

JENNA All right. Welcome, everyone. We'll give it a couple minutes before we get started, allow people to get connected to audio. All right. Welcome, everyone. We'll give it another minute. OK, it looks like we still have quite a few people joining. Welcome, everyone.

All right. I think we can go ahead and get started. I think we have some people still connecting to audio. But welcome, everyone. This is the Emergency Housing Vouchers webinar.

We've been doing a four-part series on landlord engagement. In that series, in the first three sessions we polled what topic folks wanted to hear more about, and that was supporting households through the housing search process, so that is what our topic for today's webinar is. So let's go ahead and get started.

So the session is being recorded. Just be mindful of that. The recording will be shared on the EHV site. You may have seen the recordings and materials from the previous three sessions posted recently, so take a look at those if you're not able to join.

Everyone's muted upon entering. If you're having trouble connecting at all to the computer audio, you can also call in, and the number is there. I think we have some folks putting that in the chat as well.

We also have our Q&A box so you can submit questions. And we'll make sure to answer those before we leave the session today. And we'll also have the chat function, which folks are already using, which is great.

So you can use that chat feature. There'll be some points where I may ask you to share specific thoughts or experiences on your EHV implementation in your own community so that others can hear and share with each other. So just know that that is possible as well. We'll also be sharing some resources in the chat, so just be checking that before you hop off the session. All right.

So like I mentioned, we had three other sessions prior to this session, all focused on landlord engagement. The first was system-level approaches to landlord recruitment. Landlord financial incentives after that. One session on marketing, outreach, and retention strategies. And then today's session, which was a topic chosen by you all, is supporting households through the housing search process.

So we're going to talk about finding units a little bit and talk about landlord engagement a little bit, but really focus on what support housing search staff can offer to households who have EHV's in the process. All right.

So like I mentioned, the topic for today is really focusing on that supporting role. What services and support can be offered to households that have EHV's and are going through the housing search, housing identification process right now?

So in today's session, I really hope that you leave the session understanding how to assess and respond to housing preferences and barriers. We're going to discuss how to prepare the household for undergoing the housing search process, some really practical ways and practical tips to offer households, and also to learn ways to find units and leverage those existing resources in the community that may be able to support the housing search process. All right. Let's jump in.

So before we get into discussing the practical ways to support households in their housing search, let's talk through some of the models you may see for staffing the housing search assistance that is required to be provided in the EHV program. So some housing authorities may be keeping this service in-house and hire or shift staff internally to do that function, but others may have contracted this function out to a CoC or a specific provider.

So whether that role is kept in-house or contracted out, two housing search models that we typically see are having specialized roles or having a single role to carry out the function of housing search. So in specialized roles, I would say that's most ideal for housing search. And in that model there is staff that engage landlords and facilitate the lease-up process. And those staff may have experience in real estate and really understand the landlord's perspective, and other staff would be dedicated to supporting households in the housing search process. So those staff could be peers with lived expertise or advocates with experience working with the homeless population.

So on the one hand, you have the landlord customer service role. And then on the other hand, you have someone really serving the voucher holder. So today we're going to focus on more of that support role, but we'll also touch on finding units for those that have a single role model, meaning they carry both the function of identifying units and engaging landlords, facilitating the lease-up process, and supporting the household with the voucher.

So again, really focusing on that support role today, but we'll touch on finding units as well. If you are someone in the role of carrying more of that specialized function of landlord engagement, really encourage you to go back and look at the recordings of some of the other webinars in this series.

OK. Let's jump in. So first, we're going to talk about how to assess and respond to housing barriers and housing preferences, and then we'll get into more of that supporting role as well.

So when I talk about housing barriers, there are really two types of barriers I'm referring to. So first is tenant screening barriers and then also housing retention barriers. So tenant screening barriers are those barriers to obtaining housing. So what is making it more difficult for a household to obtain housing?

And I know that many of you are really familiar with these tenant screening barriers, so I'm going to ask you to go ahead and put some in the chat if you can think of any. So what are barriers to obtaining housing that you may see a household experience? Barriers to obtaining housing. Poor credit, yes. Credit, definitely. No income, criminal record, evictions. Great. Yes. All of those. Great. Exactly.

