

HCV Best Practices: Strategies to Align the Use of Vouchers with Community Needs

Supplemental Q&A

1. How do you balance your work with the prison parole? And I'm assuming that's departments when it comes to criminal background checks?
 - a. **Panelist response:** I mean, I don't think we operate any differently for folks that are being referred to the Offender Re-Entry Program. Like I said, we have access to the DOC's offender management systems, so we can see the charges that they have and their history there. And then we just run the criminal background checks like we would for anyone else. I would say that we're more likely to overturn an appeal for someone who is connected with the Offender Re-Entry Housing Program, or we may go into it without, knowing that there's a plan and supports in place; we might not deny someone who we normally would, based on a criminal background check.
 - b. **Panelist response:** From the perspective of a landlord: lots of landlords have screening that say if you have a criminal background or your credit score is below whatever, then they're not going to rent to you. One thing we developed was our landlord risk pool. So, landlords who are hesitant and are like, "Oh gee, this is more of a risk than just taking anybody else." You say, "All right, here's what we can do. We can give you up to one month's rent on top of the security deposit just in case. This covers old rent or damages when the person leaves. If they can provide us with information showing us how much is owed, we can pay that to them so that we can keep that relationship strong and so that they're not left holding the bag."
2. How many staff members do you (BHA) have that work with participants in the program? And how many participants do you have?
 - a. **Panelist response:** We have three staff members that work with participants. But also, we have a whole team of service and support at BHA for our properties. So, we've got the three members who can help people when they're in scattered sites. And then once a person is housed in our properties, they have access to programming. They have access to onsite services; we have community events; there's a lot of staff available. We're slotted to serve 61 people and there are three FTEs to do the work.
3. Do you work with the families of prisoners to unite them in housing?
 - a. **Panelist response:** So in that instance, the person would likely not work with our program. If a person has an option to come out, whether that's with family or maybe a partner of theirs, they typically don't come to our program. Our



program is really reserved for people who just have no other options and would either remain homeless or remain incarcerated for lack of housing.

4. You mentioned that you provide onsite case management services and said it's always available, are you saying that case management onsite services is 24/7?
 - a. **Panelist response:** So if we're not available, we also have a call center that people can call into and then can also be directed to our designated agency, which also has a 1-800 number to call for the person being in crisis. So, it'll typically be after hours, a call center, and then we would follow up the next day.

5. Is the landlord trust fund to pay for damages, etc.?
 - a. **Panelist response:** Yes. So, damages, back rents, back utilities if they never got switched over into the participant's name. It could be any of those things.

6. What is the funding source used for that (landlord trust fund)?
 - a. **Panelist response:** Department of Corrections.

7. So is the Department of Corrections funding all of the programming, all of the supportive services programming then?
 - a. **Panelist response:** All of the DOC supportive services programming.

8. Did you (BHA) have to update your administrative plan for this program?
 - a. **Panelist response:** No, because not everyone is receiving a Housing Choice Voucher. And the folks that do often are eligible for the mainstream preference that probably a lot of folks are familiar with that gives priority to folks who are exiting institutions or at risk of homelessness.

9. Where do the funds that are given when the landlord is leery about renting to someone come from?
 - a. **Panelist response:** That's also the Department of Corrections. It's an industry standard to have some sort of safety net for something to go wrong. They see that; they understand that. And also, they fund that risk pool of money, but they also fund tenant participation funds, which is essentially if we need to have a barbecue for a resident meeting, if a person needs something that other funding can't purchase; like you can get funding for backgrounds in the community; you can get funding for back utilities in the community, And if you have a cat who you love but you can't afford to get a litter box, we'll get you a litter box.



10. If a housing authority is interested in trying to develop this type of program, where would you recommend, they turn to first to start having conversations about how to develop this type of program for their agency?
 - a. **Panelist response:** Call us (Crystal Jones and Liz Whitmore at BHA). Honestly, we got this program going on and then, we actually have a handful of other programs that are similar—similarly designed—but focus on a different population. We’ve both been doing this for quite a while and gotten a few things off the ground. So yeah, hit us up if you have questions or just want a consult on what could be next for you.

11. Do applicants coming into this type of program (CMHA) receive a preference on the waiting list?
 - a. **Panelist response:** Yes, they do. Basically, they bypass our waiting list, and they get preference points that allow them to supersede all the other program applicants based off the weighted average of the preference.

