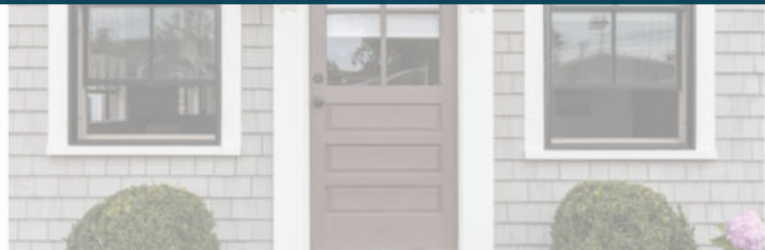


U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN
DEVELOPMENT PRESENTS

HCV Landlord Webinar 6: Landlord-Focused Customer Service Strategies

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Welcome



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HCV Landlord Participation Webinar Series

Webinar 1: Background and Introduction: Challenges Landlords Experience

Webinar 2: Education and Outreach Strategies

Webinar 3: Technology Strategies

Webinar 4: Inspections and Matching Local Rental Markets

Webinar 5: Partnerships and Monetary Incentives and Reimbursements Strategies

Webinar 6: Landlord-Focused Customer Service Strategies

Today's Webinar

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- Overview of Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Landlord Strategies Guidebook for Public Housing Agencies (PHAs)
- Landlord-Focused Customer Service
- PHA Panel Discussion
- Conclusion/Q&A

QUESTIONS:

If you have any questions throughout the presentation, please submit them through the webinar chat function.



OVERVIEW

Housing Choice Voucher Landlord Strategies Guidebook for Public Housing Agencies

Guidebook: Purpose

To support PHAs in improving landlord participation in the HCV Program by:

- Increasing Recruitment
- Increasing Retention
- Improving Responsiveness
- Improving Tenant-Landlord Relationship
- Improving Inspections Process
- Making Bureaucratic Processes Easier for Landlords

Guidebook: How to Use

- Participants are encouraged to read the entire chapter as many of the strategies are related and contain information that is transferrable.
- All strategy chapters have been published.
- Forthcoming items: Introduction, Choosing the Right Strategies, Entry Points, and Conclusion.
- All chapters will be updated to include cross-references and PHA names.

Guidebook: Where to Find

- HUD HCV Landlord Resources:
https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/landlord

Resources for PHAs to Increase Landlord Participation

Landlord Participation Research and Studies

Forms

HCV Landlord Strategies Guidebook for PHAs

Landlord-Focused Customer Service

PHAs are familiar with recognizing voucher families as customers, and perhaps less oriented towards providing intentional customer service to landlords.

Strategies include:

- Landlord Customer Service Responsiveness
- Landlord Point of Contact
- Call Center



LANDLORD-FOCUSED CUSTOMER SERVICE

INTRODUCTION

The dictionary definition of customer service is the assistance or advice provided by an organization to people who use its products or services. For public housing agencies (PHAs), the primary customers of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program are voucher families and landlords. PHAs may have a longer history of recognizing voucher families as their customers and orienting their customer service toward these families. This Guidebook, and this chapter, focus on what can happen if the PHA adds an intentional focus on landlord customer service.

The following strategies are included in this section:

- Landlord Customer Service Responsiveness
- Landlord Point of Contact
- Call Center

Related strategies:

- Education and Outreach

The strategies in this Landlord-Focused Customer Service chapter address the following areas:

Landlord-Focused Customer Service Process Improvements

PHA Process Improvement	Landlord Customer Service Responsiveness	Landlord Point of Contact	Call Center
Increase Recruitment	X	X	
Increase Retention	X	X	X
Improve Responsiveness	X	X	X
Improve Tenant-Landlord Relationship	X	X	
Improve Inspections Process		X	
Minimize Bureaucracy	X	X	X

The contents of this document, except when based on statutory or regulatory law or as incorporated into a contract, do not have the force and effect of law and are not meant to bind the public in any way. This document is intended only to provide clarity to the public regarding existing legal or contractual requirements or agency policies.



What is Customer Service?

- Definition: The assistance or advice provided by an organization to people who use its products or services.
- **HOW** customer service is delivered is just as important as **WHAT** is provided.
- Effective customer service can enhance any strategy that a PHA undertakes to improve landlord satisfaction.

STRATEGY: LANDLORD CUSTOMER SERVICE RESPONSIVENESS

Implementing a culture or mindset that prioritizes responsive customer service among HCV staff toward landlords and landlord issues.

Who: All PHAs.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$ Minimal to moderate.

Implementation Considerations: ☐ LOW ☒ MEDIUM ☐ DIFFICULT May require designating or re-allocating staff time. Minimal implementation barriers.

- This [strategy](#) offers ways that PHAs can implement a culture of providing quality customer service. It also includes examples of changes that PHAs can undertake to reflect this mindset.

Implementation

Internal customer service practices:

- Review current practices.
- Consider experience of staff throughout PHA who interact with landlords.

Implementation

Principles of responsive customer service:

- Communicate with professionalism.
- Create a welcoming environment.
- Practice active listening.
- Provide realistic timeframes.
- Learn de-escalation skills.
- Know your HCV program well!

Implementation

Review written communication.

- Are forms accessible? Do notifications provide the “why”?

Set reasonable expectations.

- What can landlords expect and when? Be realistic.

Accept unit listings.

