



Home Modification Loan Program

Tips on Finding a General Contractor

Homeowners are responsible for finding, choosing and overseeing a qualified contractor under the Home Modification Loan Program (HMLP). The program and your regional Provider Agencies do not recommend or have program-approved contractors. To aid in your search for a contractor, some Provider Agencies have a list of contractors in their region who have done previous home modification projects.

Resources for Finding Qualified Contractors

- NE Index, Information on Disabilities Exchange – for a listing of contractors who perform accessibility modifications. Go to www.disabilityinfo.org
- Better Business Bureau, www.bbb.org, enter zip code, you can either search by business or by a Better Business Bureau accredited business
- The Associated Builders and Contractors, www.abcma.org, click on member directory and enter search criteria.
- National Association of the Remodeling Industry, <https://remodelingdoneright.nari.org/>
- *HomeAdvisor*, www.homeadvisor.com, the site rates home improvement companies from user-reviews.
- *American Institute of Architects*. The Western MA Chapter, www.wmaia.org and the Central MA Chapter, www.aiacm.org and the Boston Society of Architects/AIA www.architects.org. Each site has a list of members.
- *Angie's List*, www.angieslist.com, Angie List members rate contractors and other service companies. Once you become a member and sign in you can search by zip code.
- For the Boston Area, *Consumers Checkbook*, www.checkbook.org, a nonprofit organization which rates local service businesses. You'll need to become a member and pay fee for this service.

General Suggestion when Choosing a Qualified Contractor

1. Office of Consumer Affairs, Massachusetts Consumer Guide to Home Improvement, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/home-improvement-contractor-law-resources#homeowner-resources->
2. Ask family members, friends, or neighbors for names of contractors that they would recommend.
3. Give the same job details (ramp, bathroom, widened doorways, etc.) to each contractor so you can compare.
4. Questions to ask qualified contractors:
 - What is their experience with accessibility home modification or adaptation projects?
 - What type of unknown things could be discovered on a project like yours? How much could this add to the cost of the project?
 - How long have they been in business?
 - Will they be working on your project full time? Or will they be working on other projects at the same time? How do they handle scheduling and project timelines when managing multiple projects?
 - Do they have a Home Improvement Contractor License with the state? Do they have a Massachusetts Construction Supervisor's License? Do they have a lead license? **These licenses are required.**
 - Do they have liability insurance? **Liability insurance is required.**

5. You should speak with more than one contractor and ask for written bids so you can review multiple bids for your project. Keep in mind, the lowest price is not always the best, since the value of materials or workmanship may differ.
 - Look at the proposals carefully
 - Do some research on the purposed materials and verify the quoted price
 - Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand
 - Check references
 - Check with the Better Business Bureau in the area and/or with Massachusetts Consumer Affairs (www.mass.gov/consumer).
6. Once you chose the contractor, they should complete the HMLP program bid form. Any bid forms with missing information will cause delays in your application.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why can't the Provider Agency recommend a contractor to me? Provider Agencies do not have the skills to screen or manage contractors. It is important that you decide your own opinion of the skills and reliability of the contractor who you will hire to do work in your home.

What documentation do I need to obtain from my chosen contractor? You should speak with more than one contractor to give you a quote for the work you would like completed.

In most cases, your contractor will be required to complete the Home Modification Loan Program Bid Form and Scope of Work ("Bid Form"). There is a PDF version of the Bid Form, or this form can be completed online and printed for signatures. These can be found on the main website, www.cedac.org/hmlp or the website for HMLP contractors, www.cedac.org/hmlp-for-contractors.

The form is required with your Home Modification Loan Program loan application and used when determining the eligibility of the application.

The form also includes the construction payment schedule, which will also be your loan disbursement schedule.

However, it is always helpful to include:

- Copies of any project estimates or other paperwork prepared for the project.
- Blueprints or other site plans for the project. If these are required for municipal permits, they must be submitted with the HMLP Bid Form.