12. Under CMHA., where do the funds come from to pay for the different things? I think that's in relation to the security deposits, vacancy payments, housing search assistance.
 - a. **Panelist response:** So, we allocated a million and a half of our CARES Act dollars last year to these programs. The contracting services to housing search; that comes out of CMHA’s central office cost center.

13. Have you (CMHA) seen a benefit in using a housing search firm to house residents?
 - a. **Panelist response:** I can tell you we have 1,400 vouchers on the street actively looking for places to live. RH Brown and Co. has a network of owners and landlords they are working with outside of Affordablehousing.com that want our clients. It's just getting them in there and having the right payment standard. You have a lot of competition to get into some of these homes. Some places are getting 10–20 applications for one unit. So, making sure our clients stand out a little bit was our goal and by offering basically anywhere from \$1000 to \$1,500 to help them stand out a little bit more than some of the participants in other programs in the community.

14. I assume the housing market there in Columbus is pretty hot right now like most of the rest of the country at this time?
 - a. **Panelist response:** So at one point this summer, we were the hottest in the country. It started to slow down, but nowhere near where you would think it would need to be for us to be able to house 1,400 vouchers. We are always looking for landlords. Any of the innovative programs that we can try and do on our side, we want to do, because we want to get as many people housed as we can. We have a cap of 14,759 vouchers that we can have. We want to house 14,000 families.



15. How is RH Brown and Company paid? Is it on a per voucher place basis?

- a. **Panelist response:** So it's a tiered structure, actually. So, we have participants who we are issuing vouchers to, who we know will not be able to find housing. Mrs. Brown—her team—they're going to work with them start to finish. They're going to try and get them in every single place that they have a chance to get into. When their voucher is up if they have been unsuccessful, we have a flat fee for her being unsuccessful and getting them into a unit. For everyone she gets in a unit, there is also another flat fee that is obviously higher that we pay her for that housing assistance search. And I can tell you, she's been successful. I believe she's got 150 people so far leased up into units, which I think is great especially knowing that she really didn't start on this program with us until the beginning of the summer. We're very, very pleased with her progress on that. And I would look forward to her showing what else she can do in our community for the many different communities we have.

16. How many employees make up your (CMHA's) HCV department?

- a. **Panelist response:** We currently operate with 63 Housing Choice Voucher employees. That does include our FSS and our home ownership team. We are down from where we normally operate around 75. We're hoping that as the year continues, we're able to pick up that additional staff and get back to full capacity.

17. How many HCV vouchers does CMHA have?

- a. **Panelist response:** Active, we are paying on 12,597. We have about 200 that are on hold as we process ownership changes. We wanted to make sure we weren't paying the old owner. And then, we have 1,400 actual vouchers, HCV vouchers on the street in varying degrees of time. Obviously, we have the ability to extend vouchers, and we have some families who are in those extension periods as well.

18. Could you tell us a little bit more about the RISE EnVision Center?

- a. **Panelist response:** I absolutely can. I will not do as good a job as our vice president Sonja Nelson, who is over the RISE Center and our Resident Initiatives team. If you want to know what passion about our residents looks like that is that program. If we have a client who is in need, the team at the EnVision are doing everything possible to service them. One of the things that they are working on now is getting the actual nonprofit status associated with them, so they can actually earn 501 (c) designation. So, they can actually receive these donations; they can actually start a scholarship program and things like that, because we see all of these opportunities to better our clients. The more we put into our vehicle the better we'll all ultimately be. We have done everything that we can do, at least that we've thought of, during the pandemic to assist our clients. We have done the food drives, the delivery of hand sanitizers. Anything that our clients needed during the pandemic, we



made sure they had, and that was all done through Resident Initiatives in the RISE Center. Those clients that were facing eviction for non-payment of rent, again, we partnered with Impact the local (Emergency Rental Assistance Program). That was all done through Resident Initiatives and the RISE Center. They advocated on the tenants' behalf and our residents' behalf to get CMHA to put up additional funds to cover emergency rental assistance for our clients, separate from what was given by the government to Impact to do that same rental assistance. Our RISE Center is an advocate at the end of the day. And a lot of our clients don't realize they have this advocate. So, we are working actively to make sure they all know this service is there for them. We have flyers that we hand out regularly. We are in the community. We just had a major press event here at the housing authority, because we opened a client center that houses our Resident Initiatives team. So, our clients can go there now versus having to take a phone call or trying to do something else.

