

ENERGY STAR Certification System

for Homes and Apartments

Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Modeling
Compliance Path

Last Revised: 07/30/2024

Table of Contents

- 1.0 Introduction 3
- 2.0 Effective Date 4
- 3.0 HCO Eligibility Requirements 5
 - 3.1. Legal Responsibility 5
 - 3.2. Independent Governance 5
 - 3.3. Geographic Scope of Operations 6
 - 3.4. Staffing and Competency 6
- 4.0 HCO Policies 6
 - 4.1. Business Code of Ethics 6
 - 4.2. Impartiality and Objectivity 6
 - 4.3. Non-Discrimination 7
 - 4.4. Open Access 7
 - 4.5. Data Privacy 8
 - 4.6. Public Availability of HCO Policies 8
- 5.0 Certification and Oversight Procedures 9
 - 5.1. Training and Credentialing of Raters and Quality Control Reviewers 9
 - 5.2. Verification Protocol 10
 - 5.3. Sampling Protocol 10
 - 5.4. Quality Control Protocol 11
 - 5.5. Issuance of ENERGY STAR Labels and Certificates 14
 - 5.6. Certification Recall Procedure 14
 - 5.7. Ethics Compliance and Homeowner Certification Review Requests 15
 - 5.8. Recordkeeping, Reporting, and Disclosure 15
 - 5.9. Coordination with the EPA 16
- 6.0 Software and Database Systems 16
 - 6.1. System Integration 16
 - 6.2. Data Collection and Aggregation 16
 - 6.3. Approved Energy Modeling Tools 17
 - 6.4. On-Site Photo and Test Result Collection System 18
 - 6.5. Program Documentation Collection System 18
 - 6.6. Quality Control Workflow Functionality 18
 - 6.7. ENERGY STAR Label and Certificate Printing System 19
 - 6.8. HCO Database 19
 - 6.9. Approval of Software and Systems 20
- 7.0 Use of Designees 21
- 8.0 Program Compliance 22
- 9.0 EPA Oversight Reviews 22
- 10.0 Amendments, Modifications, and Revisions 23
 - 10.1. EPA-Initiated Changes 23
 - 10.2. Revision, Amendments, and Interpretations of Referenced Standards 23
 - 10.3. HCO-Initiated Changes 23
- 11.0 Withdrawal of Recognition 24

1.0 Introduction

Since its inception, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ENERGY STAR New Construction Program has required third-party verification of homes and apartments that earn ENERGY STAR certification. In 2007, the EPA developed and implemented a structure to formally recognize the independent organizations that provide oversight of the verification process and the Raters that performed the inspections and testing necessary to document compliance with ENERGY STAR program requirements. These organizations were referred to as Verification Oversight Organizations (or VOOs).

In 2018, the EPA began a comprehensive update of the oversight recognition structure, including changing the terminology from VOO to Home Certification Organization (HCO). These changes were intended to better reflect the entire home certification process rather than just verification oversight. The changes also provided for better consistency in the EPA's approach across its residential home labeling programs (such as WaterSense).

The certification structure is now defined by two documents:

ENERGY STAR Certification System for Homes and Apartments Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Modeling Compliance Path
This document, subsequently referred to as the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification System</i> , establishes the specific eligibility criteria, policy requirements, and certification procedures required of a Home Certification Organization (HCO).

ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol for Homes and Apartments Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Compliance Path
This companion document, subsequently referred to as the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol</i> , identifies the Standards and ENERGY STAR Residential New Construction national and regional Program Requirements required to be met for a home or apartment to earn the ENERGY STAR certification when an ERI or dwelling unit modeling path is used.

A Home Certification Organization (HCO) is defined as an independent organization that is recognized by the EPA to implement a certification program that complies with the *ENERGY STAR Certification System*. These organizations are responsible for exercising final authority over decisions related to ENERGY STAR certifications for homes and apartments, including the credentialing, oversight, and quality assurance of individuals that verify homes and apartments to earn ENERGY STAR certification, hereafter referred to as 'Raters.'

Originally, the HCO construct was put in effect for HCOs operating at the national level using Energy Rating Index (ERI)-based compliance paths, which covers the ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes

and Multifamily New Construction "National" program requirements and all regional program requirements, except for California. In 2022, the EPA expanded the HCO construct to cover homes and apartments certified in California, where regional program requirements that align with the state's energy code are in effect. While most requirements in this document apply to all HCOs, a subset of modifications apply only to California-serving HCOs, as indicated in this document by a prefix of *For California*. Organizations may apply for HCO recognition at the national level, in California only, or both nationally and in California.

An organization seeking to become an HCO must submit an 'Application for Recognition' to the EPA that demonstrates that it meets the program's eligibility criteria and has the capability, competencies, and proper controls to implement a certification program in accordance with the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*. The EPA will evaluate each Application for Recognition and provide a written determination of its review to the associated applicant. In cases where the EPA determines that the application failed to meet program requirements, the EPA will identify areas of deficiency. Applicants whose applications are denied are eligible to submit a revised application for review no sooner than twelve (12) months from the most recent EPA determination.

The EPA's recognition of an HCO relates solely and specifically to the ENERGY STAR Residential New Construction programs for site-built single-family homes and multifamily buildings that are certified using an Energy Rating Index (ERI) or, in California, dwelling unit modeling approach and does not qualify an organization to implement or participate in other aspects of the ENERGY STAR program (e.g., ENERGY STAR certification of multifamily buildings using an ASHRAE-based approach or ENERGY STAR certified manufactured homes).

Activities undertaken by HCOs are not intended as services provided to the federal government. HCOs are expected to be market-based and may not submit claims for compensation to the EPA or any other federal agency for their activities related to fulfilling the required roles and responsibilities of recognized HCOs. Recognized HCOs may implement participation or certification fee structures or seek funding from other sources to support their certification program.

2.0 Effective Date

The *ENERGY STAR Certification System* shall be effective on May 26, 2020. Revisions shall be implemented according to Section 10.2.

For California: The *ENERGY STAR Certification System* shall be effective for homes and apartments certified in California using Version 3.3 (and later) of the ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes California program requirements and Version 1.3 (and later) of the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction California program requirements.

3.0 HCO Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for recognition by the EPA as an HCO, an organization is required to demonstrate the following:

3.1. Legal Responsibility

The organization is required to be a legal entity, or defined part of a legal entity, that can be held responsible for all activities related to its certification program.

3.2. Independent Governance

The organization is required to be independent, and all certification decisions are required to be independent of the influence of (1) builders and developers whose homes and apartments would be certified and (2) other entities directly involved in the design or construction of the building to be certified through its certification program. In addition, the organization is required to maintain an independent governance mechanism to ensure that its policies and activities related to its certification program comply with the requirements of the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* and support the integrity of the ENERGY STAR program.

Examples of such mechanisms include, but are not limited to, maintaining a Board of Directors or Independent Governance Committee with the following attributes:

- Specific responsibility for safeguarding the impartiality and integrity of the HCO's certification program;
- Authority to review the HCO's policies, procedures, and actions;
- A balanced representation of significantly interested parties such as builders, conformity assessment experts, Raters, designees, and representatives of trade associations, such that no single interest predominates;
- Access to all information necessary to fulfill its functions;
- Have the right to independently inform the EPA if the HCO does not follow the input of this mechanism.

Accreditation to the ISO/IEC 17065 governing standard, "*Conformity Assessment: Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services*," is also considered to meet the independent governance requirement through Section 5.2 of that standard, "Mechanism for safeguarding impartiality."

3.3. Geographic Scope of Operations

The organization is required to have the ability to implement its certification program on a national level¹. This is required to be demonstrated, at a minimum, through the following:

- Establishing a network of Raters capable of providing ENERGY STAR certifications across the U.S., as demonstrated through immediate access to such a network or via an intent, strategy, and ability to develop such a network;
- Maintaining a quality assurance and oversight mechanism for Raters distributed across the U.S.; and
- Technical support for and competency with regional variations in architecture, engineering, mechanical design, and construction methods used throughout the U.S.

For California: The network of Raters and the quality assurance mechanism that provides oversight need only be capable of providing ENERGY STAR certifications in California.

