



BLAINE COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

BOARD MEETING AGENDA MEMO

Meeting Date: Staff Member:

Agenda Item:

Recommended Action:

Policy Analysis and Background (non-consent items only):

Blaine County Housing Authority's mission is to *"advocate for, promote, plan, and preserve the long-term supply of desirable and affordable housing choices in all areas of Blaine County to maintain an economically diverse, vibrant, and sustainable community."*

In prioritizing applicants for community housing, BCHA has historically emphasized local employment. Ensuring that *local* employees are prioritized for community housing is especially critical in Blaine County with the rise of remote work. In larger communities with more diverse economies and different housing circumstances, housing authorities are typically concerned only with housing affordability and household incomes and do not consider whether an employee works for a local business.

However, defining a "local" employer or employee can raise key policy questions. The definitions of Local Employee and Local Employer from the currently adopted BCHA Community Housing Policies are below.

Local Employee: A person who is employed or offered employment by Local Employer(s) and physically working in Blaine County for a minimum of 1,500 hours worked per calendar year (average of 30 hours per week). Exceptions to the minimum work hours include teachers and active-duty military personnel. Breaks in employment which do not disqualify applicants include temporary physical or mental disability, acting as primary caretaker of ill relative, and full-time education or training.

Local Employer: A business whose business activity is primarily located within Blaine County and whose business employs persons within Blaine County. Employers which create and manage short-term rentals are not considered a Local Employer.

The current definition of Local Employer, with its emphasis on the geographic limits of Blaine County, excludes or at least creates a gray area for some members of the community who have legitimate place-based reasons for living in Blaine County. BCHA staff have recently come across multiple applicants whose current employer does not meet a strict definition of Local Employer but whose jobs are not "fully remote" or have a connection to Blaine County.

A clear example is the professional guiding community. Many guides seek housing opportunities within Blaine County, as the largest population center near the Sawtooth Mountain area. However, many of these employers and/or employers' business activity is not located within Blaine County. Some guiding companies maintain offices – or at least mailing addresses – within Blaine County (e.g. Sun Valley Guides, Sun Valley Heliski). Some maintain offices in Stanley (e.g. Sawtooth Mountain Guides) and other locations outside Blaine County. In both cases, an unknown but significant portion of the guided outdoor recreational activity occurs outside of Blaine County, in Custer, Lemhi, and Cassia Counties. The location also varies by the type of guided activity.

Guides provide important services to the Blaine County community, both supporting the tourism economy and providing education and safety trainings to year-round locals who recreate both within and outside of Blaine County's geographic limits.

Staff has also seen applications from employees of organizations that support the local guide community, like Redside Foundation, which is headquartered in Boise and serves guides throughout Idaho.

Other examples include construction workers, housekeepers, and painters who work for companies based in Shoshone or Twin Falls, but whose actual work is primarily or exclusively located in Blaine County.

Staff seeks direction from the BCHA Board on how to refine and/or administer the definition of Local Employer when reviewing applicants for prioritization and qualification for community housing.

Some considerations may include:

- Should a Local Employer be required to have a physical location within Blaine County?
- Should a Local Employer be required to serve clients or customers in Blaine County? If so, what proportion/percentage is acceptable?
- What is a reasonable threshold for evaluating whether business activity is "within" Blaine County?

Some peer communities require that, to be considered "local", an employee's physical presence within the community is necessary to perform the job. Others require that a percentage of a business' clients or customers are physically located in the community (e.g. Teton County, Wyoming requires 75% to be physically located in Teton County, WY).