So the other is housing retention barriers, and those are barriers to sustaining or keeping your housing. So again, in the chat feel free to put in some housing retention barriers. So what might make it more difficult for a household to sustain their housing?

Lease violations. Yes, absolutely. Not having the supports or assistance they need. Maybe history of trauma that really impacts their behavior in housing. Yep. Having a job that can sustain the rent. Great. All makes sense.

And keep in mind that those are all related back to being able to fulfill the duties of a tenant, right? Paying rent, not having conflict with neighbors because of certain crises that are happening, or whatever that may look like. It all relates back to someone being able to sustain their housing and maintain the agreement in the lease. Again, those lease violations. So great. OK. Let's talk through each of those a little bit more.

So what do you assess when you're assessing tenant screening barriers? You really want to assess what landlords will be assessing as they're screening criteria in the application process. So you all have said this already. So income and employment history, credit history. Even more specifically any unpaid or late payments. Court judgments. Rental arrears may be something to flag if you're a landlord.

Criminal background. Past housing experiences, so like eviction histories or if the rent was paid on time, any damage or signs of conflict with the landlord. And also, landlord references. So since this is something often asked for by owners in the application process, you want to have those conversations with the household to understand if they have landlord references and help them gather that information to be able to provide that.

So again, you're putting yourself in the landlord's position. If they're doing the screening criteria, what do you typically see? And that's really what you want to know when you're working with a household.

So you can assess these by running your own reports very similar to what a landlord report would be run. You can run credit and criminal background reports and also gather this information through conversations with the household to really get a full picture of what happened in that circumstance so that you understand what a landlord will see. So that's the what of, what do you assess?

How you will use this information. So you're not gaining this information just for the sake of knowing what's going on. The reason you really want to see exactly what a landlord is seeing, so that you can prepare for that housing search process, so you can do a better job of matching up landlords and units with the household so that you're not sending households to a landlord you know have barriers that go against any really strict screening criteria that the landlord has before doing some negotiating.

Because not only can that harm the trust that you've built with that landlord or the willingness the landlord has to engage in the program, but also trust with the household, because if you're sending a household to a landlord and they're consistently being denied or having to have really tough conversations, that's just not a good way to build that rapport.

The information also helps you understand what support a household may need through the process. So they may need support in gathering mitigating documentation like character references or resolving any issues on their credit report, things like sealing a criminal record. So while some of those supports may not take immediate effect, you can demonstrate that steps are being taken to resolve them.

So a good example of that is sealing a criminal record. That looks very different in every state. The point at which you can seal a criminal record is really different in each state as well. So just making sure that if there is something that can be sealed in a timely manner, that that starts happening pretty soon into the housing search process.

Another example would be the credit repair piece. For people that have really common names, it's not unheard of to have mistakes on their credit report that show up. So you just want to make sure that you're catching credit mistakes and making sure that those are being resolved in a timely manner. And then of course, if there's any repair like paying off debts, that you're mindful of that as well.

You can also use this information to negotiate additional incentives for the landlord. So really understanding what may cause concern to the landlord and offering things like security deposits or lease signing bonuses or even guaranteeing specific length of tenancy supports can help the landlord feel more secure about approving a household for one of their tenants.

OK. So that is tenant screening barriers. Let's talk more about housing retention barriers. It is important to understand these barriers to ensure that the household has the supports they need not only during the housing search process, but even afterwards as well so that they can keep their housing and really feel stable in their new home.

You can assess these housing retention barriers by looking for patterns in a person's history that have resulted in a housing crisis in the past. Not necessarily characteristics of the household that you think may be a barrier because we know oftentimes there can be households with certain barriers, but that haven't contributed to their housing stability.

So for example, there may be a person that is a pretty heavy drinker. They drink every day. But it hasn't impacted their housing in any way, so you wouldn't necessarily name substance use as an issue unless it's really impacting the housing and if that is something that the household wanted to address in their work with you.

So just keep that in mind too. You're not really making assumptions about what may come up in their housing stability. You're really looking at the facts and the patterns that have shown up.