3.4. Staffing and Competency

The organization is required to employ or have access to sufficient personnel with the competencies necessary to meet all applicable requirements related to the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*. This may include on-staff personnel, as well as designees² working under a contract or other formal agreement that places their activities under the legal responsibility of the HCO.

4.0 HCO Policies

The HCO is required to maintain documented formal policies related to:

4.1. Business Code of Ethics

The HCO is required to maintain a business code of ethics for the HCO, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used).

4.2. Impartiality and Objectivity

The HCO is required to maintain conflict of interest (COI) policies to identify and mitigate risks to the impartiality of the HCO, its Raters, and its designees. These policies are required to address COI that pertains to both the individuals and organizations involved in the ENERGY STAR certification process. Where designees are used, the HCO is required to maintain a specific conflict of interest policy for designees.

¹ The EPA may consider recognizing HCOs that do not have a national scope of operations for specific states or regions where unique geographic situations, code structures, or state/local law warrant different oversight models.

² See Section 6.0 for additional information about the use of designees.

COI policies are required to include disclosure of existing or potential conflicts of interest and steps to resolve the conflicts. In addition to any other conflicts identified, these policies are required to address, at a minimum, the following conflicts:

- Conflicts between the HCO and its builder clients;
- Conflicts between individuals involved in the certification process and other entities involved in the design or construction of the home to be certified;
- Conflicts between Raters, individuals performing quality assurance activities, and/or individuals making certification decisions.

All COI policies are required to be reviewed on an ongoing basis, and disclosures are required to be updated as necessary. The HCO is required to disclose any identified potential or existing conflicts of interest and mitigation steps to the EPA on an annual basis.³

In addition, the HCO's organizational chart and management system are required to reflect the impartiality of decision-making related to its certification program and show a clear separation of roles between certification decisions and other business activities that may present a conflict of interest, if any. Certification decisions are required to be carried out by individuals who have not been involved in the process of evaluation (i.e., Raters).

4.3. Non-Discrimination

The HCO is required to maintain a non-discrimination policy for the HCO, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used) forbidding, at minimum, discrimination based on a person's race, color, religion, sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age, disability, or genetic information.

4.4. Open Access

The HCO is required to maintain an open access policy for the HCO, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used), making its certification program accessible to all eligible ENERGY STAR builder and developer partners and specifying that access may not be conditional upon the size of the ENERGY STAR builder or developer partner, nor membership in any association or group.

³ See Section 5.8 for additional information about HCO reporting requirements.

4.5. Data Privacy

The HCO is required to maintain a data privacy policy for the usage, storage, and transmission of data and photos related to verification of ENERGY STAR-specific program requirements⁴, including, at a minimum, the following elements:

- Applicable data and photos are permitted to be shared and used for the exclusive purpose of activities required by the ENERGY STAR Certification System, such as quality control review, homeowner certification review requests, and ethics investigations.
- All parties may retain or destroy documentation data (e.g., ENERGY STAR checklists and HVAC design documentation) following the minimum data retention period of three years (see Section 5.8).
- An Energy Rating Company may retain or destroy its photos following the minimum photo retention period of two years (see Section 5.8) unless otherwise specified by agreement with a dwelling unit's builder/developer.
- Applicable photos stored by the HCO, its designees, and any other intermediate custodians (e.g., photo collection software) are required to be destroyed following the minimum photo retention period of two years.
- Exceptions to the above rules, including sharing data/photos with other parties (e.g., homeowners, researchers, non-EPA program administrators, commercial data brokers, or multiple listing services), are only permitted at the direction of the HCO or the EPA (e.g., for an investigatory hold) or with the express written authorization of both the Energy Rating Company that captured the data/photos and the builder/developer of the originating dwelling unit.

4.6. Public Availability of HCO Policies

The HCO is required to publish information on a public webpage that describes its certification program and the HCO's policies and procedures for granting and withdrawing certification, including but not limited to:

- Business code of ethics, per Section 4.1.
- Conflict of interest policies, per Section 4.2.
- Non-discrimination policies, per Section 4.3.
- Open access policies, per Section 4.4.
- Data privacy policies, per Section 4.5.
- Training and credentialing requirements, per Section 5.1.
- The verification protocol, per Section 5.2.

⁴ These data privacy policy requirements apply to the ENERGY STAR-specific checklist data and photos and do not cover generic items under the ANSI standards, such as test results and photos of minimum-rated features. An HCO is free to define data custody policies with respect to these items.

- The sampling protocol, if used, per Section 5.3.
- The quality control protocol, per Section 5.4.
- Ethics complaint and homeowner inquiry policies, per Section 5.7.
- The published list of software and systems, including energy modeling tools that are approved for use in the HCO's certification program, per Section 6.9.
- Qualification criteria for designees, if used, per Section 7.0.
- Implementation timelines regarding amendments, modifications, and revisions, per Section 10.0.

5.0 Certification and Oversight Procedures

The HCO is required to take all necessary steps to evaluate conformance with the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*, including the following measures:

5.1. Training and Credentialing of Raters and Quality Control Reviewers

- Develop or recognize ENERGY STAR-specific training and examination programs for Raters and quality control reviewers, including:
 - Incorporate EPA-provided content on ENERGY STAR program requirements and develop or recognize additional instruction on reference standards (e.g., ANSI 301, 310, and 380 or California HERS rating standards) and HCO protocols;
 - Attendance tracking and conclusion of courses with proctored examinations;
 - For quality control reviewers, include a prerequisite for the ENERGY STAR Rater training and develop additional content on quality control functions; and
 - For both Raters and quality control reviewers, implement separate (or combined) training and continuing education programs for the ENERGY STAR SFNH and MFNC programs, addressing the program requirement distinctions and specialized skills and knowledge applicable to each sector.
- Develop an annual continuing education program for Raters and quality control reviewers to reinforce relevant skills and knowledge, review recent developments, and define requalification procedures for individuals with lapsed continuing education attendance;
- Credential Raters and quality control reviewers who have satisfied the required initial training, continuing education, and (for Raters) annual field evaluations per Section 5.4;
 - For both Raters and quality control reviewers, implement separate credentials for SFNH and MFNC program requirements, with the SFNH credential being a prerequisite for the MFNC credential;
- Maintain a public or private list of credentialed Raters and quality control reviewers that is updated regularly;
- Maintain a database of Rater headshot photos to allow quality control reviewers to confirm the identity of a Rater captured in the mandatory inspection photo (see Section 5.2); and

- Ensure that individuals contributing to ENERGY STAR certifications hold an appropriate credential for the tasks performed.

5.2. Verification Protocol

The HCO is required to implement a verification protocol for on-site observation and testing of ENERGY STAR program requirements, including:

- All verification requirements specified in the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* and referenced standards, including the following items:
 - The Rater performs a minimum of two inspections, one at pre-drywall and the other at final.
 - The Rater verifies that all requirements have been met in accordance with the Mandatory Requirements for All Certified Homes and with the inspection procedures for minimum rated features in ANSI / RESNET / ICC 301, Appendix B, which includes reviewing all items on the applicable Rater checklists to verify that each inspection checklist item has been met within program-defined tolerances.
 - The Rater completes and signs a copy of the applicable Rater checklists.
- At each inspection, the following photos are required to be collected by the Rater as a record of their observations:
 - A timestamped and geo-tagged photo of the Rater in front of the rated dwelling unit;
 - Timestamped photos⁵ of all minimum rated features as specified in Normative Appendix B of ANSI 301-2022 (or a more recent version, as adopted by the HCO);
 - Photos of checklist items that are timestamped, as specified in the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* (i.e., on the applicable Rater Field Checklist).

5.3. Sampling Protocol

The HCO may choose to offer a sampling protocol for use with the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction program for all building types except townhomes. Note that sampling cannot be applied to the ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes program or townhomes.⁶ When offered, the sampling protocol is required to, at a minimum:

- Specify the collection of energy modeling files for every certified home based on a worst-case analysis;
- Require that dwelling units participating in sampling be within the same building, be the same construction type, and include the same envelope systems;

⁵ It is recommended, but not required, that all photos be geo-tagged. At a minimum, it is required that the photo of the Rater in front of the dwelling unit be geo-tagged.

