

The Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA) *Frequently Asked Questions*

PART 1 – SETTING UP THE PROCESS

1) How should I structure the FHEA process? What types of expertise should we seek out?

It may be helpful to structure the data and deliberation steps into four stages with overlapping timelines in the Request for Proposal (RFP): (1) data collection and analysis (DATA); (2) informal “ground-truthing” and exploration of key analytical questions around the data with core partners (DELIBERATION, PART 1); (3) review and discussion of the data with a larger set of stakeholders and the broader public to identify impediments and potential actions (DELIBERATION, PART 2); and (4) discussion of key goals, objectives, and actions from the FHEA that can inform key grant deliverables and future investments with consortium members and key stakeholders (DECISION MAKING AND BRIDGE). It is not necessary for the same party to conduct the data and deliberation phases of the FHEA work. In fact, it may be beneficial to delegate each of these sections to separate parties with deep expertise. The lead grantee should consider the capacity and capabilities within the consortium and beyond, focusing the RFPs strategically on skill or capacity gaps within the consortium. HUD is expecting that grantees will undertake more than a descriptive analysis of the data – that they will go the extra length to fully analyze the findings of the data within the context of large historical and future trends in the region. As you are building out your FHEA, keep in mind how each section will help to reinforce the analytical nature of the process.

Some regions have used local graduate schools or university centers for assistance with similar census data analyses; this could be a less expensive option for the first stage. Other regions may also have data intermediaries that are very skilled with data analysis and familiar with local data sources; check the [National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership \(NNIP\) website](#) to see if there is one in your region. Finally, check with your regional Federal Reserve Community Development office, as they may have additional research capacity on staff. Likewise, in the discussion of analytical questions and identification of impediments and actions, it is critical to have a strong fair housing organization to identify such impediments and actions. Those with data expertise or a history of simply complying with reporting requirements (such as Consolidated Plans) are unlikely to be well suited to the task because they do not hold the trust of a range of stakeholders. Facilitators and conveners for conversations about the data and findings should also be from organizations or institutions with a stake in the progress of the region, experience working on issues of equity, civil rights, or fair housing, and have trust among institutional and community players.

Regardless of the awardee of the RFP, it is important to choose a university partner, data intermediary, or consultant with a specific focus, mission, or expertise in serving marginalized communities. It is possible to tell many stories with data, including diffusing, ignoring, or not exploring findings that would enhance the region's understanding of its fair housing and equity issues. Additionally, in both data analysis and deliberation, regions should be conscious about using the FHEA and other grant requirements to build partnerships and capacity.

2) How should I budget for the costs of the FHEA? What is the range of costs for the different components of the scope?

Some grantees have estimated that the FHEA costs in the ballpark of \$60,000-\$80,000. This will vary based on the scope of your FHEA, the extent of analysis undertaken, the number of partners and organizations that need to be involved, and the types of partners contracted to do the work.

In the first question, we listed the types of organizations that can help conduct the data analysis. Some partners may be more cost effective than others. For example, partnering with a university or local data intermediary might produce a data analysis that is both low cost and sensitive to equity issues. Sometimes these organizations may be able to bring their own funding as well. Community organizations, intermediaries, or university partners in your consortium may be good partners in hosting deliberation discussions about the data. Not only will they likely come at a lower cost, they often are seen as a trusted player among institutional and community players.

3) How long should the process take? Is there a sample timeline?

The timeline of the FHEA will in part depend on the timing of the other components of your grant. Because it is critical that your FHEA be used to inform the rest of your planning process and decision making, the first step in developing a time frame for the FHEA should involve looking at specific decision points in the grant and thinking through how those could be informed by an equity analysis. Generally, it is recommended that the FHEA be undertaken as early as possible in the grant period so it may have the maximum possible impact on the remaining aspects of the grant. (We recognize this may be difficult for FY 2010 grantees. For grantees entering the FHEA late in the decision-making process, work with your Grant Technical Representatives (GTR) to develop creative ways to make sure that the FHEA has some resonance in grant-related or other regional planning activities.)