All right. And those are-- again, I think I mentioned this before, but those should be really related to keeping the housing. So you can see here, really thinking about, are they able to pay their rent? Do they have a history of lease violations? Do they have patterns showing property damage?

And then again, that will help you think through, what do I need to offer to this landlord to really mitigate that concern around that? So maybe it's an extra security deposit. Maybe it's a lease signing bonus for those that are able to accept prospective tenants that have eviction histories. Whatever it may be to help the landlord feel more secure about that. OK.

So you can identify the housing retention barriers through those tenant screening information. Especially if you're running a report, it might be easier to see where patterns are showing up in their history. Of course, conversations with the household, observations over time, especially if you are conducting home visits.

And also in those proactive check-ins with both the household and the landlord. So it can be really helpful to have more proactive check-ins, really checking in with your households and landlords both on a regular schedule to make sure that you're catching any tendency issues that start to arise instead of having to reactively resolve issues that have already arisen and have caused some conflict between either the program and the landlord or the landlord and the tenant.

So that could be on a monthly basis. It could be on a quarterly basis. Whatever you and the landlord and the household agree upon. But really making sure that you're getting ahead of any issues that come up to make sure those barriers are resolved quickly.

OK. I want to take some time to acknowledge how trauma shows up in the housing search process because we don't always think about that. We don't always think about how that impacts the engagement, the level of engagement a household is able to offer, and also what supports that the housing staff can offer as well.

So households receiving vouchers may have experienced traumas related to housing search that could impact their level of engagement during that process. And having conversations about those housing barriers could bring up feelings and behaviors related to that trauma.

So some examples of where this might show up is if households have experienced racial discrimination when looking for apartments in the past, if they've experienced evictions leading to housing instability and homelessness, if they have criminal backgrounds that are stigmatized and they may experience shame around, and also just financial hardship in general.

It can be really scary to commit to going into a unit when you've lost an apartment in the past or if it's caused you financial hardship before. So it's just really important to be mindful of how those experiences may be impacting someone in the housing search process.

Also, housing instability in general can cause a stress response. I know many of you have experienced stress when looking for housing. I just went through that. I'm moving in a few weeks and just had to go through my own housing search process. And even without experiencing housing instability and just going through the housing search process is stressful, and it can really make it more difficult for households to engage and problem solve their situation. So that's really why it's so important to have support during this process.

So because of the trauma that households may have experienced, it's really important to remain trauma-informed in your approach to housing search. So that could look like creating a safe, private space when exploring housing barriers and having those conversations. That looks like active listening, ensuring confidentiality, really being attentive in those conversations.

Intentionally building rapport by remaining non-judgmental and avoiding shaming. So that's really checking our facial expressions, checking the language that we're using, not being directive or advice givers, but really being there to listen and understand and help people make informed decisions.

It may also look like providing a more intensive level of support when households are struggling to engage. So that means that as a housing search staff, you may be taking on more of the housing search work, especially in the beginning, in order to secure that housing.

So not expecting the household to do all of the work themselves and just come to you when they have an apartment ready to go, but really putting in time and energy into that process to take on some of that burden, if not most of that burden. And I just want to reiterate how difficult it can be for a household to engage in that housing search work themselves without support and when they're experiencing a stress response.

You can also take a trauma-informed approach by really fostering that household choice and intentionally giving households that sense of control over their situation, which can be lost a lot of the time when someone is experiencing housing instability or homelessness. So we'll talk more about how to foster that choice as well.

One way to do that is to really talk through what a person's housing preferences are. So not only focusing on the barriers and really assessing and responding to those, but really getting an understanding of what the household feels that they need in order to sustain their housing.

So understanding those household needs and preferences. You can walk through some of these questions and really just have a conversation about that.

So which neighborhoods would they like to live in? What neighborhoods would they be open to living in? What are their transportation needs? Do they use public transportation? Do they have a car and need to be able to park that car somewhere?

What community-based or natural supports do they need access to? So an example might be if they have frequent medical appointments and use public transportation, making sure there's a way to get from point A to point B frequently. Do they need any special accommodations in their unit? And then are they interested in shared housing if that opportunity becomes available much quicker than maybe a one-bedroom unit of their own?