⁶ Sampling is an option for the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction program but is phased out for ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes and all townhomes for dwellings permitted after 1/1/25.

- Require successful inspection on a qualification set of at least the first seven (7) consecutive instances of a sampled measure before applying sampling to that measure;
- Ensure that verification occurs on a representative sample of dwelling units ready within a 30-calendar day period at a rate of no less than one-in-seven (or 15 percent);
- Provide for corrective actions to address failures identified during sampling, including, at a minimum:
 - Correction of any failed measures in the dwelling unit where it was discovered,
 - Additional evaluation of measures in a minimum of two (2) additional homes or apartments, and
 - After multiple additional failures, requalification through evaluation of measures in at least three (3) additional dwelling units and/or documentation of a root cause analysis.

5.4. Quality Control Protocol

The HCO is required to implement comprehensive quality control systems and procedures, including, at minimum:

- Collect a complete rating file submission via software/database systems prior to quality control selection and review (see Section 6.6);
- Have HCO personnel directly review any user-confirmed overrides of validation errors prior to certification;
- Perform quality control file review on at least one in ten (10%) ENERGY STAR certified dwelling units that includes the following features: ⁷
 - Dwelling units are selected randomly for file review by the HCO database, per Section 6.6;
 - File review is performed by a human reviewer;
 - File review of dwelling units participating in the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction program includes a review of the building's common spaces and central systems, as applicable; ⁸
 - Phase 1 of the quality control file review, which includes completion of the ENERGY STAR Quality Control Checklist, is successfully completed before distribution of the ENERGY STAR certificate;

⁷ Proposals to calculate the file quality control rate using a statistical calculation based on a 95% confidence interval rather than a fixed 10% rate may be submitted to the EPA for consideration. Proposals should ensure that sample populations used to calculate review rates are appropriately defined as comprising similar items, which, for large energy rating companies, will generally require distinguishing between different divisions that may have different protocols, equipment, or organizational cultures.

⁸ If multiple dwelling units from the same building are selected for file review, the building's common spaces and central systems are only required to be reviewed once.

- Phase 2 of the quality control review, which includes completion of an HCO-developed checklist covering the referenced national standards, is completed, at the latest, by the end of the calendar quarter following the date of certification; and
- An escalation provision requiring a full Phase 2 review before distribution of the ENERGY STAR certificate in the event that the Phase 1 review reveals discrepancies outside allowable thresholds (see below);
- If the above file review step is assigned to a designee, have HCO personnel⁹ directly perform an additional quality control file review ('HCO direct file review') that includes the following features:
 - A rate of HCO direct file review adhering to the following schedule by year:
 - 2025 and 2026: 1 in 400 homes (0.25%)
 - 2027 and 2028: 1 in 200 homes (0.5%)
 - 2029 and beyond: 1 in 100 homes (1%)
 - Dwelling units are selected randomly by the HCO database (see Section 6.6), with 75% drawn from submissions previously reviewed by a designee, per above, and 25% being unreviewed.
 - The HCO direct file review is at least as rigorous as the 10% file review above and is performed by a human reviewer using the ENERGY STAR Quality Control Checklist, as well as an HCO checklist covering the referenced national standards;
 - Phase 1 of the HCO direct file review, which includes completion of the ENERGY STAR Quality Control Checklist, occurring after a designee's original Phase 1 review is complete (if applicable) and before distribution of the ENERGY STAR certificate;
 - Phase 2 HCO direct file review, which includes completion of an HCO-developed checklist covering the referenced national standard, occurring after a designee's original Phase 2 review is finished (if applicable) and is completed, at the latest, by the end of the second calendar quarter following the date of certification.¹⁰
- For each Rater¹¹, perform annual field evaluation(s) to assess the Rater's skills and knowledge of current applicable policies, procedures, and program requirements and perform quality control of installed measures on certified homes/apartments (and/or homes/apartments pursuing certification). Field evaluations are required to include the following features:

⁹ "HCO personnel" may include on-staff personnel, as well as designees working under a contract or other formal agreement that places their activities under the legal responsibility of the HCO.

¹⁰ It is recommended, but not required, for an HCO to perform Phase 2 reviews at the same time as the Phase 1 review to minimize the risk of future certification recall.

¹¹ Field evaluation applies to all credentialed "Raters," including Certified Raters and Approved Inspectors, as defined by ANSI / RESNET / ICC 301, as well as equivalent designations as determined by an HCO.

- Field evaluation comprising quality assurance personnel independently verifying all applicable minimum rated features and ENERGY STAR program requirements via a witness or after-the-fact assessment ¹²;
- Field evaluation occurring at the following rates, according to the annual number of ENERGY STAR certifications to which a Rater contributes (for example, by performing one or both inspections and/or serving as the "Rater of record"):
 - For Raters contributing to one hundred (100) or fewer annual certifications, field evaluation is required to occur on at least one (1) home/apartment per year and alternate between the pre-drywall and final stages each year.
 - For Raters contributing to more than one hundred (100) annual home/apartment certifications, field evaluation is required on at least one (1) home/apartment at the pre-drywall stage and one (1) home/apartment at the final stage per year, for a total of at least two (2) annual field evaluations.
- Homes are selected based on availability by the assigned quality control reviewer, with the intent of capturing a representative cross-section of builders, locations, and home types.
- Homes not being re-used for multiple ENERGY STAR field evaluations ¹³;
- Maintain a set of repeatable standards for assessing whether discrepancies found during quality control file reviews and field evaluations are within allowable thresholds, including the use of the appropriate ENERGY STAR Quality Assurance checklist and a maximum allowable ERI score variation of three percent (3%) relative to the post-review ERI score ¹⁴;
 - For California: Rather than being based on a 3% variation, the threshold standard is required to ensure that installed building components meet or exceed the energy performance of the design specifications (in alignment with the threshold structure used in California's Building Energy Efficiency Standards).
- In the event that deficiencies are discovered outside allowable thresholds, provisions for addressing the deficiencies and, more generally, identifying and addressing the root cause(s) to ensure the deficiencies do not reoccur;

¹² In a witness assessment (or "shadow audit"), the Rater performs an inspection in the presence of the quality control reviewer. In an after-the-fact assessment (or "blind QA"), a quality control reviewer retests a home without the original Rater present.

¹³ It is permissible, however, to perform an ENERGY STAR field evaluation at a home also being used for other programs, such as DOE's Zero Energy Ready Homes.

¹⁴ For example, the allowable tolerance for a home with an ERI of 60 is ± 1.8 points (3% of 60 = 1.8), which equates to a tolerance range of 58.2 to 61.8.

- In the event of recurring deficiencies related to a particular Rater, provisions for corrective action, such as supplemental training or an increased rate of field evaluation, as well as conditions for triggering disciplinary action by the HCO; and
- Maintain an accidental data loss and missing photo policy with appropriate remedies¹⁵, adequate safeguards against abuse, and escalating consequences for repeated occurrences designed to limit the rate of missing photos to no more than 1%.

Quality control protocols that employ alternative schemes, such as those relying on remote video QA, automated file flagging, or artificial intelligence (AI), may be submitted to the EPA for consideration.

5.5. Issuance of ENERGY STAR Labels and Certificates

The HCO is required to maintain the final authority over all ENERGY STAR certifications and be responsible for determining that certified homes and apartments conform with the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*.

The HCO is required to implement protocols ensuring that, at minimum:

- The ENERGY STAR label and certificate are required to either be created directly by the HCO or, if supported, printed through an approved energy modeling tool per Section 6.7;
- Raters and designees do not print (physically or digitally) the ENERGY STAR label or certificate through any other method than specified above, including via proprietary recordkeeping systems; and
- Raters are required to provide the ENERGY STAR builder or developer partner with an ENERGY STAR certificate for each certified home or apartment.

5.6. Certification Recall Procedure

The HCO is required to maintain a formal procedure to recall a certification following the discovery of unresolvable deficiencies during routine quality control review, including, at minimum:

- A standardized notice being sent to the builder, with the HCO retaining a copy, and
- Removal of the home's certification from the HCO database and public address lookup tool.

The HCO is required to consult with the EPA regarding potential decertification(s) stemming from sources other than routine quality control review, including homeowner certification review requests and ethics compliance investigations per Section 5.7.

