SHIP Annual Report Goes Online

By Michael Chaney

Florida Housing Finance Corporation has updated the method by which SHIP administrators will submit their annual reports this September. The reports must now be submitted using Florida Housing's newly developed online annual reporting system (here after called the Web Report). The system is designed to provide administrators with instant feedback on topics of program compliance. Helpful instructions and technical assistance are embedded throughout the new Web Report. This article provides an introduction to the new system and an update on new reporting requirements. It is accompanied by the regular "SHIP Clips" column, which in this edition is dedicated to annual reporting topics.

Since the beginning of the SHIP program, annual reports have been a statutory requirement, although the exact form of the report has been updated several times through the SHIP Rule. In the early years of the program, SHIP jurisdictions would mail in their completed report on paper forms. Most recently, annual reports have been electronically submitted on excel spreadsheets. With the transition to an online process, Florida Housing intends to increase the pace for addressing reporting problems and to reduce the time needed to compile SHIP program statistics to share with the Legislature and public. As in the past, not all reporting requirements can be submitted electronically. Each jurisdiction must mail in two original and signed certification forms. In addition, local governments are encouraged to share "Other Accomplishments"—a topic addressed on Form 4 of the report–by mailing to Florida Housing

newspaper clippings, success stories, thank you notes from recipients and more.

Florida Housing will provide SHIP Administrators with log on instructions and a password to sign on to the Web Report. The first screen that greets a new user will include a "User Administration" tab, so that the user may provide the names of all who may work on adding data to the jurisdiction's annual reports. Sometimes compiling report data may require researching SHIP files, resulting in delays as you enter data on the Web Report. The online system will allow an administrator to remain logged on for four hours from when data was last entered before it automatically logs off for the user.

Instantaneous Feedback

The new Web Report contains several embedded 'validation tests' that analyze the data entered on a report to calculate whether compliance with several fundamental SHIP requirements has been achieved. A validation test has detected compliance problems in this screenshot, which shows an unsubmitted report that does not achieve set-aside compliance.

In a similar fashion, the Web Report will issue an alert if a jurisdiction's 07/08 annual report does not indicate that all funds are encumbered or expended, which violates the encumbrance deadline. In this case, the online reporting system indicates "There are "Unencumbered" dollar amounts listed in a "First Interim" year report."

This feedback is helpful and prevents reporting mistakes upfront, even before Florida Housing's staff reviews the material. Yet the feedback must be heeded. Until the mistakes are corrected, a jurisdiction cannot submit an annual report.

Assistance at Your Fingertips

Fortunately, instructions are included alongside most questions on each annual report form. If you read the instructions and are still at a loss, all is not lost. Many portions of the online instructions include a link with more in-depth guidance, relevant examples, and related frequently asked questions (FAQs).

A comprehensive collection of annual report FAQs is available on the Coalition's website *(www.flhousing.org)* for those interested in a refresher before starting their annual reports.

The Coalition will offer a 90 minute introductory web-based training to introduce SHIP administrators to the new online report. The webinar will be offered on multiple occasions with enough availability to accommodate participation from staff in each City or County SHIP office. In addition, a more in-depth training is available. For the third year in a row, the Coalition will offer a web-based workshop on annual reporting. This training offers 6 hours of content spread over three sessions on three days. It is designed especially to assist those staff members who are preparing reports for the first time. Space is limited for this webinar, so register early.

The best training for annual report responsibilities comes from the experience of consistently and methodically tracking SHIP data throughout the year. As funding is committed to a new household, for example, or as a SHIP project is finalized with all funds expended, this updated information should be added to your SHIP tracking system on the same day. To support this best practice, the Coalition has created a free SHIP
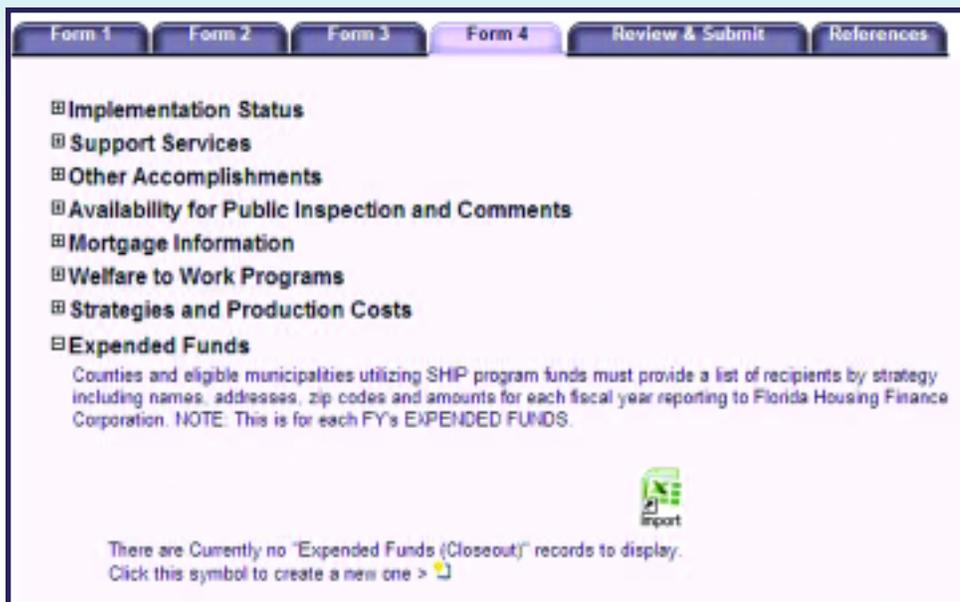
The Web Report now only requires a jurisdiction to complete the data for Form 4 once, when creating the 06/07 close-out report. In the past, jurisdictions were required to answer several Form 4 questions with data specific to each of three distributions. Now Florida Housing will only collect data specific to the 06/07 distribution for the Form 4 questions about average strategy production costs, administrative expenditures for sub recipients, and sources of recaptured funds and program income.