HMLP Bid Form is a detailed document. It is comprised of 3 Parts.

- Part 1: Includes certain program requirements, as well as other construction contract requirements outline by the Office of Consumer Affairs.
- Part II: Includes a brief description of the scope of work, list of permits required, contractor license and insurance information, estimated project timeline, labor rates, and the construction payment schedule.
- Part III: Is made up of sub-forms, only the sub-forms related to the specific project need to be completed.
 - Form A Ramps, lifts and elevators
 - Form B Exterior modifications
 - Form C Bathroom modifications
 - Form D Kitchen modifications
 - Form E Permanent Adaptive Design (i.e. alarm systems, security lighting).
 - Form F Addition to Dwelling or ADU

Each of these sub-forms do require details on the materials to be installed (type, quantity, price), as well as labor costs, and costs from any required sub-contractor(s).

Are there different types of contractor licenses? Review the information from the Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs on tips for hiring a contractor and the licenses required in Massachusetts <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/homeowners-guide-to-hiring-a-home-improvement-contractor>. If any structural work is part of your project scope, the contractor must have a Construction Supervisor's license and a Home Improvement or HIC license. A Construction Supervisor license certifies that the contractor understands state building code. A construction supervisor must pass an examination in order to receive this license. Keep in mind, a license does not guarantee the contractor is experienced.

How do I know my contractor's licenses are valid? You can look up each license on the Commonwealth's website.

- Home Improvement Contractors (HIC) license look-up. You can also search for any history of the contractor and the Guaranty Fund. www.mass.gov/ocabr/consumer-rights-and-resources/home-improvement-contract
- Construction Supervisor License look-up. You will enter the contractor's name. Here you can find out the status of the license and any history of disciplinary action. <https://www.mass.gov/construction-supervisor-licensing>
- Lead License look-up. There are several different kinds of licenses issued related to lead paint. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts requires contractors to have one of these licenses.
 1. Renovation, Repair and Painting Contractors, https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/01/12/web_list_LW.pdf?_ga=2.61447916.1913077927.1621260805-225454268.1602876115
 2. Certified Lead-Safe Renovator Supervisors, Approved for Moderate Risk Deleading, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/contractors-who-are-authorized-to-perform-moderate-risk-deleading>
 3. Licensed Deleader Contractors, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/deleading>

Why must the contractor provide their liability insurance policy information? Liability insurance protects you should any accidents occur and/or the contractor damages your home during the construction. You may also want to ask for a liability insurance certificate with you listed as "Additional Insured".

Why should the contractor pull the building permit? When a project requires any construction permit from the municipality, the contractor must be the person to request and pay for the building permit(s). The permit shows the contractor is responsible for the project and for following all codes, laws, and ordinances. The same person who signs your bid must be the person who holds the HIC license and pulls the town/city construction permits for you to remain eligible for the Guaranty Fund. The Provider Agency must have a copy of the building permit before disbursement of any loan funds.

Is there a difference between paying a subcontractor and a general contractor? Yes. Your construction contract must be with the general contractor. HMLP does not disburse funds directly to subcontractors. The general contractor is responsible for the requirements of the building permits and is responsible for the quality of the work done and is the one who will guarantee it. By hiring a firm to oversee the project you can address your questions and concerns about all aspects of your scope of work directly with the general contractor.

I have chosen my contractor, what happens next? Once your application is complete and you submit the required documents to support your application a construction monitor performs an initial inspection. This inspection makes sure everyone understands and agrees to the scope of work before construction begins. Please ask that your contractor attend the inspection. Once the monitor's inspection report is complete, loan documents will be prepared and a mortgage or UCC-1 will be filed. Please see the *Frequently-Asked-Questions* in the HMLP application guide for more details.

Once the mortgage or UCC-1 Financing Statement has been recorded, the Provider Agency will be able to disburse loan funds according to the payment schedule on your bid form. **Please note the first loan disbursement can take up to 4 – 6 weeks after your initial inspection.**

When can I tell my contractor to start work? Your contractor can start construction once the mortgage or UCC-1 is recorded on the property. The Provider Agency can tell you when this has been done. Make sure, that the contractor is not expecting payment before it will be available.