Expect the FHEA to take about 6-12 months to complete. Forming a working committee and developing a scope and/or RFP may take 1-3 months, the data collection and data crunching may take about 2-3 months, the data interpretation and analysis (determining what it is saying, and how it relates to grant activities) another 1-2 months, and the translation of the data analysis into the decision making may take another 2-3 months. The deliberation and engagement should be ongoing throughout the entire process. Many of these steps can be taken simultaneously, and since the FHEA is very much an iterative, collaborative

undertaking, it's helpful to build in time for discussion and revisions. The best way to save time up front is to start collecting and analyzing the data, even if your scope is not complete or if the decision on FHEA versus Regional Analysis of Impediments (RAI) hasn't been made yet. Getting a clear sense of how the FHEA is going to bridge into grant deliverables and action steps up front will help move the process along as well as provide some clear targets for completion.

4) What should be in the scope of work to address the decision-making phase?

The scope of work should include the types of decisions and/or grant activities that the FHEA is going to address and the types of analytical questions that will be included in the process to ensure that the FHEA will adequately prepare decision-makers to understand the equity implications of their decisions. Some grantees are using their FHEA to inform their regional housing needs assessments or regional transportation plans; in this case, this should be stated in the scope, along with the timeline for approval of that process, and ensure that the deliberations of the data analysis are conducted in a timely manner to inform staff and decision-makers in these processes.

5) How should we decide whether to do a FHEA or a RAI?

First, you should include your GTR in conversations early on about whether to do an FHEA or an RAI, as they can be helpful in thinking through which process makes sense for your region.

The FHEA and the RAI have many [similarities but also a few key differences](#) in terms of data collection, focus areas, and engagement requirements. We recommend that you do not let internal discussions about whether to choose the FHEA or RAI impede progress on developing an initial scope of work, establishing a working group, and beginning the data analysis, knowing that there may be adjustments in the data scope.

The decision about whether to do a FHEA or RAI should be made in consultation with other key stakeholders in your consortium, including representatives and organizations that work with marginalized communities, as well as with representatives from entitlement jurisdictions. HUD will provide additional technical assistance when doing an RAI.

6) What has been the record with consultants retained to work on fair housing planning? How should this record influence our approach to the FHEA?

Many entitlement jurisdictions around the country retain consultants to produce Analyses of Impediments (AI), the closest counterpart to the FHEA (others retain fair housing organizations or do it "in house").

While consultants can be proficient in compiling this type of complex and robust data analysis, they will need to work with local organizations to meaningfully interpret and analyze the data, identifying barriers and impediments, and, identify the appropriate

organizations, action steps, and funding streams that will ensure the FHEA is successful in implementation. You may also want to have a local representative coordinate the FHEA effort, including management of the consultant, as they can help to navigate the local dynamics and relationships that the FHEA process will ultimately involve.

If do you choose to work with a consultant, try to employ local organizations or agencies wherever possible to facilitate the deliberation sessions and community engagement around the data. While consultants' particular data expertise or neutrality as facilitators can be an asset, stakeholder buy-in and ownership is often best fostered through the commitment of key stakeholders. We still recommend developing a working group, including equity and civil rights partners, to ensure that the consultant is appropriately integrating local context and equity perspectives.

Finally, the authors of the FHEA are likely the same actors who will assist with implementation or will be charged with periodic update of the FHEA. Consistency between those who are involved in the FHEA's development and its implementation will lead to stronger outcomes, building consensus about the key impediments to, and interventions for, fair housing and equity. Parties that are trusted and credible among a wide range of interests and stakeholders will enable the consortium to make decisions and pursue implementation on difficult matters.

PART 2 – DATA: ANALYSIS AND TROUBLESHOOTING

7) I am having issues with my data package. Whom should I talk to if I have specific questions about the data from HUD?

If you are having any technical issues with your data package from HUD, you should contact your GTR. If you have questions about visualizing, interpreting, or analyzing the data, or with adding additional data sources to your analysis, please contact Jillian Olinger at the Kirwan Institute at olinger.24@osu.edu.

8) How can I access the metadata from the HUD data package?

The technical information about HUD's data package can be found [here](#). Please contact your GTR if you are having issues accessing this site.

9) How can our region identify and assess the role of public investments in infrastructure on different communities and in terms of their impact on opportunity?

HUD guidance encourages regions to consider the following types of investments in infrastructure:¹

¹ HUD's 6th FHEA webinar on physical infrastructure investments provides these guiding questions.