¹⁵ Remedies for missing photos may include, but are not limited to, a Rater revisiting a home to collect the missing photo, collecting a photo from a builder, and/or signing an attestation regarding the status of an installed item.

5.7. Ethics Compliance and Homeowner Certification Review Requests

The HCO is required to maintain:

- An ethics complaint process covering the HCO, its Raters, and designees;
- Procedures for disciplining Raters, including provisions for appeal; and
- A resolution process for homeowner inquiries, including:
 - Providing a web page that allows homeowners to submit inquiries or concerns regarding the ENERGY STAR certification of their home or apartment.
 - For eligible inquiries, performing Certification Reviews for the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* as defined by the ENERGY STAR Certified Homes Rater Quality Assurance and Certification Review Checklist (pending) and rescinding the ENERGY STAR certification in cases where the HCO determines a home fails the Certification Review.

5.8. Recordkeeping, Reporting, and Disclosure

The HCO is required to:

- Ensure data is retained for a minimum of three (3) years and available to the EPA upon request, including verification records, program documentation, test results, and all other records related to the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*;
 - As an exception, ensure program-required photos are retained for a minimum of two (2) years and available to the EPA upon request, after which point they are destroyed;
- Report to the EPA within 30 days of any designee approvals or suspensions;
- Report to the EPA within 30 days of any disciplinary action taken, including any suspensions;¹⁶
- Provide the EPA with aggregate/summary information about the energy-efficiency features used in homes and apartments certified through the HCO's certification program upon request; and
- Conduct annual internal management review and provide the EPA with an annual report (or more frequently, upon request) regarding the HCO's administration of its certification program, including the following topics:
 - Certification counts and trends;
 - Quality control activity review;
 - Missing photo rate;
 - Status of system/software development and approval;
 - Reference standards adoption status;
 - Dispute resolution activities;
 - Identified conflict of interest and mitigation; and
 - Risk analysis and opportunities for improvement.

¹⁶ The EPA reserves the right to terminate the ENERGY STAR Partnership Agreement of Raters that violate the terms of their partnership or the Federal ENERGY STAR trademark.

5.9. Coordination with the EPA

The HCO is required to:

- Maintain open lines of communication with the EPA to address questions and concerns promptly.
- Participate in meetings upon request by the EPA.
- Work collaboratively with the EPA to facilitate the comprehensive and coordinated investigation and response to:
 - Findings resulting from routine quality assurance activities;
 - Certification discrepancies, including those referred to the HCO by the EPA; and
 - Certification Review Requests and other inquiries from homeowners.

6.0 Software and Database Systems

The HCO is required to develop or recognize a set of software and database systems¹⁷ that includes the following features to support energy modeling, data collection, quality control review, and recordkeeping workflows:

6.1. System Integration

If multiple systems are used to deliver the functionality specified below, the systems are required to be well-integrated to support effective participant workflows and data integrity. This includes, but is not limited to, the ability of a user to input and review all requisite data points (see Section 6.2) without unnecessary complexity or undue administrative burden.

6.2. Data Collection and Aggregation

A method to cross-reference data from relevant data sources to associate the following data points with each dwelling unit in a consistent manner across user interfaces:

- Physical address;
- Certification date;
- ENERGY STAR program, Version, and Revision number;
- The builder and energy rating companies associated with each certification, as identified by their My ENERGY STAR Account (MESA) "Organization ID."¹⁸
- The Raters (or equivalently designated inspectors) contributing to each certification, including the Rater of Record and the individuals performing on-site inspections, cross-referenced against the database of credentialed Raters (see Section 5.1);

¹⁷ An HCO has the flexibility to define its approach to making software and database systems available. Acceptable options include recognizing third-party data software, developing proprietary in-house solutions, requiring the use of a vertically integrated HCO platform, or some combination thereof.

¹⁸ An interface is required that, at minimum, accepts input of the Organization ID. It is recommended, but not required, to provide a search box, auto-fill, or similar. Organization IDs are available through the EPA's "Partner List" API, as well as at www.energystar.gov/ResPartnerDirectory.

- The quality control reviewers evaluating each certification (if applicable) cross-referenced against the database of credentialed quality control reviewers (see Section 5.1);
- The energy modeling file, ERI score, ENERGY STAR ERI Target, all minimum rated features as defined in referenced standards, and the software version number (see Section 6.3);
 - For California: Rather than ERI metrics, the Efficiency Energy Design Ratio (EDR) and/or Compliance Margin delta, as applicable;
- The applicable ENERGY STAR Rater Design Review checklist and HVAC design documentation (see Section 6.5);
- The on-site inspections, with an association made to the inspecting Rater or equivalently designated inspector (per above), applicable ENERGY STAR Rater Field Checklist (see Section 6.5), and collected on-site photos (see Section 6.4);
- If a sampling protocol is used, the worst-case energy model, sampled status, and, as applicable, inspection record (see Section 5.3); and
- For ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction, a building-level association to facilitate MFNC's whole-building logic¹⁹, including:
 - A single building-level address, in addition to dwelling unit IDs (e.g., unit numbers);
 - Building-level photos of common spaces and central systems, as applicable; and
 - Building-level documentation, such as the Multifamily Workbook.

6.3. Approved Energy Modeling Tools

The HCO is required to identify and approve in writing for use in its certification program software tools that include and are continuously maintained with respect to the following functionality:

- A user interface that permits input and review of all data points necessary to demonstrate compliance with minimum rated features defined in referenced standards.
- Calculation of a dwelling unit's ERI in a manner compliant with referenced standards, as validated through one of the following options: ²⁰
 - Integration of the open-source NREL-developed "OpenStudio-ERI" calculation engine;
 - Approval by the RESNET Accreditation Committee in accordance with the most current version of RESNET Publication 002;
 - For California: Rather than the above options, software approval by the California Energy Commission (CEC) in accordance with the applicable version of California's Building Energy Efficiency Standards;
- Calculation of the ENERGY STAR ERI Target as defined by ENERGY STAR program requirements;

¹⁹ For example, in MFNC, all dwelling units in the same building are required to be certified on an 'all or none' basis and use the same ENERGY STAR program Version and Revision.

²⁰ When calculating ERIs for ENERGY STAR purposes, approved rating software is required to follow referenced standards, with the caveat that it may use the approved exceptions listed in *ENERGY STAR Exceptions to ANSI / RESNET / ICC 301 When Calculating Target ERI Values*.

- For California: The above requirement does not apply;
- Automatic warnings and errors for the standardized list of validations defined in the *ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements*, including a user-confirmed error override function;
- For California: The above requirement does not apply;
- Ability to submit confirmed ratings to the HCO database, including all data elements necessary to populate the HCO database per Sections 6.2 and 6.7;
- Ability to receive error and confirmation notices from the HCO database and present appropriate notices to users; and
- All other applicable requirements of the *ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements*.

6.4. On-Site Photo and Test Result Collection System

A user interface that permits upload and review of mandatory on-site photos and test results, including, as applicable, timestamp and geo-tag metadata (see Section 5.2).

6.5. Program Documentation Collection System

A user interface that supports:

- Input and review of the mandatory ENERGY STAR checklists in an itemized machine-readable format, with a recommendation to implement the reference data schema defined in the *ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements*; ^{21, 22, 23}
- Upload and review of the mandatory HVAC design documents in a digital format, such as PDF or scanned image.

6.6. Quality Control Workflow Functionality

A system, or collection of systems with appropriate integration, to support the quality control workflow specified in Section 5.4 that includes the following functionality:

- Ability to submit rating files to the HCO database prior to quality control selection;
- Automatic flagging of user-confirmed error overrides for review by HCO personnel;
- Random selection of dwelling units for quality control file review by the HCO database at specified rates, as drawn from the pool of submissions pursuing ENERGY STAR certification;

²¹ As an alternative, it is permissible to use a custom data schema, provided that it is reviewed for accuracy on an ongoing basis by the HCO in accordance with Section 6.8.

²² In addition to supporting direct input of checklist data in the approved rating software tools, it is recommended (but, at this time, not required) for software to support data exchange with mobile data collection apps.

