

The Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative

HOMEBUYER COUNSELING CURRICULUM

PREFACE

The Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative

In December 1996, Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) launched the Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative, an initiative to enhance and improve housing counseling services provided to low and moderate income homebuyers in Massachusetts. The Collaborative includes participation by local lenders, homebuyer counselors, realtors, mortgage insurers, government officials and others who support homebuyer education. It was originally funded by the Fannie Mae Foundation, with matching funds from local lenders, the City of Boston, and others, and in-kind support from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

At the Collaborative's kick-off meeting, participants identified the following issues as top priorities for the initiative:

- A standardized homebuyer counseling core curriculum
- Increased financial stability for non-profit homebuyer counseling agencies
- An organized mechanism for sharing information
- Evaluation of homebuyer counseling programs
- Increased focus on post-purchase counseling

Homebuyer Counseling Curriculum Subcommittee - 1997

At the kick-off meeting, a Homebuyer Counseling Curriculum Subcommittee was established to develop a standardized homebuyer counseling core curriculum. Chaired by Jim Wilde, Executive Director of the Merrimack Valley Housing Partnership, the Subcommittee included over 40 practitioners from across the industry, including lenders, realtors and homebuyer counselors. During the first half of 1997, the Subcommittee worked to assemble the core curriculum to serve both as a baseline for all home counseling programs and as a "best practices" training tool for new counselors and new counseling programs. The Subcommittee collected and compiled curricula and handout materials used by participating agencies, identified key issues to be included, and established work teams to develop specific sections of the core curriculum.

The Curriculum quickly grew from a core curriculum (covering the basic concepts in homebuyer education) to a comprehensive instructor's manual that highlights the core requirements established by the Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative, but also includes detailed discussions of every aspect of purchasing a home. This comprehensive Curriculum allows the counselors to decide what to include beyond the core curriculum, based on the needs of the particular group they are counseling in any given workshop series.

During the second half of 1997, the Subcommittee reviewed and edited the work of each team. CHAPA then hired Kathy Tullberg, Manager of the Massachusetts Community and Banking Council and former vice president at Shawmut Bank, on a consultant basis to edit and organize the document and related hand-out materials. A final draft was completed and presented to the Collaborative's Advisory Committee in December 1997.

During the first quarter of 1998, feedback was received on each chapter of the Curriculum by more than 25 individuals (fourteen bankers reviewed the chapter on obtaining a mortgage alone). In all, over 65 individuals from across the industry contributed to this document. The final Curriculum was completed in April 1998.

The Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative in 2010

Since 1997, the Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative has continued to work with local lenders, homebuyer counselors, realtors, mortgage insurers, government officials and others who support homebuyer education. The Collaborative provides technical assistance and training on a bi-annual basis to homebuyer counselors, and holds bi-annual Advisory Committee meetings to bring members together to talk about issues in the field.

In 2000, the Collaborative established the "Collaborative Seal of Approval", a certification for homebuyer counseling agencies that allows lending institutions, real estate professionals, government agencies and consumers to identify those community organizations that meet the Collaborative's standards for high-quality, comprehensive, effective homebuyer education.

Homebuyer Counseling Curriculum Second Edition Subcommittee – 2003

In December 2002, members of the Collaborative decided at the Advisory Committee meeting to revise portions of the 1998 Curriculum and include several new sections that have become important homebuyer education issues in recent years.

The Subcommittee consisted of fourteen Collaborative members, many of whom participated during the initial creation of the Curriculum. While the revision of the Curriculum did not require the same amount of preparation and collaboration as the initial one, members of the Subcommittee included homebuyer counselors, lenders, and realtors. In addition, many other Collaborative members reviewed updated portions of the Curriculum.

The Subcommittee met in May of 2003 and work on the Curriculum occurred throughout the summer and fall. The second edition of Curriculum Guide was completed in December and was distributed to Collaborative members in early 2004.

Homebuyer Counseling Curriculum Second Edition Subcommittee – 2010

In 2009, members of the Collaborative decided to again revise portions of the 2003 Curriculum to reflect changes in the home buying process.

Members of the Subcommittee included homebuyer counselors, lenders, and other interested

parties. In addition, many other Collaborative members reviewed updated portions of the Curriculum.

The Subcommittee began work in Spring 2009 and work on the Curriculum occurred throughout the following year. The third edition of Curriculum Guide was completed in June 2010 and was distributed to Collaborative members in July 2010.

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HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

How to Use The Pre-Purchase Curriculum

The Curriculum includes nine chapters that should comprise a pre-purchase homebuyer counseling program. Three additional chapters, on condominium ownership, multi-family ownership and purchasing a foreclosed property, are included as optional sections. The Curriculum should be incorporated into a series of homebuyer counseling workshops that comprise a minimum of eight hours of instruction over at least two days (most provide ten to twelve hours or more); most counseling agencies offer the classes in two or two-and-one-half hour sessions, one night per week for four or five weeks. Sample syllabi are included in **Appendix A**.

Most agencies invite guest speakers into their classes to present various aspects of the homebuying process. For instance, a realtor might discuss shopping for a home, a lender would discuss obtaining a mortgage, and a lawyer would familiarize buyers with the purchase and sale agreement. **Appendix B** discusses ways to work successfully with guest presenters.

Within each of the nine chapters that comprise the pre-purchase curriculum, core information is displayed in bold print. This is the information the Homebuyer Counseling Curriculum Subcommittee determined should be included in all homebuyer education workshop series throughout the state. The rest of the information, to be included at the discretion of the instructor, is displayed in regular print. For instance, if you prefer not to discuss information within the curriculum referring to purchasing a foreclosed property, you may skip these sections if they are not in bold. A series of “tips” for instructors, provided by experienced homebuyer counselors, are included in framed *italics* throughout the document.

In addition, a **glossary of terms** is included for use by the instructors and, at their discretion, for handout to homebuyer participants. A **list of sources** is included to identify the source of much of the information incorporate into the Curriculum, and to serve as a resource list for instructors seeking more detailed information and/or additional classroom materials.

Post-Ownership Programs

A detailed outline for a post-purchase counseling program, and an instructor’s guide on foreclosure prevention are included in this Manual. The post-purchase counseling program was developed by the Massachusetts Affordable Housing Alliance and the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership on behalf of the City of Boston, and the foreclosure prevention guide was developed by the National Consumer Law Center. Both pieces were adapted for the

Collaborative's purposes and adopted by the Collaborative's Post-Purchase Counseling Subcommittee as models for successful post-ownership programs.

Core Hand-Out Materials

Each section identifies a variety of core handout materials that must be used in conjunction with the Curriculum.. *The handouts have been produced separately from the Curriculum, and are available from CHAPA on hard copy and/or electronically.*

The handout materials also include an outline of each course section. This outline, which has space for homebuyer notes, was developed both as a learning tool and to provide homebuyers with a take-home list of key issues. The outlines can be customized by the individual counseling agencies, as needed.

Further Assistance

The Massachusetts Homeownership Collaborative offers technical assistance, training and support to homebuyer counseling agencies throughout the state. Housed at CHAPA, the Collaborative also has a clearinghouse of written materials and resources available for homebuyer counselors. For more information, call CHAPA at (617) 742-0820.