There is now only one Form 4 question that requires data specific to each of three distributions. As required by SHIP reporting instructions, each local government must provide a list of recipients for whom assistance is complete and funds are fully expended. This data must be provided for each strategy, including names, addresses, zip codes and amounts expended for each fiscal year reporting to Florida Housing.

In some jurisdictions, staff collects this data throughout the year on a spreadsheet with columns for each of these data points. Other communities collect this data on the tracking spreadsheet designed by the Coalition. In the past, they would simply copy and paste data onto "Tab 8" of the formerly used Excel spreadsheet version of the report. The process will be similar with the Web Report, requiring only one extra step: once the data is assembled on a spreadsheet, select and copy all the data. Click the 'Excel Import' button on the Web Report to 'paste' the data in the window that appears.

CONCLUSION: Start Soon

There are several reasons to start your annual reports early. Many administrators find that these reports require more of their attention than originally expected, and there is no possibility to file for an extension for the annual report. They must be reviewed and approved by your city or county commissioners and submitted to Florida Housing no later than September 15th.

tracking spreadsheet—recently updated in 2008—which is available for download from the Coalition's website or directly from the online web report website.

New on the Annual Report

There are several fairly new report requirements. This September, the close out report for 06/07 will be the first to feature data detailing how many extremely low income (ELI) households were assisted. Although the requirement to track ELI households is not new, the 06/07 distribution was the first to which this requirement applied, and so it will be the first close out distribution that will comprehensively include ELI data.

In addition, there are updates affecting Form 4. First, Florida Housing has changed the question that addresses Default and Foreclosure information for first mortgages on the homes of SHIP assisted households. Florida Housing will no longer require jurisdictions to collect any 'life to date' information about defaults, foreclosures, or the number of SHIP households assisted. Instead, jurisdictions will report activity during the 08/09 state fiscal year. Furthermore, jurisdictions will no longer report the number of households assisted for each income category, but will instead only report the number of foreclosures and defaults that occurred during this 12 month period. This includes foreclosure or default data on any household that has received SHIP down payment assistance at any time in the past.

The online annual report is a new system. The reporting process may be slower than usual as you become familiar with it. After years of working with the familiar SHIP Annual Report excel spreadsheet, many SHIP administrators were very adept at creating annual reports using the old Excel format. My "personal best time" for creating an Excel report was 20 minutes. Yet it will take time to become fully familiar with navigating through the Web Report. Since user must interact with the reporting system through the Internet, there is a delay of a few seconds whenever you enter data or chose to view another Form. For these reasons, it took me an hour to submit a close out annual report, complete with Form 4 data.

Creating annual reports requires administrators to have SHIP tracking spreadsheets that are fully updated with data through June 30. Some jurisdictions may be delayed in entering the most recent data onto these spreadsheets. This process takes time, research and effort. Fortunately, the process is rewarding and makes staff more fully aware of how much SHIP funding has recently been expended or committed and exactly how much remains available for future assistance.

As a final incentive to start your reports early, consider the current reality of SHIP funding. Face it: there is no 09/10 SHIP distribution, which means there is no new 10% administrative budget coming any time soon. In some jurisdictions, staff have fully expended the 08/09 administrative budget in the first 12 months upon receiving this distribution. Many jurisdictions, therefore, will soon run out of administrative funds. SHIP annual reporting is an essential program activity, so complete this requirement while administrative support is still available. **HNN**

W hile the Housing Coalition's website includes a comprehensive section outlining SHIP-related questions and answers, we have recently added a new section specifically addressing annual report-related questions. It is available in the SHIP section of "Local Government and Nonprofit Developer Tools" on the Coalition's website *(www.flhousing.org)*.

Top Ten Topics of Annual Report Questions
- New Reporting Requirements
- Regulatory Reform Certification
- Default and Foreclosure Statistics
- Sub Recipient Information
- Calculating the Carry Forward
- Program Income and Recaptured Funds
- Closing Out and Reporting HHRP
- Expenditure and Encumbrance Deadlines
- Tracking Spreadsheet Instructions
- Set-Aside Compliance