²³ For buildings pursuing certification via the ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction program, it is acceptable (but not required) for software to support input of batch checklist data covering multiple units, provided that a data relationship is established such that every dwelling unit is associated with a checklist.

- If applicable, random selection of dwelling units for HCO direct file review by the HCO database at specified rates and distribution between previously reviewed and unreviewed submissions;
- A notification system to indicate when dwelling units are selected for review, as well as when the review is complete; and
- A "holding bin" that isolates selected submissions until the quality control review is complete.

6.7. ENERGY STAR Label and Certificate Printing System

A system to print a digital ENERGY STAR label and certificate that includes the following features:

- Either operated directly by the HCO or included in the approved energy modeling tools;
- Use of the latest graphic templates and guidance provided by the EPA; and
- Integration to prevent printing of the ENERGY STAR label or certificate until the HCO database transmits a confirmation of final certification (see Section 6.8).

6.8. HCO Database

The HCO is required to develop and continuously maintain a central database that supports the functions specified above, including, but not limited to, the following features:

- Data exchange protocols to aggregate submissions from all applicable sources, including the approved modeling tools, photo and test result collection system, and program documentation collection system;
- Logging of a final record for each certified dwelling unit, including all data points specified in Section 6.2;
- Rater and quality control reviewer credential records (see Section 5.1);
- Tracking of quality control file review and field evaluation records (see Section 5.4);
- Retention of records according to the minimum durations specified in Section 5.8;
- Destruction of photos following the two-year photo retention period (see Section 4.5);
- Assignment and notification of final certification, contingent on a final validation check as defined in the *ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements*, review of user-confirmed error overrides, and completion of assigned Phase 1 quality control file review and/or Phase 1 HCO direct review, as applicable;
- Transmittal of nightly certification reports to the EPA's reporting database via the Homes Online Submission Tool API (HOST API), with coordination as needed to resolve reporting errors;

- A public certification search interface that, at a minimum, accepts queries by physical address and reports the home or apartment's ENERGY STAR certification status; and ²⁴
- All other applicable requirements of the *ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements*.

6.9. Approval of Software and Systems

The HCO is required to review and approve all specified software systems, including energy modeling tools, by performing the following activities:

- Verify that systems comply with these requirements as applicable to the functions assigned to those systems;
 - For energy modeling tools, specifically, verify compliance by collecting and reviewing a copy of the *ENERGY STAR Software Approval Form* filled out by the software developer.
- Re-review major software/system versions²⁵ for compliance with these requirements and approve software for use on a version-specific basis;
- Publish a website list, by type (e.g., energy modeling tool), of software/systems approved for use in its certification program, including the following information: software name, approved version number or version range, date approved, which ENERGY STAR programs and program versions the software supports, and, for earlier software versions, the approval expiration date as determined by a dwelling unit's permit date (see Section 4.6);
- Ensure that software/systems are updated by developers and reviewed by the HCO promptly²⁶ when factors such as program revisions or the HCO database schema necessitate changes; and
- Implement a policy to ensure current versions of software rating tools are used for ENERGY STAR certifications, with a transition period of no longer than six (6) months following new software version releases, as determined by a dwelling unit's permit date.

The EPA reserves the right to review software/systems for compliance, require correction of any deficiencies, grant final approval for HCO recognition of new software/systems, and, if necessary, require de-listing of software/systems unable to be brought into compliance.

²⁴ It is recommended, but not required (at this time), for the HCO to share address-level ENERGY STAR certification data with parties that make certification information available to the real estate marketplace (e.g., Multiple Listing Services, real estate listing websites, and other data aggregators serving the underwriting, appraisal, and/or lending communities.)

²⁵ “Major software versions” include all releases that affect the functionality specified in this section, as well as those indicated by the software developer's numbering scheme as “major,” as opposed to a “minor” or “patch” release. At least one major software version is expected per year in response to the EPA’s annual revision of the ENERGY STAR program requirements.

²⁶ In general, high-effort updates are expected to occur within 12 months and lower-effort changes sooner. The HCO is required to seek EPA approval for any timelines longer than 12 months.

To the extent that the HCO relies on third-party software systems to deliver specified functionality, the HCO is also required to provide a letter from the software developer stipulating an intent to offer their software for use in the HCO's certification program for a minimum of two years, including meeting the defined software requirements, maintaining integration with the HCO database and other applicable systems, and providing user support to the HCO's participant Raters.

7.0 Use of Designees

The HCO is permitted to delegate certain of the activities related to the implementation of its certification program to external parties, referred to as designees. Where the HCO chooses to use a designee, the HCO is required to:

- Take responsibility for all designee activities related to the implementation of its certification program;
- Exercise final authority over certification decisions and issuance of the ENERGY STAR label (Section 5.5), credentialing of Raters (Section 5.1), resolving ethics complaints, presiding over appeals, and disciplining Raters (Section 5.7);
- Have documented designee scopes of responsibility and corresponding criteria, including access to appropriately qualified individuals (e.g., quality control reviewers with an SFNH and/or MFNC credential per Section 5.1);
- Maintain a public or private list of approved designees by scope of activity, including, if applicable, an indication of whether a designee is approved for SFNH, MFNC, or both;
- Ensure that designees follow all of the HCO's policies and procedures, including those required in Sections 4.0 and 5.0;
- Have a quality assurance process by which to regularly assess and monitor the activities completed by the designees and
- Implement corrective action for any designee breach of the HCO's policies or procedures.

The HCO may not use designees for the following activities unless the designee is working under a contract or other formal agreement that places their activities under the legal responsibility of the HCO:

- Establishing policies governing ENERGY STAR certification activities outlined in Section 4.0;
- Listing credentialed Raters and maintaining the Rater headshot photo database, as outlined in section 5.1;
- Credentialing and listing quality control reviewers and delivery of training and continuing education specific to quality control functions²⁷, as outlined in Section 5.1;
- Performing direct HCO direct file review, if applicable, as outlined in Section 5.4;
- Reviewing user-confirmed error overrides, as outlined in Section 5.4;
- Coordinating with the EPA, as outlined in Section 5.9; and

²⁷ While HCOs are required to develop and deliver training content that is specific to quality control functions, it is permissible to delegate delivery of the prerequisite ENERGY STAR Rater training to a designee.

- Maintaining the central database, as outlined in Section 6.8.

The EPA reserves the right to prohibit a designee's participation in ENERGY STAR certification activities with cause.

8.0 Program Compliance

The EPA may consider an applicant's history of noncompliance with ENERGY STAR program requirements generally, including patterns of deficiencies relating to ENERGY STAR home certifications, energy ratings based on referenced national standards, or substantively similar activities. This may include consideration of another organization's compliance history where the applicant's leadership has or had a substantial affiliation or nexus to that organization during some or all of the noncompliant activity.

9.0 EPA Oversight Reviews

The EPA reserves the right to conduct periodic oversight reviews of any and all HCO activities related to the implementation of the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* as needed to ensure the value and integrity of the ENERGY STAR program. The EPA intends to review HCOs one (1) year after initial recognition and every two (2) years thereafter, with additional reviews as necessary based on performance issues that arise. The EPA may revisit the oversight review protocols and schedules as the HCO marketplace evolves. These reviews may include, but are not limited to:

- Review of HCO policies, procedures, documentation, and certification records.
- Phone interviews with HCO personnel and/or designees.
- In-person meetings with HCO personnel and/or designees at the HCO, designee, or EPA offices at the EPA's discretion.
- Site visits (including re-evaluation, at EPA's discretion) at homes and apartments that have been certified by the HCO through the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*.

HCOs are expected to fully cooperate with EPA reviews, provide requested documentation, and make personnel available for interviews and meetings with EPA staff.

If the EPA's review identifies deficiencies, the HCO will be provided with written notification and an allowance of 30 days to resolve identified issues and provide a written response to the EPA's findings. If the organization fails to submit a satisfactory response that addresses the deficiencies identified, the EPA reserves the right to suspend or withdraw the organization's recognition.

10.0 Amendments, Modifications, and Revisions

The following sections describe procedures to be followed in the event of amendments, modifications, and/or revisions initiated either by the HCO or the EPA.