So really just gaining that understanding of what they're looking for will help throughout the housing search process, especially if you're-- we'll talk about this a bit later, but having to manage expectations around what they could get.

OK. So we're going to talk through some practical ways to help a household prepare for the housing search process. So a great first step and tool in the housing search process is developing an individualized housing search plan. So this plan should be based on the assessment you've just done with the household, on their barriers and preferences, and really tailored to their needs. It can be used as a tool to outline what the household's responsibilities are and what you as the housing search staff would be responsible for.

And you can also use it to track progress. So in developing that housing search plan, you can talk about what types or intensity of supports the household is interested in. And since their needs may change over time, it's really important to keep that updated, and like I said, use it as a tool to track progress.

Go back to-- it really acts as your roadmap to supporting the household, and it's also a good conversation starter to really broker that agreement of how you will work together to identify housing. So again, who is doing what? What level of support do they expect from you? What do they expect to need from you as far as housing search activities? And again, just having that conversation really transparently so that both of you know what to expect from each other.

So while some households may have recent experience of undergoing that housing search process and feel really confident in their ability to communicate with landlords and attend viewings and just go through that process, other households may want more support along the way, or you may find that they need a little bit more support as you begin working with them.

So while it's important to have that conversation upfront when you're developing the housing search plan to really understand what needs-- or sorry, what support they expect to need, you may find a month or two into the process if they're not housed yet, they may have other ideas of how you can support them. So continuing that conversation as well.

So like I said, not every household will need this level of support, but as a housing search staff you should be prepared to provide technology or access to technology, identify potential units for them, facilitate landlord conversations, coordinate transportation to viewings or other appointments like the lease signing, offer support with completing applications or other paperwork, attending viewings and lease signings with the household.

And also walking through the terms of the lease after a lease is signed to really help them understand-- well, actually, before the lease is signed and after the lease is signed. But really help them understand what they're signing on to and make sure they know what their responsibilities are once their tenancy begins. So again, not every household will need everything on this list, but it's really important that you're prepared to offer this to households.

I should say, these are the really practical activities, but some of the other activities I haven't mentioned here that are really important is to just be really encouraging to the household, to be understanding as they experience the emotions that one may experience through the housing search process, and to just really listen to them because it's not fun.

And like I said, many of you have been through that process before on your own without having experienced housing instability or these other barriers. So you can probably imagine how difficult it is for someone to go through this process and really engage and problem solve when they're experiencing a very high-stress situation. So just keep that in mind as you're supporting your households.

It's also helpful to preview what landlord conversations may be like with the household. So that could look like really explaining what that conversation will be. It's similar to a job interview. It's important to signal respect like eye contact or language you're using or offer a handshake. Or I guess people are doing the elbow bump right now. That's cool too.

Providing materials or talking points about the subsidy. Or really offering your contact information to be shared as well to help explain what the subsidy entails, not only the lease-up process, but what that looks like afterwards. And if you're sending off households to do their own housing search who feel comfortable doing that and want to do their own housing search solely, really making sure that they have the materials to be able to share that information that's necessary.

And then also, I wanted to touch on this one, is preparing responses if asked about tenant screening barriers. I think that's so important because we really don't have control over what a landlord will ask prospective tenants about, but we can support the household to be prepared for those conversations and help them work through feelings around their tenant screening barriers, understand what they are and are not willing to share, and really respecting and helping maintain those boundaries.

And also brainstorming how to mitigate landlord concerns together. So making sure that households know that this is a barrier that may show up on your tenant screening report that a landlord may see. If they ask about this, what would that look like for you to respond to that?

And then again, talk through those feelings that it may bring up. Understand where their barriers are and help maintain those. And when I say that I mean if a landlord is pushing that you're helping support the tenant and being able to keep their boundaries and only share information that's really important.

What you should not do, I'll say, is share someone's story or circumstances with a landlord without their consent or make promises you cannot keep because not only will that harm the trust that you've built with the household that you're supporting, but also the landlord's trust if you can't follow through on that commitment. So again, really having those conversations to understand where the household's barriers are.

Some households may need more intensive support with communicating with landlords, so you should be prepared to facilitate those conversations. But in some cases, it may just be offering some coaching and offering an ear to listen to their concerns about the process and communication with landlords.