- *Transportation, such as freeways/highways, light rail/subway/street car lines, fixed bus routes and recreational trails, and other non-vehicular transportation investments and other programmatic and investment vehicles from the federal, state, and local levels.*
- *Economic Development, including direct subsidies to firms, public works investments, and tax breaks for firms.*
- *Housing/Community Development, such as the location of subsidized housing, CDBG funding, access to healthy food outlets, and civic infrastructure.*

PolicyLink also defines infrastructure broadly – roads, bridges, transit, sidewalks, water and sewer systems, parks, schools, affordable housing, banks/financial services, and communication networks. Each of these types of infrastructure can play a significant role in shaping opportunities within regions, from individual circumstances such as areas of health, employment, and education, to collective measures such as prosperity, competitiveness, and environmental quality.

To begin an analysis of physical infrastructure investments in the FHEA, a region must first identify recent and planned investments in infrastructure. Look through past and current planning documents, such as regional transportation plans, economic development plans, transportation improvement plans, consolidated plans, local and regional budgets, and other plans that allocate infrastructure investment.

A few sample measures to consider around infrastructure investment might include:

- *Commute times by race/ethnicity and/or income;*
- *Availability of sidewalks and quality of pedestrian infrastructure;*
- *Density of pedestrian or bicycle accidents in low-income communities or communities of color;*
- *Average wait times for public transportation in low-income communities or communities of color;*
- *Location of CDBG investments in the past 5-10 years relative to low-income neighborhoods or communities of color with infrastructure deficiencies; or,*
- *Percentage of future funds available for investment in public transportation (relative to highways and other construction/maintenance projects).*

PART 3 – DELIBERATION: MAKING THE DATA MEANINGFUL

10) In order to balance the diversity of interests in this process, it is critical for lead grantees (or FHEA coordinators) to be targeted in their approaches. With dozens of jurisdictions and governmental entities, who should a lead grantee (or FHEA coordinator) be sure to involve in the FHEA process?

It would be unwieldy to include the myriad of jurisdictions and governmental entities in the FHEA process, in addition to engaging all community-based groups, equity organizations, and other nonprofit or private actors. The goal of stakeholder engagement for the FHEA is to

engage broadly and deeply enough to foster collective support for the coordinated actions that result from the FHEA process. As a result, the lead grantee (or FHEA coordinator) will want to think about four major factors described below. A working group for the FHEA should include representatives from each of these categories.

Scales of government: The model for SCI consortia is intentionally structured to ensure vertical representation (regional, county, local, neighborhood), and FHEA stakeholders should represent the same diversity. The benefit of this diversity is realized in the form of buy-in and capacity at the time of implementation. Local level actors include jurisdictions, but also school districts, public housing authorities, and some transit agencies. Inter-jurisdictional actors include counties (and their relevant departments – human services and public health), workforce development boards, transit agencies, public utilities, and other special districts. Regional actors include MPOs, COGs and air districts, housing finance agencies, and housing authorities.

Geographic and sector diversity: The fair housing and equity framing of the FHEA asserts that all neighborhoods provide a certain level and diversity of access to opportunity, and thus, representation from high and low opportunity areas is necessary when rethinking access to opportunity. In entitlement jurisdictions (those who receive HUD funding through the formula-based programs, e.g. HOME, CDBG, and oversee public housing units and subsidies), it may be housing authorities, transit agencies, and workforce investment boards that are the most active players connecting low-income residents with opportunity. In neighborhoods at a distance from the central city and with high housing costs and demand, school districts and county human services departments may help FHEA stakeholders think critically about how to expand access to opportunity.

Power dynamics: A regional equity assessment could not be considered legitimate without the participation and engagement of local equity, civil rights, and fair housing organizations – in addition to leaders from traditionally marginalized communities. It is important to include as many of these groups as possible. If they are far outnumbered by institutional actors, their voice and perspective may be overwhelmed, thus diminishing the critical value they bring to the table. When you are soliciting their participation, remember that this is a new process, and that many of these groups may have negative experiences with some of the jurisdictions or agencies at the table. It will take some time to cultivate trust, but their engagement will be necessary to generate a FHEA that can start to make progress on reducing the legacy of segregation and disinvestment.