10.1. EPA-Initiated Changes

The EPA reserves the right to amend, revise, or provide technical clarification regarding the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* and *ENERGY STAR Certification System* as needed to ensure the value and integrity of the ENERGY STAR program.

The EPA generally releases revisions to program documents referenced in the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol*, such as the National Program Requirements and Mandatory Measures, once per year. HCOs are required to implement changes according to the implementation timeline that the EPA publishes with each update.

For changes to the *ENERGY STAR Certification System*, organizations previously recognized by the EPA will generally be given 180 days to implement any policies or procedures needed to comply with new EPA requirements unless otherwise specified by the EPA based on consultation with HCOs. If changes affect the HCO's Application for Recognition or an applicant's referenced documents, the HCO is required to provide the EPA with a redlined copy of any updates.

10.2. Revision, Amendments, and Interpretations of Referenced Standards

HCOs are required to implement revisions, amendments, and interpretations of standards referenced in the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* within one (1) year of formal adoption by the standards developer and to publish an implementation timeline online. HCOs may request that the EPA allow for a longer implementation period when needed and on a case-by-case basis. If granted, the extended implementation timeline would be made available to all recognized HCOs.

10.3. HCO-Initiated Changes

The HCO is required to notify the EPA in writing about any proposed organizational, procedural, or policy changes, such as an addendum or interpretation to the HCO's operating standards, that materially affect its compliance with the requirements outlined in the *ENERGY STAR Certification System*. If changes affect the HCO's Application for Recognition or the applicant's referenced documents, the HCO is required to provide the EPA with a redlined copy of any updates. Notification must be made at least 60 days prior to the implementation of such changes and with sufficient time to allow the EPA to evaluate the changes and determine if the HCO will continue to meet all program requirements.

11.0 Withdrawal of Recognition

The EPA reserves the right to suspend or withdraw its recognition of an organization that no longer meets the eligibility, policy, certification, and oversight procedure requirements of the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and/or has demonstrated a pattern of actions that may negatively impact consumer and industry confidence in, or the integrity of, the EPA's ENERGY STAR program. If the HCO fails to meet its program obligations, the EPA will issue a written notice of deficiencies, providing 30 days in which the HCO must submit a corrective action plan to the EPA for approval. Failure to provide a timely or approvable plan may result in suspension or withdrawal of the organization's recognition. If the EPA determines that an HCO has significantly breached the public trust, it will instead provide a 60-day notice of recognition withdrawal with no additional consideration for corrective actions.

Should the EPA suspend or withdraw recognition of an HCO, or if an HCO determines that it will no longer implement a certification program, the organization is required to cooperate with the EPA to ensure an orderly closure of its activities and timely transfer of relevant documentation. Organizations whose recognition as an HCO is withdrawn may re-apply for recognition after a period of two years.

Application for EPA Recognition as a Home Certification Organization

Completed applications should be submitted to EPA at the physical address below or via email at energystarhomes@energystar.gov.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
ENERGY STAR New Construction Program (MC 6202A)
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20460

EPA will confirm receipt of applications received within five business days. Note that all applicants must also participate in a formal interview process with EPA staff, which will be conducted either at EPA's offices or via conference call. EPA also strongly encourages organizations considering pursuing recognition to contact ENERGY STAR to discuss their interest before applying.

PART ONE: General Applicant Information

Organization Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Contact: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Primary Contact Telephone #: _____

Organization Web Site Address: _____

Proposed Geographic Scope (select one or both): National ²⁸ California ²⁹

²⁸ HCOs operating at the national level may certify homes and apartments in all U.S. states and territories except for California, using an Energy Rating Index (ERI)-based compliance path within the applicable ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes or Multifamily New Construction "National" or regional program requirements.

²⁹ HCOs Operating in California may certify homes and apartments in California, using a dwelling unit modeling approach within the ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes or Multifamily New Construction regional California program requirements.

PART TWO: Required Documentation

Attach to this application any policies and procedures, manuals, guidance documents, attestations, detailed narrative(s), and any other documents necessary to demonstrate that your organization meets the eligibility requirements and has the capability, competencies, and proper controls to implement a certification program in accordance with the *ENERGY STAR Certification System for Homes and Apartments Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Modeling Compliance Path* and the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol for Homes and Apartments Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Modeling Compliance Path*. Complete the table below by filling in the "Applicant's Reference Document(s)" column to indicate the submitted documentation that fulfills the ENERGY STAR requirement noted at left. To facilitate application review, please record the exact file name that is used in the attachment and highlight the applicable text within the document or note its exact location in the table.

An organization with national HCO recognition seeking to extend its certification program to California needs only to complete the sections indicated as "*For California*" unless other aspects of the organization's original application are also being updated. All other organizations must complete the entire table.

ENERGY STAR Requirements for Home Certification Organization (HCO)	Applicant's Reference Document(s)
3.0 HCO Eligibility Requirements	
3.1 Legal Responsibility	
Provide documentation that the organization is a legal entity or a defined part of a legal entity.	
3.2 Independent Governance	
<p>Provide a detailed narrative of how the organization ensures that certification decisions are independent of the influence of (1) builders and developers whose homes and apartments would be certified and (2) other entities directly involved in the design or construction of the building to be certified.</p> <p>Provide a description of the organization's independent governance mechanism, such as a Board of Directors or Independent Governance Committee, and documentation of the following attributes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific responsibility for safeguarding the impartiality and integrity of the organization's certification program; • Authority to review the organization's policies, procedures, and actions; • A balanced representation of significantly interested parties, such as builders, conformity assessment experts, Raters, designees, and representatives of trade associations, such that no single interest predominates; • Access to all information necessary to fulfill its functions; • Have the right to independently inform the EPA if the organization does not follow the input of this mechanism. 	

<p>Alternatively, provide documentation of accreditation to the ISO/IEC 17065 governing standard, "<i>Conformity Assessment: Requirements for bodies certifying products, processes, and services.</i>"</p>	
3.3 Geographic Scope of Operations	
<p>Provide a detailed narrative to establish the organization's ability to implement its certification program on a national level, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a network of Raters capable of providing ENERGY STAR certifications across the U.S., as demonstrated through immediate access to such a network or via an intent, strategy, and ability to develop such a network; • Maintaining a quality assurance and oversight mechanism for Raters distributed across the U.S; and • Technical support for and competency with regional variations in architecture, engineering, mechanical design, and construction methods used throughout the U.S. <p><i>For California:</i> The network of Raters and the quality assurance mechanism that provides oversight need only be capable of providing ENERGY STAR certifications in California.</p>	
3.4 Staffing and Competency	
<p>Provide a description of sufficient available personnel and/or designees with the necessary competencies to meet all applicable requirements related to the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification System</i> and the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol</i>.</p>	

4.0 HCO Policies	
4.1 Business Code of Ethics	
Provide a business code of ethics for the organization, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used).	
4.2 Impartiality and Objectivity	
<p>Provide conflict of interest (COI) policies used to maintain the impartiality of the organization, its Raters, and its designees (if used). The COI policy is required to address COI that pertains to the individuals and organizations involved in verification and certification, include disclosure of existing or potential conflicts of interest and steps to resolve the conflict, and outline the frequency of review of the COI policies and when disclosures are updated.</p> <p>In addition to any other conflicts identified, these policies are required to address, at a minimum, the following conflicts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts between the organization and its builder clients; • Conflicts between individuals involved in the certification process and other entities involved in the design or construction of the home to be certified; • Conflicts between Raters, individuals performing quality assurance activities, and/or individuals making certification decisions. <p>Provide the organizational chart and management system to demonstrate impartiality in the decision-making and the separation of roles between certification decisions and any business activities that may present a conflict of interest, if any. Certification decisions must be carried out by</p>	

individuals who have not been involved in the evaluation process (i.e., Raters).	
4.3 Non-Discrimination	
Provide non-discrimination policies covering the organization, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used).	
4.4 Open Access	
Provide open-access policies for the organization, its participant Raters, and its designees (if used), making its certification program accessible to all eligible ENERGY STAR builder and developer partners and specifying that access may not be conditional upon the size of the ENERGY STAR builder or developer partner, nor membership in any association or group.	
4.5 Data Privacy	
<p>Provide data privacy policies for the usage, storage, and transmission of data and photos related to verification of ENERGY STAR-specific program requirements, including, at a minimum, the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicable data and photos are permitted to be shared and used for the exclusive purpose of activities required by the ENERGY STAR Certification System. • All parties may retain or destroy documentation data following the minimum data retention period of three years. • An Energy Rating Company may retain or destroy its photos following the minimum photo retention period of two years unless otherwise specified by agreement with a dwelling unit's builder/developer. • Applicable photos stored by the organization, its designees, and any other 	