What if the contractor requests money before work has started?

The Provider Agency may disburse up to one-third (1/3) of the total contract price before the start of work. The Provider Agency must have a copy of the building permit and if first invoice is for materials prior to work starting a detailed list of the materials and their costs must be provided.

How do I request funds? *Requesting payment means that you are satisfied with the work completed.* If you have concerns about the quality or value of the work performed, you should address those concerns directly with your chosen contractor. If you are unable to reach a suitable outcome with your chosen contractor, please see the question below regarding disputes.

There are three ways that you may ask for funds:

1. You bring to your Provider Agency an HMLP Invoice form from the contractor. Please note that you must sign and approve this invoice before a Provider Agency can issue a check. **Your Provider will not accept invoices submitted from your chosen contractor directly.**
2. You may also bring an invoice from a supplier, such as Home Depot, which details the items purchased or services provided; or
3. You may also bring an invoice from the contractor or supplier marked paid or other documentation proving that you have used your own money to pay for the services or supplies.

You should review the work done carefully. You should also review any invoice carefully before submitting them to your Provider Agency for payment. You should **NEVER** pre-sign an invoice form.

In general, funds requested should reflect the cost of materials and/or work completed to date. If you are not sure that an invoice shows the status of the project at the time of the request, you should have a conversation with your contractor.

How will the check be made out? In most cases, the Provider Agency will send you a two-party check made payable to you and the contractor. In situation number 3 above, the Provider Agency may make the check payable directly to you.

What if I have a dispute with my contractor? HMLP, your provider and the construction monitor cannot be involved in disputes between you and your chosen contractor. It is very important that you and your qualified chosen contractor both sign a legally binding contract with details outlining materials, labor, timeline, etc.

More information about hiring a construction contractor and consumer protection laws, including how to file a complaint can be found on the Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation at: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/home-improvement-contractor-law-resources> or call the state office's toll-free hotline at (888) 283-3757.

What if there are needed project changes or unforeseen circumstances are uncovered during construction? Prior to starting the work, changes in scope must be documented in writing, describing any changes to the original contract agreement, and be signed by both the homeowner and contractor. The change order narrative should provide a reason for the change and list labor and/or material costs. This should include any possible change in cost and be signed by the homeowner and contractor. If possible or helpful, provide photos of the affected area for clarity.

Before proceeding, you should ask the homeowner to confirm that any change will be an eligible project for their HMLP funding or that they have other funds to cover any changes in the agreed upon scope of work.

Please be aware any work performed outside the agreed upon scope of work stated on the HMLP Bid Form without a change order – is a separate agreement between yourself and your contractor and the loan funds from HMLP cannot be used.

The project is complete, what is required by HMLP to receive the final payment? The homeowner will contact the regional provider agency, who will contact the HMLP construction monitor who performed the initial inspection, and an HMLP final inspection will be scheduled.

The regional agency will only request an HMLP final inspection when (1) the homeowner informs them that they are satisfied with the work performed, and (2) the municipal inspection process has been completed, and the permits have been satisfactorily signed off on.

The final invoice requires you to also complete the Contractor's Conditional Waiver and Release. This waiver confirms the funds received and confirms you will not file a claim for non-payment. Please see M.G.L. c. 254, section 32 for more information.

My project includes a wheelchair lift or elevator and I need more information on the additional requirements. A person with an elevator mechanics' license is required to install elevators or wheelchair lifts (not stair-lifts). State law requires inspections of lifts and elevators in single-family homes by the Department of Public Safety when first installed and then every 5 years. This inspection can be set up through the company who installed your elevator or lift.

If you are having trouble finding someone, you may find the Massachusetts Elevator Safety Association helpful, <http://mesassoc.com/>, member companies are likely to have licensed installers.