OK. So I'm going to share some really practical tips in going through the housing search process. So you can share these tips with households who have vouchers or other housing search staff that you work with. I would also love to hear what tips you all have. I'm sure you have experience supporting households through the housing search process, so please share those tips in the chat so that you all can hear from each other. I think I've seen a few tips in there already, which is awesome, so please keep sharing those.

So the first is that if the household has not already or if you as the housing search worker have not already signed up to every housing search site and app that you know of, you should sign up for those. You should sign up for immediate notifications on new listings so that you are notified very quickly.

It's also really helpful to use those sites like Zillow, Trulia, Hotpads because you can create a very standard response that you can just click Send when you are interested in a unit. Every community uses different housing search sites, but I will say I would just get on all of them.

This is not an exhaustive list. There's apartments.com. There's rents.com. There's Go Section 8. There's so many housing search sites out there, and it truly is a full-time job to keep track of all of them.

But sign up for notifications. Make sure you have your standard spiel that you could just send out. And make sure that you're tracking all of the units that you've reached out to, and then follow up if you don't get a response. I typically follow up about 48 hours after if I don't hear back from the landlord, even if I just reached out to say, hey, can I see your application, or is this unit available, or whatever it may be.

I would also say in your spiel, keep it short and sweet just to intrigue the landlord enough to reach out to you. And if they offer a phone number, I would call. I would always call before I email unless they say specifically that they prefer to email or go through the housing search site.

You can also prepare a standard rental application to provide landlords during a viewing or upon request or use it as a reference for completing other rental applications. So if you've been through the process recently, either supporting a household through the process or for yourself, you know that you probably have to submit multiple applications at one time, and that they all ask for really the same thing.

So having all of that information in a really centralized place so that you can refer back to it when you're completing applications instead of having to go back into your phone and find, where did I keep this information about this person's landlord from two years ago, or whatever it may be. So really having the housing search worker and the household who's searching for housing have a standard rental application ready to go with all of their information that you'd need.

Having rental applications submitted before a viewing when possible. Sometimes this is really standard practice in a community, but not in every community. But it can be really helpful because some landlords will do a first come, first serve basis. So whoever submits the application first that passes their screening criteria or that they're willing to accept would get the unit. So there is a lot of value in being the quickest one to submit an application, and that's another reason why it's so important to have that rental application information on hand.

Last but not least, preparing mitigating documentation before your search to reduce concerns about the tenant screening barriers. So if you're a household and you know that you have an eviction history that might be a barrier to a landlord, just thinking of creative ways to demonstrate that you intend to have some tenancy education or to engage in services, or that you have a good history of your employment or something to demonstrate to a landlord that they don't have to be concerned about that barrier. Character references, whatever it may be.

One participant I had, he was in the process of getting a voucher. This was a few years ago. Was getting a housing choice voucher and had to go through the mitigation process. And he had prepared a bunch of character references from pretty much every neighbor that he's had within a quarter mile radius because he was in a rapid rehousing program, and he really prioritized community building when he was housed out of homelessness through that program, and then was working on getting a voucher to move on to from the rapid rehousing program.

And he had really prioritized community building because he used to host cookouts every week and made really great friends with his neighbors who all gave character references. And even though he had a very extensive criminal background, he was able to overcome that barrier through the mitigation process by collecting all of those character references. So you just never know what type of supports people have or are able to build when they're in that position. So just think creatively about what you can do to really mitigate those concerns. And he got the voucher, by the way.

OK. So I mentioned this before, but it is really important to be managing expectations through this process. With housing markets returning to their prepandemic states and communities really experiencing that lack of affordable housing, it can be really difficult to identify a suitable unit for someone. And that's just, unfortunately, the reality that we're in.

So households should really know what to expect from the housing market, including typical rent prices, how quickly the market moves. For example, if people typically lease up within a week of posting their unit, a household should know that. They should know how quickly they should expect to submit rental applications. So whatever to share that helps them understand the housing market is really helpful.