<p>intermediate custodians are required to be destroyed following the minimum photo retention period of two years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptions to the above rules, including sharing data/photos with other parties, are only permitted at the direction of the organization or the EPA or with the express written authorization of both the Energy Rating Company that captured the data/photos and the builder/developer of the originating dwelling unit. 	
<p>4.6 Public Availability of HCO Policies</p>	
<p>Provide a draft of a public webpage that describes the proposed certification program and the organization's policies and procedures for granting and withdrawing certification, including all listed elements.</p>	
<p>5.0 Certification and Oversight Procedures</p>	
<p>5.1 Training and Credentialing of Raters and Quality Control Reviewers</p>	
<p>Provide policies and procedures or a description for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The development of training and examination programs for Raters and quality control reviewers with all required elements; • The development of an annual continuing education program for Raters and quality control reviewers, including a requalification procedure; • Training syllabus for training and continuing education; • Credentialing process with all required elements; • Maintenance of a public or private list of credentialed raters that is updated regularly; 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of a database of Rater headshot photos; and • A process to ensure that individuals contributing to ENERGY STAR certifications hold an appropriate credential for the tasks performed. 	
5.2 Verification Protocol	
<p>Provide the verification protocol, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All verification requirements specified in the ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol and referenced standards; and • Collection of specified on-site photos at each inspection. 	
5.3 Sampling Protocol	
<p>If a sampling protocol is proposed, provide the sampling protocol to include, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting of worst-case energy modeling files; • Requiring that dwelling units participating in sampling be within the same building, be the same construction type, and include the same envelope systems; • Requiring successful inspection on a qualification set of at least the first seven consecutive instances of a sampled measure before applying sampling to that measure; • Ensuring that verification occurs on a representative sample of dwelling units ready within a 30-calendar day period at a rate of no less than one-in-seven (or 15 percent); • Providing for corrective actions to address failures identified during sampling, including, at a minimum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Correction of any failed measures in the dwelling unit where it was discovered, 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Additional evaluation of measures in a minimum of two (2) additional homes or apartments, and ○ After multiple additional failures, requalification through evaluation of measures in at least three (3) additional dwelling units and/or documentation of a root cause analysis. 	
--	--

5.4 Quality Control Protocols

<p>Provide policies and procedures and/or documentation describing the quality control systems and procedures in place to include, at a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collection of a complete rating file prior to quality control review; ● HCO personnel direct review of any user-confirmed overrides of validation errors; ● Quality control file review on at least 10% of ENERGY STAR certified dwelling units that includes all required features; ● If the above step is assigned to a designee, the performance of an additional HCO direct file review by HCO personnel that includes all required features; ● An HCO-developed file review checklist covering the referenced national standards; ● For each Rater, the performance of annual field evaluation(s) at the specified frequency and scope; ● A set of repeatable standards for assessing whether discrepancies found during quality assurance file reviews and field inspections are within allowable thresholds. 	
--	--

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provisions for addressing discovered deficiencies and addressing the root cause(s); and • Provisions for corrective actions in the event of recurring deficiencies related to a particular Rater. <p>If applicable, provide a detailed description of any proposed alternative schemes with evidence and data demonstrating equivalency in meeting the intent of the applicable requirements.</p>	
5.5 Issuance of ENERGY STAR Labels and Certificates	
<p>Provide attestation that the organization maintains final authority over all ENERGY STAR certifications and takes responsibility for determining that certified homes and apartments conform with the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol</i>.</p> <p>Provide policies and procedures in place to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ENERGY STAR label and certificate are created directly by the HCO or printed through an approved energy modeling tool; • Raters and designees do not print (physically or digitally) the ENERGY STAR label or certificate through any other method than specified above; and • Raters provide the ENERGY STAR builder or developer partner with an ENERGY STAR certificate for each certified home or apartment. 	
5.6 Certification Recall Procedure	
<p>Provide policies and procedures or a description for the recall of certification following the discovery of unresolvable deficiencies during routine quality control review, including:</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A standardized notice being sent to the builder, with the HCO retaining a copy; • Removal of the home's certification from the HCO database and public address lookup tool. <p>Also, provide an attestation that the organization will consult the EPA regarding potential decertification(s) stemming from sources other than routine quality control review, including homeowner certification review requests and ethics compliance investigations.</p>	
5.7 Ethics Compliance and Homeowner Inquiry Resolution	
<p>Provide policies and procedures and/or a detailed narrative documenting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ethics complaint process for the organization, its Raters, and designees; • Procedures for disciplining Raters, including provisions for appeal; • Attestation that the organization will inform EPA when disciplinary action is taken; and • A resolution process for homeowner inquiries, including the web page that allows homeowners to submit inquiries or concerns regarding the ENERGY STAR certification of their home or apartment. 	
5.8 Recordkeeping, Reporting, and Disclosure	
<p>Provide policies and procedures and/or a detailed narrative to demonstrate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data retention for a minimum of three (3) years, with an exception for program-required photos, which are to be destroyed after two (2) years; • Attestation that the organization will report to the EPA within 30 days of any designee approvals or suspensions; • Attestation that the organization will report to the EPA within 30 days of any 	

<p>disciplinary action taken, including any suspensions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attestation that the organization will provide EPA with aggregate/summary information about the energy-efficiency features used in homes and apartments certified through the organization's certification program upon request. • Annual internal management review and attestation that the organization will provide the EPA with an annual report regarding the organization's administration of its certification program. 	
5.9 Coordination with EPA	
<p>Provide attestation that the organization will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain open lines of communication with EPA to address questions and concerns promptly. • Participate in meetings upon request by EPA. • Work collaboratively with EPA to facilitate the comprehensive and coordinated investigation and response to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Findings resulting from routine quality assurance activities; ○ Certification discrepancies, including those referred to the organization by EPA; and ○ Certification Review Requests and other inquiries from homeowners. 	

6.0 Software and Database Systems

6.1 System Integration

Provide an overview (e.g., a "system map") of the set of software and database systems that will be used to provide the required functionality, as well as:

- A detailed description of system integrations; and
- A flowchart and description of the Rater and quality control reviewer workflows related to the use of software systems.

6.2 Data Collection and Aggregation

For each listed data point, provide a detailed description of how the data point will be collected and associated with each dwelling unit, including how relevant data sources will be cross-referenced to ensure consistency across user interfaces:

- Physical address;
- Certification date;
- ENERGY STAR program, Version and Revision Number;
- The builder and energy rating companies, as identified by their "Organization ID;"
- The Raters contributing to each certification, including the Rater of Record and the individuals performing on-site inspections, cross-referenced against the database of credentialed Raters;
- The quality control reviewers evaluating each certification cross-referenced against the database of credentialed quality control reviewers;
- The energy modeling file, ERI score, ENERGY STAR ERI Target, all minimum rated features as defined in referenced standards, and the software version number;

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>For California:</i> Rather than ERI metrics, the Efficiency Energy Design Ratio (EDR) and/or Compliance Margin delta, as applicable; ● The ENERGY STAR Rater Design Review checklist and HVAC design documentation; ● The on-site inspections, with an association made to the inspecting Rater, applicable ENERGY STAR Rater Field Checklist, and collected on-site photos; ● If a sampling protocol is used, the worst-case energy model, sampled status, and inspection record; and ● For ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction, a building-level association to facilitate MFNC's whole-building logic, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A single building-level address, in addition to dwelling unit IDs; ○ Building-level photos of common spaces and central systems, as applicable; and ○ Building-level documentation, such as the Multifamily Workbook. 	
---	--