Transparency: It is not possible to include everyone in working groups or deliberations about the fair housing and equity assessment. Some groups that may want to stay involved may not have the capacity to participate frequently. To the extent possible, provide drafts of information at key points in the process and open them up for public comment. We suggest having at least two public comment periods. Prior to any meetings about the information in the FHEA, we also recommend sharing data and facilitation questions in advance to ensure that all participants can participate with shared knowledge.

11) What does the FHEA process offer community-based groups and equity organizations?

While the FHEA process will unfold differently in every region, there are a few points that community groups, advocates, and civil rights or fair housing organizations should consider for their engagement:

- *The process includes analysis of regional patterns of segregation, racially/ethnically concentrated poverty, and access to job centers, public transportation, affordable housing, and good schools for low-income communities, communities of color, and other disadvantaged communities. This has never been done before and can help to surface conversations about root causes, historic injustices, and how they contribute to persistent patterns of segregation and disparities.*
- *The FHEA is not just about access to housing – but about how huge investments in infrastructure (transportation, housing, economic development, schools) can benefit communities that have been left behind in previous decisions and ensure that gentrification and new investment does not displace current residents and businesses.*
- *The FHEA will focus on increasing affordable housing opportunities in neighborhoods that are well connected to jobs, transit, and good schools, as well as focus on investments in infrastructure in neighborhoods that have been previously redlined and disinvested in.*
- *The FHEA is not just about analyzing data, but also puts a strong emphasis on deliberating with diverse stakeholders about what the data means with a requirement to bridge the findings of the data analysis into the regional plans and implementation projects.*
- *The FHEA can be an opportunity to develop a vision, framework, and roadmap to increasing access to opportunity (jobs, transit, affordable housing, good schools, other infrastructure) that includes collaboration among many agency partners. Connecting neighborhoods to government agencies with resources and capacity can be a potential outcome of the FHEA.*

12) What considerations should guide the FHEA coordinator's engagement of community groups?

The purpose of the FHEA's robust data analysis requirements is to reveal core challenges for low-income communities and communities of color in accessing opportunity – and how that relates to demographic changes and historic trends and barriers that stem from institutionalized and systematic discrimination and racism. But these analyses are incomplete and inadequate snapshots when not supplemented with local knowledge and expertise. Deliberation among community-based groups, civil rights organizations, equity advocates, regional planners, governmental entities, and fair housing organizations is crucial to provide context for the data – so that it doesn't just describe the current state of affairs

but rather explains it within the historical context of major events in local and national history.

Without the participation of these groups, planners run the risk of advancing a picture of opportunity that misrepresents or omits their communities' challenges. Community groups and equity advocates can expose regional actors to the needs of their communities and to solutions that will help to reverse damaging trends for these communities.

FHEA coordinators may experience some resistance or skepticism from community-based or equity-concerned stakeholders. Capable, savvy community groups in "low opportunity" neighborhoods have been previously engaged in planning processes, many of which have not resulted in outcomes that make progress on the issues most crucial to their neighborhoods. They may have existing neighborhood or redevelopment plans that were hard fought and for which implementation is stalled or yielding slow or incomplete returns. They worry that being identified as an area of racialized concentrated poverty or a low opportunity neighborhood will result in even fewer resources. They are cautious about whether their involvement is sought in a token manner, and may be unconvinced about how the FHEA will result in meaningful change that will filter down to their communities. They may also not have much time or resources to dedicate to an uncertain process.

FHEA coordinators can help allay some these concerns with proactive and transparent outreach to these stakeholders. Whether key issues are job access and training, an aging, affordable or low-rent housing stock, health disparities, inadequate transportation, or a combination thereof, one purpose of the FHEA is to collect these "data" about communities. In doing so, quantitative analysis is supplemented with lived experience. There are many ways to engage these communities: through participation on working groups, through surveys and focus groups, through interviews, and importantly, through ongoing relationship building. For more information about community engagement, please refer to the [Community Engagement Guide for Sustainable Communities](#).

13) Can grantees 'piggyback' on other processes of engagement?