I would say given those limitations of the housing market, you should be prepared to really facilitate conversations about next step housing versus ideal housing. And what I mean by that is really understanding what type of housing they would be willing to go into as a way of ending their housing crisis while still being a very decent, habitable unit, a unit that feels dignifying for them. But they may not see that as their long-term ideal housing unit.

And I'm sure many of you can think back to a time in your life, if not now, where you may be in that position that this is not your forever home. This is not somewhere that is your ideal housing, but it's the housing that you accept in the moment given your circumstances, knowing that you can start preparing for that long term.

So really helping households think through that. Sometimes when we get a subsidy it can feel like, this is the opportunity you've been waiting for and needing for such a long time. But really understanding the intricacies of the housing market right now and how to use that subsidy. It's also just important for households to have all the information to make their own informed decisions about their preferences, and also what supports they'll need throughout the housing process.

OK. So that was more on how to support households. Now we're going to talk through a little bit about finding units and leveraging existing resources, and then we'll have some time for Q&A.

So a good rule of thumb for finding units is that you leave no stone unturned. So first and foremost, you want to know if there's any system-level approaches in your CoC or your community that's doing coordination around landlord engagement.

So I will make a plug for the first session in the series which talked about system-level approaches to landlord engagement. So really understand what your community is doing to work together to make sure that you're acquiring the number of units that you need to utilize these resources.

So know what's going on. Participate in whatever's going on. But also do your own housing search. So really outreaching to your existing landlord contacts and continuing to build your partnerships, reaching out to new landlords.

You can do this through cold calling in response to listings on those housing search sites. You can network with groups like landlord associations or neighborhood associations, chamber of commerce. You can even think about, are there faith communities in your area that may have landlords and they're willing to let you make an announcement at a service or whatever it may be? So really get creative about how you can network with landlords in your community.

You can and should identify the affordable housing opportunities in your community, especially those that have preferences related to the EHV population. And then also leverage those incentives, utilize marketing. You can post these marketing or post about your incentives on some of the community groups on Facebook. Like, really get creative about how you get the EHV's out there so that landlords that have units are getting the message and that you're doing a really broad outreach, but also a really concerted outreach through those housing search sites.

And then also, know what resources are available. So you may find that you have staff that are doing the housing search process and supporting participants through that, but there may also be other resources in the community that can help supplement your efforts. So know what housing search and navigation services are available through the CoC or ESG and leverage those when possible.

Understand what housing navigation supports are in shelters or outreach teams where your households may be currently staying. And then think about housing counseling centers in your community.

You can also think about what community-based supports are available to overcome those tenant screening barriers or housing retention barriers. So things like legal services, funds to clear rental or utility debts, and then case management to support stabilization, which is really important, even if it's only for a few months during the transition.

OK. I think there's a lot going on in the chat, and I think we have a few questions that have come in for Q&A. So I'm just going to pause and take a look at the chat. And feel free to submit your questions in the Q&A box, and we can move into a time of answering all of those.

NICOLE: So hey, Jenna. A question in the chat-- or in the Q&A. How does one overcome the challenges of a family who thinks it is solely the housing search assistant's job to find them housing?

JENNA ESPINOSA: Yeah, I mean, that's a good question. That happens. I would say you don't always overcome that barrier, but don't let that be the barrier that keeps a household from getting housed. If that means that you have to do more of the housing search work, I would say then you do more of the housing search work.

Like I said, I don't want that to keep anyone-- I don't want us to have this view that a household has to engage in the process and do the work on their own in order to get housed. So really think about how stress comes into play with that.

People's motivation looks differently and our opinions of motivation look differently, but the goal at the end of the day is to get this person housed. And sometimes that looks like the housing search worker doing most of the work in the beginning, and that's OK. But also having those conversations very early on in the process of what you would like to see from the household, what they feel their level of engagement can be, and really coming to an agreement on that.

And I know that's not the answer that folks really want to hear, is that they may be needing to do most of the housing search work in the beginning. But that honestly is just the reality with the circumstances that our households are in.

But yeah, having just very transparent conversations from the beginning about what expectations you have from each other, documenting those in the housing search plan, and then coming back to that every time you meet with someone. So using the housing search plan as a tool for conversation for your meetings with the participant. Checking in every week on the housing search plan, every two weeks, whatever the agreement is, and then walking through what expectations you've set for each other and if those are still fair expectations.

