Landlord recruitment and retention

Overview
Local jurisdictions can help to increase the number of properties where housing choice voucher holders can live by engaging in proactive outreach to landlords and offering meaningful incentives to those who participate in the program.

Landlords may refuse to accept vouchers for a variety of reasons, including a lack of familiarity with the program, concerns about their obligations under the program, and beliefs that voucher holders may be challenging tenants. Landlord outreach can help to address these and other concerns, as well as dispel myths and misconceptions about the program and its participants. Some cities, towns and counties go beyond relationship-building and offer incentives to landlords to accept vouchers, including cash payments for each unit rented to a voucher holder.

This section describes some of the considerations for jurisdictions interested in developing a landlord recruitment and retention program.

Approach
To increase residential opportunities for housing choice voucher holders, localities can reach out to landlords to encourage them to rent to voucher holders, particularly in higher-cost and resource-rich areas where landlords may be less familiar with the program. This outreach can be conducted by a public housing agency (PHA), a local housing department, or a nonprofit partnering with one of these agencies and can involve education about the program, promotion of the benefits to landlords, and the offer of financial incentives or a guarantee to cover the cost of potential damages or vacancies. Outreach can be conducted on a one-on-one basis, or through partnerships with local apartment associations. In addition to clarifying expectations and program requirements, outreach can provide assurance that the PHA, or the nonprofit assisting the agency, will be a good and responsive partner should any issues with the tenant arise and help allay any other concerns landlords might have about the program.

Many landlords do not understand how the Housing Choice Voucher program works and what their obligations are under the program. Representatives from the local housing department or PHA can provide educational materials and workshops to share information with landlords and respond to any questions or concerns. The workshops can clarify expectations regarding property inspections and quality standards, answer
questions about security deposits and payment of utilities, and provide information about marketing and tenant selection. Some housing authorities also produce newsletters to stay in touch with landlords. Newsletter topics include program changes and updates, and answers to frequently asked questions.

The outreach can also underscore the benefits of renting to voucher holders, including that a guaranteed portion of the rent is paid by the PHA each month and that the PHA can be a helpful intermediary in the event the landlord has a problem with the resident. Those conducting outreach can also emphasize that housing authorities will help landlords find new tenants by providing information on available units to new voucher holders as well as existing voucher holders interested in moving to a new residence. This tenant outreach may be less meaningful, however, in areas that have low vacancy rates or a high demand for housing.

Financial incentives can provide even greater enticements to landlords. These incentives often mitigate two of the concerns landlords have about the program: payment delays and damages to the unit in excess of the deposit amount. Some housing authorities fund a security deposit or agree to pay for damages in excess of the security deposit amount should they occur. Others pay for one month of rent to cover any vacancy caused during lease up, or pay the full rent amount during a vacancy caused by turnover from one voucher holder tenant to another. Landlord incentive funds may also help to cover application fees or fund back payment of utility bills.

Some PHAs may employ a landlord outreach specialist who is responsible for this work or partner with a non-profit who provides this service. It can be helpful to make this a specific responsibility and allow someone to dedicate time to these efforts. Having one point of contact can also help build a good working relationship between landlords and the PHA.

**Eligibility**

To be eligible for participation in the voucher program, all properties need to meet HUD quality standards and have a rent that is affordable for the tenant and is reasonable in relation to other similar units in that location. Depending on the market, smaller properties that are owner-operated may be more likely than buildings operated by third-party managers to have units with rents that fall within the voucher program payment standards.

Some incentive programs are only available to landlords who meet certain criteria. For example, Los Angeles incentivizes landlords to rent to homeless voucher holders by paying one month’s rent. Other programs, like a state income tax credit in Virginia, incentivizes participation by landlords in census tracts with low poverty rates.
Examples

- The Long Beach Housing Authority holds quarterly workshops for new landlords, prominently features a video promoting the benefits of renting to voucher holders on its website, and reaches out to landlords through a periodic owner’s newsletter. The city is also developing a new program (LeaseUp LB) that would provide financial incentives for landlords.
- The Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority has created a variety of resources for landlords. The PHA holds bi-weekly orientation workshops and provides resources online including a guidebook and checklist to help landlords understand the inspection process. The organization also produces a regular newsletter for landlords and holds an annual landlord appreciation banquet.
- The Virginia Communities of Opportunity Tax Credit provides a state income tax credit for landlords who rent units to housing voucher holders in census tracts with <10% poverty in the Richmond area.
- The Marin Housing Authority offers a number of incentives to potential landlords. The financial incentives protect the landlord against financial loss by paying a security deposit, covering the cost of damages if losses exceed the deposit, and providing one month’s rent if a tenant vacates.
- The non-profit Inclusive Communities Project in Dallas has developed a financial incentive program for landlords in partnership with the Dallas Housing Authority called the Apartment Incentive Program. The non-profit plays an intermediary role by providing a financial guarantee to landlords that rent to voucher holders.
- The Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh has created a Preferred Owners Program that offers participants preferred listings, fewer inspections, and up to two months of rent paid during the turnover time between housing choice voucher tenants.

Related resources

- This Urban Institute article argues that financial incentives could increase landlord participation in the Housing Choice Voucher program. The article reviews existing incentive programs and argues that more analysis should be done to determine which kinds of incentives are most effective.
- This guide developed by the Fort Wayne Housing Authority and this handbook developed by the Evansville Housing Authority provide information for landlords about the Housing Choice Voucher program. The documents include information about advertising and tenant screening, sample contracts, information about policies and HUD regulations, and contact information for support staff and other resources in the community.