Yes! There is no reason why you shouldn't be able to build and connect community engagement efforts for the rest of the grant into the Fair Housing and Equity Assessment or RAI process – especially if engagement efforts were targeted with traditionally marginalized communities and surfaced key community concerns and aspirations. However, the FHEA requires intentional engagement with low-income communities, communities of color, immigrant communities, and other marginalized communities to not just understand their aspirations but also to document the barriers they currently face to accessing various aspects of opportunity. You may need to augment your FHEA outreach with more targeted engagement, including interviews with key leaders, residents, developers, and organizations; focus groups with these stakeholders; and, by including equity leaders in any working groups or decision-making bodies for the FHEA. Ensure that these groups are included in engagement throughout the FHEA process – from shaping the scope to reviewing the data, deliberating on the findings, and constructing the bridge to the regional plan.

PART 4 – DECISION MAKING: USING THE FHEA TO INFORM PLANS AND INVESTMENTS

14) How do you create a regional dialogue to define opportunity? How can we define opportunity that makes sense for our region? How should we consider the relative importance and implications for the opportunity indices?

There are many approaches to conducting a regional dialogue. A strong facilitator familiar with the participants and their interests can be instrumental in determining the right approach for your region.

Many regions start by establishing a shared set of values related to their sense of opportunity. These could include mobility, equality, democracy, community, and security. Developing a shared set of values, and later definitions of opportunity, equity, and fair housing, can help explain why everyone has a stake in expanding and protecting opportunity. For example, expanding opportunity leads to a better business environment, one with a stronger economy, a better-educated workforce, and less crime.

As this conversation proceeds, regions should seek to incorporate both aspirational features and attainable actions, so that a long-term and empowering vision is balanced with shorter-term, concrete steps to get there.

PolicyLink and the Kirwan Institute are currently developing a series of blog posts to serve as tools for regions during the deliberation process to be posted on the Learning Network throughout the spring of 2013. For specific guidance on how to weigh opportunity variables, see the Opportunity Mapping Issue Brief (forthcoming) or contact the Kirwan Institute for tailored technical assistance (Jillian Olinger, Research Associate 2, Olinger.24@osu.edu).

15) How can the data analysis and deliberation activities of the FHEA lay the groundwork for meaningful decision making? How can FHEA findings inform decision making, prioritization, and investments?

The FHEA is a platform to match neighborhood and market conditions to interventions that will advance opportunity. The fair housing and equity framing advanced in the FHEA is concerned with where, how and to whom opportunity accrues. Taking stock of opportunity structures across various neighborhoods in the region illustrates the presence of shared challenges and opportunities, demonstrating how the region's economic and social health is interwoven. Furthermore, this deliberation of the data recognizes that data points alone are insufficient, and that the buy-in of stakeholder groups must foreground an equitable decision-making process.

For example, a framework could identify prevalent neighborhood "typologies," which in turn can help identify replicable interventions. In other words, while each neighborhood is unique, there are many shared problems and/or opportunities that lend themselves to specific interventions. Each typology could be matched with an available funding source or

policy solution, such as the Attorneys General Settlement for foreclosures, CDBG funds for disinvested areas, or an inclusionary housing ordinance to facilitate affordable housing construction in high housing demand and gentrifying areas.

When possible, use your own analysis and local expertise to weigh different trade-offs and assess the unique strengths and weaknesses of individual neighborhoods. Using such a framework to “bridge” FHEA findings with actions achieves two aims: 1) it has the potential to constitute a HUD-required “bridge” document to clarify how the FHEA findings are informing decision-making, prioritization and investment; and 2) it advances a view of neighborhoods as multidimensional, avoiding a characterization solely based on one set of deficits or assets. Communities are grappling with a confluence of issues related to their livelihood and quality of life; therefore, an understanding of neighborhoods must encompass broad issues such as housing, jobs, transportation, and public services.

PART 5 – INTERACTION WITH HUD: SUPPORT AND CERTIFICATION

16) To what extent should or could HUD’s regional office staff participate in the FHEA process? How can we make this happen?

HUD regional staff as well as regional Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO) staff should have a guiding role in the FHEA process to the extent possible. These staff can help connect you to official guidance from HUD and FHEO, convene conversations with regional stakeholders, or connect you to key stakeholders for the FHEA/RAI that may not be included in your consortium, such as housing authorities, fair housing organizations, or other key civil rights and fair housing groups. If you are not already connected with your local HUD office, work with your GTR to do so.