Like I said, that's not going to help every situation, and there are still going to be some situations where a housing search worker is doing most of the work. But again, please don't let that be the barrier that keeps someone from being housed. The barrier should not be the housing search worker in this situation, if that makes sense.

NICOLE: Awesome. Super helpful, Jenna. And another question that is specific to just helping with that housing search assistance, but somebody wants to live in a specific neighborhood because of where their children go to school and they're not having any luck finding places nearby. So maybe getting back to some of, this isn't your forever home, but a step towards ending your housing crisis. But any other advice that you have?

JENNA
ESPINOSA: Yeah, that's so tricky. And I totally get that. I totally get someone wanting to be able to have their child go to the same school that they've been going to. That makes so much sense. And hopefully there is ways to make that happen, whether that's through landlord incentives to do an extra lease signing bonus for a landlord who is willing to accept them in that neighborhood, or whatever it may be. But really leveraging your incentives.

I would say also chatting with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Liaison to see what support they can offer if it is related to the school district and whatnot. So yeah. And again, having those managing expectation conversations is important too.

I would say if anyone else on the call-- you all have been doing housing search throughout this process. Please share tips in the chat too with each other if you've come across the same experience.

NICOLE: Wonderful. Thanks, Jenna. And there has been lots of great chatting going on and sharing. And I wonder, somebody mentioned a rental resume. And I don't know if you're at your computer and you can upload that in the chat, but it sounds like it'd be a super helpful connection for people.

And then somebody had made a comment, landlords always ask me, is this a good tenant? Are they good people? It's so frustrating, the stigma involved prior to ever even meeting or talking to voucher holders. So any advice on kind of flipping that script and coming at it a different direction? Like, oh, this EHV can be guaranteed rent for you. Anything else like that, Jenna, that you would share?

JENNA
ESPINOSA: Yeah. I think what you said, Nicole, is really helpful. Like, really making it about the support the subsidy can offer. And if they are receiving supports not just through the rental assistance piece, but if they're tenancy supports they'll be receiving. So really selling the program and not having to talk as much about the household in that situation. So yeah. Having those conversations with landlords about the subsidy.

I would also say-- I'm sorry. I can see the chat now too. Let me close that so I'm not super distracted. I would say with the landlords too, sometimes we get in this position where we feel like we have to appease the landlord. And I wouldn't be afraid to push back a little bit, especially if you feel like they're treating this household differently than they may be treating other prospective households.

But I mentioned once throughout, really understanding what a household will allow you to share with a landlord is really important. And anything written, mitigating documentation can be really helpful so that you as a housing search worker can go ahead and just avoid those conversations of having judgments on the household that you're serving.

That feels icky, and you shouldn't have to do it, but landlords are going to ask about it. So if you can have anything prepared beforehand that you can just share with the landlord if they do ask about something like that-- like I mentioned character references before. That's really helpful to have sometimes when landlords ask about that.

So landlords will ask, I think, selling the program. Any written documentation that you know the household is willing to share with the landlord can be really helpful. And again, just speaking to any tenancy supports that they can offer.

But yeah, you don't want to get into a position where you're really selling a household, and then that household ends up having some difficulty in their tenancies and you've lost that trust with the landlord. So at the end of the day, making sure the landlord knows it's their decision, but that the household is coming with x, y, and z supports as well.

I was also thinking about the question before, and I forgot that one practice I used to do with my participants is I would sit down with them and do their first housing search with them on these websites. Because if you think about it, some of these participants may not have done their own housing search in several years. And we all know how quickly the housing market has changed over these last few years.

So not assuming that someone is being difficult on purpose or wanting to live a really upscale life when they may not have the means to at this point in time. But it may just be they haven't done housing search in this type of market in a long time. And so sitting down with them and looking at these websites together so they don't feel like it's you just saying, you can't have this. You can't have that.

But instead, showing them the expectation that they can have and what's realistic has been really helpful in the past for me. So if you haven't tried that as well, I would give that a try.