6.3 Approved Energy Modeling Tools

<p>Provide a list of proposed energy modeling tools and login credentials for EPA testing.</p> <p>Provide evidence that proposed energy modeling tools are approved through one of the following pathways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● DOE validation of proper functioning of software that is built using the EnergyPlus engine and the NREL-developed ruleset for calculating ERIs or; ● Approval by the RESNET Accreditation Committee in accordance with the most current version of RESNET Publication 002. 	
--	--

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>For California:</i> Provide evidence that (rather than the above pathways) software is approved by the California Energy Commission (CEC) in accordance with the applicable version of California's Building Energy Efficiency Standards. <p>Provide evidence that the energy modeling tools also include all other required functions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A user interface that permits user input and review of all applicable data points; • Calculation of the ENERGY STAR ERI Target; • Automatic warning and errors for the standardized list of validations; • Ability to submit confirmed ratings to the HCO database; • Ability to receive error and confirmation notices from the HCO database and present appropriate notices to users; and • All other applicable requirements of the ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements. 	
6.4 On-Site Photo and Test Result Collection System	
<p>Provide a list of proposed on-site photo and test result collection systems and login credentials for EPA testing.</p> <p>Provide a detailed description of the tool or set of tools that permit user upload and review of all mandatory on-site photos and test results, including, as applicable, timestamp and geo-tag metadata.</p>	
6.5 Program Documentation Collection System	
<p>Provide a list of program documentation collection systems and login credentials for EPA testing.</p>	

<p>Provide a detailed description of the tool or set of tools and evidence of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Input and review of the mandatory ENERGY STAR checklists in an itemized machine-readable format; and • Upload and review of the mandatory HVAC design documents in a digital format, such as PDF or scanned image. <p>Indicate whether the documentation collection system will use the reference data schema or a proprietary data schema.</p>	
--	--

6.6 Quality Control Workflow Functionality

<p>Provide a detailed description of the system(s) that will support the quality control workflow and evidence of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to submit rating files to the HCO database prior to quality control review selection; • Automatic flagging of user-confirmed error overrides for review by HCO personnel; • Random selection of dwelling units for quality control file review by the HCO database at specified rates, as drawn from the pool of submissions pursuing ENERGY STAR certification; • If applicable, random selection of dwelling units for HCO direct file review by the HCO database at specified rates and distribution between previously reviewed and unreviewed submissions; • A notification system to indicate when dwelling units are selected for review, as well as when the review is complete; and • A "holding bin" that isolates selected submissions until the quality control review is complete. 	
--	--

6.7 ENERGY STAR Label and Certificate Printing System	
<p>Indicate whether ENERGY STAR label and certificate printing will be performed directly by the HCO or included in the approved energy modeling tools.</p> <p>Provide a detailed description of the system to print a digital ENERGY STAR label and certificate and evidence of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the latest graphic templates and guidance provided by the EPA; and • Integration to prevent printing of the ENERGY STAR label or certificate until the HCO database transmits a confirmation of final certification. 	
6.8 HCO Database	
<p>Provide a detailed description of the HCO database and evidence of the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data exchange protocols to aggregate submissions from all applicable sources; • Logging of a final record for each certified dwelling unit, including all specified data points specified; • Rater and quality control reviewer credential records; • Tracking of quality control file review and field evaluation records; • Retention of records according to the specified minimum durations; • Destruction of photos following the two-year photo retention period; • Assignment and notification of final certification; • Logic to make certification contingent on a final validation check as defined in the ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements, review of user-confirmed error overrides, and completion of 	

<p>assigned Phase 1 quality control file review and/or Phase 1 HCO direct review, as applicable;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmittal of nightly certification reports to the EPA via the HOST API; • A public certification search interface that, at a minimum, accepts queries by physical address and reports the home or apartment's ENERGY STAR certification status; and • All other applicable requirements of the <i>ENERGY STAR Software and Database Requirements</i>. <p>Provide attestation that the organization will continuously maintain its central database with respect to all requirements and that it will coordinate as needed to resolve reporting errors involving the HOST API.</p>	
--	--

6.9 Approval of Software and Systems

<p>Provide a detailed description of policies and protocols that the organization will use to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verify that systems comply with these requirements as applicable to the functions assigned to those systems; • Verify compliance of energy modeling tools, specifically, by collecting and reviewing a copy of the <i>ENERGY STAR Software Approval Form</i> filled out by the software developer; • Re-review major software/system versions for compliance with these requirements and approve software for use on a version-specific basis; • Ensure that software/systems are updated by developers and reviewed by the organization promptly when factors such 	
---	--

<p>as program revisions or the HCO database schema necessitate changes; and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure current versions of software rating tools are used for ENERGY STAR certifications, with a transition period of no longer than six (6) months following new software version releases, as determined by a dwelling unit's permit date. <p>Provide a draft website that lists software/systems approved for use in its certification program, with all specified information.</p> <p>For any third-party software systems that will deliver specified functionality, provide a letter from the software developer stipulating an intent to offer the software for use in the organization's certification program for a minimum of two years, including meeting the defined software requirements, maintaining integration with the HCO database and other applicable systems, and providing user support to the HCO's participant Raters.</p>	
<p>7.0 Use of Designees</p>	
<p>Provide a detailed description of activities that the organization plans to delegate to designees.</p> <p>Where an organization chooses to use designees, provide an attestation that the organization takes responsibility for all activities of designees related to the implementation of its certification program. In addition, provide policies and procedures and/or a detailed narrative to demonstrate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documented qualification criteria for designees; 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of a public or private list of approved designees and their approved scope of activity; • Description of how the organization will ensure that designees follow all of the organization's policies and procedures; • A quality assurance process by which to regularly assess and monitor the activities completed by the designees; and • Description of how the organization will implement corrective actions for any breaches of the organization's policies or procedures. 	
10.0 Amendments, Modifications, and Revisions	
<p>Provide a narrative detailing the organization's implementation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPA-initiated amendments, revisions, or technical clarification regarding the <i>ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol</i>, such as new revisions of the National Program Requirements and Mandatory Measures documents; and • Revisions, amendments, and interpretations of standards referenced in <i>the ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol</i> within one (1) year of formal adoption by the standards developer and publishing of an implementation timeline online. <p>Provide attestation that, if needed, the organization will request EPA's permission for any extended implementation timelines (beyond one year).</p>	

PART THREE: Declaration

As an officer of _____, I, the undersigned, represent here that I have the authority to serve as an authorized signatory and submit this Application for Recognition as a Home Certification Organization to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. I understand that intentionally submitting false information to the U.S. government is a criminal violation of the False Statements Act, Title 18 U.S.C. section 1001.

The organization, _____, agrees to adhere to the provisions for Home Certification Organizations (HCOs) outlined in the *ENERGY STAR Certification System for Homes and Apartments Using an Energy Rating Index or Dwelling Unit Modeling Compliance Path*, including granting EPA the right, at its discretion, to conduct periodic audits of any and all HCO activities related its certification program.

_____ also agrees to notify the EPA in writing about any proposed organizational, procedural, or policy changes that materially affect its compliance with the requirements outlined in the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* at least 60 days prior to the implementation and, if applicable, provide an updated Application for Recognition.

_____ understands that the EPA may amend, revise, or provide technical clarification regarding the *ENERGY STAR Certification Protocol* to be implemented according to the implementation timeline exhibit published with each update.

_____ understands that the EPA may amend, revise, or provide technical clarification regarding the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and that organizations that have been previously recognized by EPA will generally be given at least 180 days to implement any new policies or procedures needed to comply with EPA requirements, although the EPA reserves the right to specify a shorter or longer timeline based on consultation with HCOs.

In addition, _____ understands that if, after recognition, the EPA determines that an HCO no longer meets the requirements of the *ENERGY STAR Certification System* and/or has demonstrated a pattern of actions that may negatively impact consumer and industry confidence in or the integrity of the EPA's ENERGY STAR program, the EPA will provide the HCO with written notification and allow 30 days to submit a corrective action plan for approval and that

failure to provide a timely or approvable plan may result in suspension or withdrawal of the organization's recognition.

In addition, _____ understands that if, after recognition, the EPA determines that an HCO has significantly breached the public trust, it will instead provide a 60-day notice of recognition withdrawal with no additional consideration for corrective actions.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Title: _____

Organization: _____

Date: _____