



SUPPORTING HOUSEHOLDS THROUGH THE HOUSING SEARCH PROCESS

Housing search assistance is required under the Emergency Housing Voucher Program. Staff providing housing search assistance to EHV holders should be prepared to support households in their housing search experience, including how to assess and respond to housing barriers, how to prepare households for the process, and support in finding units suitable to the households needs.

Housing Search Models to Consider

For public housing authorities providing housing search assistance for the first time or collaborating with other organizations to provide support, there are two common staffing models to consider. While it is ideal to have specialized roles, some programs utilize a single role model to carry out the housing search function.

Specialized Roles

In a staffing model with specialized roles, the role of supporting the household in the housing search process is separate from the role of identifying units and engaging with landlords. Staff in each role have a specialized expertise. For example, staff supporting households could be peer supports with lived experience of homelessness while staff identifying units may have real estate experience.

Single Role

In a single role staffing model, staff carry out both functions of the housing search process: landlord engagement and unit identification and supporting the household in the housing search process.

Assessing and Responding to Housing Barriers

It is important to consider how a household's tenant screening barriers and housing retention barriers impact their ability to obtain and maintain housing using their voucher.

Tenant Screening Barriers

Tenant screening barriers refer to the household's obstacles in *obtaining* housing. It is important to assess a household's tenant screening barriers to understand what a property owner may find in the tenant selection process and support the household in mitigating these barriers. Common tenant screening barriers include poor credit, criminal background, eviction histories, and lack of landlord references, which can be identified by running tenant screening reports and conversations with the household.

Housing Retention Barriers

Housing retention barriers are the patterns in the household's housing history that if continued could jeopardize their housing stability. This includes lease violations, untimely or neglected rent payments, property damage, and conflict with roommates, neighbors, or the property owner.



Acknowledging the Impacts of Trauma

While it is important to learn about the barriers the household may encounter in the housing search process, it is important to understand these conversations may resurface trauma related to past housing experiences, including racial discrimination, evictions, financial hardships, and criminal backgrounds. Staff should ensure households feel safe disclosing this information and supported throughout the housing search process by using a trauma-informed approach and respecting the household's boundaries.

Preparing the Household for Housing Search

Housing search staff should develop individualized housing search plans with their households to clarify roles and responsibilities, agree upon the types and intensity of support for the household, and track progress towards housing. While some households may only need light-touch services, others may need more intensive support to secure housing, including support in using technology, finding units, facilitating landlord conversations, and coordinating the lease-up process.

Communicating with Landlords

Housing search assistance may include coaching households on how to communicate with landlords. Staff can provide support in communicating with landlords by:

- Providing materials or talking points about the program to households participating in their own housing search
- Offering tips like maintaining eye contact and shaking hands
- Preparing responses if asked about tenant screening barriers

Housing Search Tips

Other practical tips that can be shared with households searching for housing include:

- Sign-up to receive immediate notifications on new listings on housing search sites and apps like Zillow, Trulia, Hotpads, etc.
- Track all the units you have contacted and follow up when you do not receive a response
- Prepare a standard rental application to provide landlords or use as a reference for completing other rental applications
- Submit rental applications before a viewing, when possible
- Prepare mitigating documentation before your search to reduce concerns about tenant screening barriers (e.g. character reference letters, explanation of tenant supports you'll be receiving, etc.)

Managing Expectations

With many housing markets returning to their pre-pandemic norms and communities continuing to experience a lack of affordable housing, it may be difficult to identify suitable units. Households should know what to expect from the housing market, including typical rent prices and how quickly the market moves. Given the limitations



of the housing market, staff should facilitate conversations about next step housing vs. ideal housing to delineate what type of housing they are willing to accept to end their housing crisis and what housing goals they can work towards in the long-term. Having this information will help households make their own informed decisions about housing preferences and what supports they will need throughout the process.

Finding Units

If staff are also conducting housing identification for the household, there are several methods of recruiting landlords and finding new units:

- Staff should first and foremost participate in any system-level approaches in the CoC and community
- Outreach to existing landlord contacts and continuing to build your partnerships
- Cold call in response to listings on housing search sites (Zillow, Trulia, Hotpads, Rent.com, Apartments.com, etc.)
- Network with groups like landlord associations, neighborhood associations, Chamber of Commerce, etc.
- Identify the affordable housing opportunities in your community that have preferences related to the EHV population
- Leverage incentives and utilize marketing

Additionally, there may be housing search efforts that can be leveraged through existing resources such as housing navigation in CoC or ESG programs, shelters, and outreach teams. There may also be legal services and funds that can help reduce tenant screening barriers like criminal background and rental or utility arrears. It is important to ensure that households can access services to help them maintain their new home, as needed.