NICOLE:

Great advice, Jenna. And one of the questions in the Q&A is a struggle between the CoC and the PHA on that housing search assistance and who is actually responsible for that. And do just want to remind everyone that housing search assistance is a requirement in the EHV notice. Housing authorities are getting admin fees such as the service fees that can help pay for that. So perhaps that's just more discussion that can be had with your specific housing authority.

And just wanted to make a plug, though, that CoCs and PHAs can ask for technical assistance. And so I just put the link to that technical assistance in the chat that you all can complete at your convenience if you're interested. And then Lisa, who had shared or tried to share the rental resume, I got her email address, so I will work to get that from her so that we can share that along with the other materials.

And so Jenna, with that, I think that has taken care of most of the questions and a lot of the good comments. It's great to see everyone really sharing in the chat, so I'll turn it back over to you.

**JENNA
ESPINOSA:**

Great. I will also say, if you are having difficulty really brokering who is doing what in the housing search process, whether that is between CoC and the housing authority or the housing search staff and participants, one way to offer housing search support differently is through a housing search group model.

So offering a workshop on housing search once a week was really helpful when I was supporting participants because sometimes they didn't want to come meet with me individually or maybe didn't have time to, or whatever it may be. But offering that as a group that they can come and talk to each other about housing search and what has helped them. They can hear what other people are doing in their own housing search work, and maybe that prompts them to try some things on their own or feel more comfortable doing housing search on their own.

So sometimes when someone's not engaging in the housing search process, I just think there's a lot of underlying factors there. And one factor could be the stress response, but the other factor could be just feeling really hesitant or insecure about doing their own housing search work. And so whatever security you can help them feel in engaging through that can be helpful.

It also can be helpful to do a group instead of-- or in addition to, I'll say, one-on-one work because you may not have the capacity to meet with everyone weekly and really give them that intensive level of support if you're finding a lot of households need that. So this is just a way to supplement the support that they're getting and be able to offer that more broadly.

See some things in the chat about landlords not wanting to accept subsidies. I would just say really be familiar with what fair housing looks like in your community and don't be afraid to leverage that. And also, don't be afraid to submit complaints about landlords in a very-- be strategic about it. Be strategic about who submits that complaint and when you do it and whatnot.

But yeah, there's a lot of ways to leverage fair Housing in order to make sure landlords are not just blanket saying no to subsidies. Also, there's a lot of great things about subsidies, so it's guaranteed rent. [LAUGHS]

NICOLE: Awesome, Jenna. Anything else?

**JENNA
ESPINOSA:** I don't think so. Anything else in the Q&A or the chat? We have a few more minutes if folks have other questions.

NICOLE: Yeah, I think one question, are PHAs required to pay deposits and application fees? The notice says may, but wanted to make sure. I'm happy to answer that.

So PHAs can use their service fees to pay deposits and application fees, but the notice does outline that they are to work with their continuum of care or victim service provider or other referral partner to figure out what is already available in the community and use those service fees to fill in any gaps. So really, it's about connecting with your PHA and CoC and seeing how they are choosing to use those service fees.

There was another question about furniture and household goods. And again, those are eligible service fee uses, but it all depends, again, on what your PHA and CoC outlined on their use of those fees, and looking at what was already available in the community.

And then I'll just put in where people can ask a question, I will drop the link in there. And then there is another question. I'm just trying to find it in the chat. I was hoping there was somebody I could contact regarding questions on how to apply for an emergency housing voucher due to a client of mine fleeing domestic violence.

So you really need to reach out to your housing authority. And you can find your housing authority on the EHV website. You can use that ask a question that I dropped in the chat. And then-- thank you-- the link to the CoCs in your area. All that information might get you pointed in the right direction as far as who can help you in your area. I think Jenna tried to catch them all with what was remaining.

**JENNA
ESPINOSA:** Great. That's great. OK. If there's no other questions before people head off, we just want to preview that there's an upcoming office hours on August 9, specifically on the topic of serving returning citizens. So we hope that you join with that.

Please see the EHV website in order to find the other materials from the previous webinars. And make sure you go see those if you haven't listened to those already. Let's see. All right. And I think that is all we have for you. So thanks, everyone, for joining, and we hope to see you at the EHV office hours on August 9.