19. Is the search assistance person someone from the community or a grant position or employed by the agency?

a. **Panelist response:** So, it's a contract position. We put out an RFP, the company RH Brown and Co. They have won this RFP; they have also done all of our RAD relocations. Whenever we have done a disposition of a property, she (Mrs. Brown) and her team has worked with those families to get them rehoused as well. She is local to central Ohio, but she has worked all across Ohio. We know she's done relocation services down in Cincinnati. She was also a former HUD employee. So, she has a strong understanding of URA Rules and helped keep us on our toes a lot because she is so familiar with the rules and regulations associated with relocating and housing.

20. What documents do you (HACA) require from your CoC to show the client is eligible for the emergency housing voucher in the four different groups?

a. **Panelist response:** We have established a referral form that they provide, that they have to complete. And, they have to certify that the individual referred is eligible for the voucher.

21. It sounded like you allow for rapid rehousing participants to utilize a voucher at the completion of their rapid rehousing period. When that happens, do you require those residents to move or are they able to lease in place?

a. **Panelist response:** We have staff at ECHO that work with the residents, and hopefully we can allow them to stay in place. Austin's market is really hot as well and very competitive. So sometimes a property owner may choose to refuse a voucher. And in that case, we would help support that client to find a new place to live.

22. Is there any source of income discrimination law there (Austin, Texas)?



- a. **Panelist response:** No. In Austin, Texas, we are not allowed in the state of Texas to have a source of income law, which is one of the reasons that the owners could refuse the voucher if they chose to.
- 23.** How do VASH vouchers work for the homeless? Is VASH different than the vouchers you're using for your permanent supportive housing or through your regular Housing Choice Voucher Program?
- a. **Panelist response:** The VASH vouchers are separate, because we have a separate allocation, and then, we receive direct referrals from the VA for homeless veterans that are eligible for those vouchers.
- 24.** Can you share your landlord incentives that you use to increase unit availability?
- a. **Panelist response:** Honestly, it's easier to get it from our website. CMHAnet.com. Once you get on the website, there's a tab that says Landlord Incentives. Simply click on it. It'll give you the flyer that we pushed out that has RH Brown and Co.'s contact information on there as well as the ins and outs of how we're doing this. I think the one caveat to Columbus's landlord incentives is that these incentives are only applicable if you are bringing a vacant unit onto our program. A leasing-in-place unit would not qualify for the security deposit or vacancy payments.
- 25.** How do the presenting PHAs determine what community needs are to be addressed? For example, do you survey the community? How do you go about determining what the community needs are?
- a. **Panelist response:** I would say for Columbus, we get a lot of phone calls from our participants, our stakeholders, letters, things like that, letting us know the issues in the community. In addition to that, many of our staff here are on local boards that have dealings that affect the community. So, we are hearing about things from many different angles. And as a result, we are able to be actionable on things that we may not have been able to be actionable on had we not been in the rooms to have the discussion.
- b. **Panelist response:** I would reiterate that for us here in Burlington. Our University Medical Center also does a needs assessment of the community. They have a foundation that has some grant funding dollars and I want to say, biannually, and it is a survey that goes out to all of Chittenden County and then shows key priority areas as identified by the community.
- 26.** What CMHA funds are used for landlord incentives? Is it HCV admin fees, reserves, unprotected net position, central office cost center funds, or other funds?
- a. **Panelist response:** We use CARES Act dollars for the landlord incentives, the security deposit assistance, vacancy payment assistance, and homebuyer education. For RH Brown and Co. and Affordablehousing.com, those are paid out of central office cost center funds.



27. Did you use HUD waivers? And how do you plan to follow up with clients who were allowed to participate in the emergency housing vouchers?

- a. **Panelist response:** Yes, we absolutely have used the waivers. I instructed my team as we are receiving these referrals over from CSB to take advantage of waivers to the fullest extent. We want to change how quickly we are doing this. Because we need less documentation to actually issue a voucher, we should be able to take the self-certifications as soon as we get you and be able to turn around a voucher. My challenge to the team is to turn vouchers around to the emergency housing vouchers 48 to 72 hours after we received the referral. We have allocated our team members to it. It is just getting everybody on board with doing things the way we need them to. We've set up all of our systems to work this way and now it's just now getting everybody on board.

