

March 2017

[Green Corner: Don't delay! It's Microgrant time!](#)

[Rich Resources](#)

[Test the AIR](#)

[Saving Energy with an ESCO](#)

[How Sustainable is Your Co-op?](#)

[A New Administrator for Ontario and PEI Rent Supplements](#)

[High Points of CMHC's Rental Market Reports](#)

[Events You Won't Want to Miss](#)

Green Corner: Don't delay! It's Microgrant time!

CHF Canada has recently announced that the Greener Co-op Microgrant program is being offered for the second time. The grants are drawn from carbon-offset funds from the Agency and CHF Canada. CHF BC and the Housing Services Corporation are also contributors. Instead of donating these funds further from home, we've all decided to let the money make housing in Canada greener.

Grants of \$500 to \$4,000 are available on a first-come, first-served basis for as long as the funds last. Grants are awarded for small projects that will improve air quality, help co-ops adapt to climate change and inspire others to make their community greener. All CHF Canada member co-operatives qualify, unless they received a grant last year.

Applying is quick and easy. Download the [application form](#), which you can complete on line and save as a PDF, and send it to CHF Canada. The application deadline is April 15, but in 2016, the money vanished very quickly, so you should make your application as soon as possible.

For more information, see CHF Canada's [flyer](#) or e-mail [Julie LaPalme](#). Good luck!

Rich Resources

If you haven't visited the Agency's [client website](#) lately, you may not realize how much information you can find there. You would expect links to guides that will help you with your AIRs, monitoring reports and budgets—and you won't be disappointed—but there is more.

Resources

The Resources section is a clearing house for practical information from many places, including CHF Canada and CMHC. For example, under Program Guidelines and Policies, we give the latest utility allowances for your province. Under Greening Your Co-op, you'll find a rich collection of advice on how your co-op can increase its energy efficiency and any funding available. (Please check the date of the posting before applying for any of the government grants, as they come and go.)

Reports and Agreements

All the reports you and the Agency have exchanged are on file, as well as legal documents, such as your mortgage, operating agreement, and, for some clients, workout agreement and land lease.

Property Management Firms

For Ontario co-ops looking for a property-management firm, our Vendors of Record List (under Resources/Property Management) gives you the names of companies that met a basic standard through a competitive public process. We've confirmed that all of them will welcome co-op housing clients. With companies on the list, you can skip the time-consuming tendering process and go straight to an interview, knowing the company's pricing is competitive.

Security

Password protection keeps each individual co-op's information private. Your co-op's username and password are available from your co-op's main contact (usually your staff or president). Some co-ops give the password to everyone on the board, and to any member, on request. It is your co-op's choice how widely to share access to this information. If your co-op has misplaced its password or user name, your Agency relationship manager can help.

Test the AIR

An important part of your annual filing to the Agency is making sure that the information in it is correct and complete. Your auditor will provide your board with a draft AIR. The auditor is best placed to handle the financial part, but who knows most about your whole operation?

Have your co-op's main and alternate contacts changed? Was there a financial conflict of interest in the past year? Did your members approve the budget? What are your current housing charges? The return includes these and other questions that the board needs to answer, normally in consultation with staff.

Before your auditor finishes the filing, please review your draft AIR make sure that all the information about your operation is accurate. Your goal? An AIR that tests clean. Your reward? Knowing that wrong or missing information won't delay your Agency reports, or make them less useful to your co-op.

Saving Energy with an ESCO

For years, governments have been using energy-service companies (ESCOs) to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings. Now some of those companies are wondering if housing co ops would be a good source of new business.

An ESCO plans, carries out and arranges financing for projects that will make a building more energy efficient or reduce its use of water. When the project is done, the ESCO measures the savings achieved. All this takes place at little cost to the co-op (although probably some nuisance), because the work is paid for over time through the savings realized.

Through a public selection process, the Agency identified two well-qualified companies that can provide this service to housing co-operatives across Canada. Contracting with an ESCO to improve your energy efficiency will not work for all Agency clients, but, for some, it could be a very good option.

More information is available from the [Q&A on ESCOs](#) on our public website, and you can ask your relationship manager about the ESCOs we have identified. As always, your co-op will need to do its due diligence, but we're excited about the possibility of greater energy efficiency and meaningful savings for our clients over time.

How Sustainable is your Co-op?

When it comes to environmental sustainability, some co-ops are ready to go beyond municipal recycling programs and composting. For their benefit, the Agency and CHF Canada have worked together to develop a Model Environmental Sustainable Policy. CHF Canada has this policy on its [website](#), and you can also find it on [ours](#).

You don't have to take this policy as written. We hope you'll read it carefully and make decisions about what will work for your co-op and what won't. The policy is in Word, so that you can add or delete items, as you see fit.

A New Administrator for Ontario and PEI Rent Supplement

The Agency has been dropping hints for nearly a year, but now it's a sure thing. As of this April, co-ops in Ontario and PEI will be working with the Agency on rent-supplement matters. As always, we'll be acting on CMHC's behalf.

The due date for making your annual claim hasn't changed. It's still two months after your fiscal year end, which gives your auditor time to confirm that your Rent Supplement Report agrees with your financial statements and Annual Information Return (AIR).

Once the Agency is sure that your filing is complete and correct, we will ask CMHC to reset your monthly supplement payment for the next year. You will also see a year-end adjustment, depending on whether you overspent or underspent your monthly advances.

We'll be bringing a few new things to the file, which we think you'll like. At the moment, though, we're not quite ready to share them. More information will be available soon.

High Points of CMHC's Rental Market Reports

British Columbia

B.C. vacancy rates have increased slightly since October 2015, but the vacancy rates for Vancouver, Victoria and Kelowna remain below 1 per cent. The average rent in the province is up by 5.5 per cent.

Alberta

Results are very different in Alberta's urban centres. In Calgary the overall vacancy rate is at seven per cent, with vacancies in three-bedroom apartments at 8.7 per cent. This is the highest vacancy rate in 25 years. Average rent, at \$1,143, is down by 7.6 per cent.

In Edmonton, the overall vacancy rate is marginally higher at 7.1 per cent. The average rent has fallen by 3.6 per cent to \$1,113.

Ontario

At 2.1%, Ontario's vacancy rate is at the lowest level since 2001, with Toronto, London and Ottawa contributing most to the decline. The average rent in the province is \$1,089, up by three per cent since October 2015.

Prince Edward Island

The vacancy rate in PEI has fallen to 2.1 per cent, from 4.8 per cent in October, apparently owing to the influence of immigration.

[CMHC's website](#) also has rental market reports for most urban areas.

Events You Won't Want to Miss

[CHF BC Member Forum](#) – 20 March 2017

[COCHF 2017 Spring Education Conference](#) – 25 March 2017

[CHF BC Spring Education Conference](#) – 1 April 2017

[SACHA Annual General Meeting](#) – April 22, 2017

[NACHA Annual General Meeting](#) – April 22, 2017

[CHF BC Vancouver Island Appreciation Evening](#) – 26 April 2017

[CHFT Spring Member Education Event](#) – 29 April 2017

[CHRA's National Congress on Housing and Homelessness](#) – 2-4 May 2017

[CHF Canada's Annual General Meeting](#) – 7-10 June 2017