- Make it easy for landlords to list or find where to list. If the PHA lists units, keep list current.

STRATEGY: LANDLORD POINT OF CONTACT

Having a single point of contact (or a team of staff) designated to provide outreach and education to landlords and respond to landlord inquiries.

Who: Smaller PHAs may be able to implement by partnering with other organizations in the area to support one position. Medium and larger PHAs may consider adding this position to their internal organizational structure.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$ Minimal to moderate.

Implementation Considerations: ☐ LOW ☒ MEDIUM ☐ DIFFICULT Consider current and future staff capacity and funding.

This [strategy](#) examines the role that a landlord point of contact plays in providing customer service. It outlines:

- Typical responsibilities
- Job qualifications
- Funding sources

Typical Responsibilities

- Responding to inquiries (phone, email, walk-in).
- Conducting outreach (events, one-on-one, accessing data).
- Recruitment ("making the pitch," cold calls).
- Mediation (with other PHA offices, between landlord and voucher families).
- Inspection support.

Job Qualifications

- Customer service skills
- Public speaking
- HCV experience**
- Real estate or social services background**

**PHAs differed in the emphasis they placed on these skillsets.

Funding Sources

- There are multiple ways to fund a landlord point of contact position.
- PHAs should think creatively about different funds that might be available.
- Multiple sources of funding can be used.

Funding Source Examples:

- Administrative Fees
- Continuum of Care Organizations
- Emergency Solutions Grants
- Local or State Dollars (ex. housing trust fund)
- Philanthropic Grants
- United Way

Alternatives

- A dedicated position might not be a good fit for all PHAs.
- PHAs should look for other ways to establish a connection and relationship with landlords.
- Example: Establish a landlord-dedicated day of the week.

Alternative to a Landlord Point of Contact: Create Landlord-Specific Spaces and Connections

A landlord point of contact might not be feasible or a good fit for all PHAs; however, there are other ways that PHAs can create and foster relationships with landlords.

As discussed in the subsequent strategy focused on customer service, making it easy for landlords to connect with the PHA creates a solid foundation upon which to build. At every opportunity, starting with the landlord orientation, the PHA can create a real and also a symbolic connection, where landlords have a face to associate with the PHA and contact information that will allow them to get answers to their questions.

Another way to create connection and provide good customer service for PHAs with a steady volume of landlord questions is to dedicate a day to responding to landlord inquiries in-person, by phone, or via a video platform. (If using a video platform or conference call line, confidentiality of participating families and landlords should be protected by not recording, allowing cameras to be turned off, and not revealing identifying information such as social security numbers or addresses.) A dedicated-day schedule could fit the typical volume of inquiries and available staff; it could be weekly, every Thursday, monthly, or the first and third Thursday of every month, for example. Landlords would know they could contact the PHA on that day and get a response from the PHA. (Naturally, some staff would continue to carry out their typical responsibilities. Only a select person or persons would be designated to landlord inquiries.) A dedicated day is a way to show a focused commitment by the PHA to respond to landlords as valued partners in the HCV Program.

See the Technology chapter for other ways to connect with landlords through landlord-dedicated webpages and landlord portals.

NOTE: PHAs that implement a dedicated landlord day(s) still need to commit to address questions from landlords in a timely fashion outside of the dedicated days since questions and emergencies don't follow a schedule.

STRATEGY: CALL CENTER

Shifting a large volume of phone calls for the entire PHA or specific departments within the PHA to a centralized reception with staff assigned to answer calls related to specific programs such as the HCV Program.

Who: Large PHAs.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$ Moderate to high.

Implementation Considerations: ☐ LOW ☒ MEDIUM ☐ DIFFICULT May require staffing and funding considerations.

This [strategy](#) discusses how and when a PHA might choose to implement a call center.

It outlines:

- Set-up
- Staffing
- Costs

Call Center Overview

- Organizes and answers a large volume of incoming calls.
- Interactive voice response (IVR) routes calls to call center staff and/or a selection of standardized topics and prompts.
- IVR might be available 24 hours, allowing landlords to access standard information at any time, similar to an online portal.
- Can also allow other HCV program staff to carry out their responsibilities with fewer interruptions.
- Training for call center staff is critical to ensuring good customer service.
- May still need for staff to respond to complex issues and walk-ins.
- May represent a solution for larger PHAs with an overwhelming call volume.

Implementation Considerations

- **Scope:** Will the call center serve the entire PHA or just the HCV Program?
- **Information needed:** Current volume of calls, topics, number of calls requiring a secondary referral.
- **Set-up and software:** PHA will need to select a software provider and customize the IVR menu. Call centers should aim to reduce the number of steps/time it currently takes for a landlord to reach a knowledgeable staff member.
- **Roll-out:** PHA will need to invest time in acclimating landlords to the new call center.

Implementation Considerations (cont.)

- **Staffing:** Call center staff require an understanding on how to handle/answer common HCV situations. This might require a departmental shift to move existing staff into call center positions or training of new staff.
- **Costs:** Call center costs are typically high and include start-up, set-up, training, and on-going costs.

Call Center Alternatives

PHAs that do not have the call volume to make a call center an effective option, may still face challenges answering/returning calls in a timely manner.

Alternate strategies might include:

- Dedicating or rotating staff trained in landlord-focused issues on telephone duty.
- Creating a dedicated landlord day.
- Using call routing or call trees to create efficiencies for customers calling in to a main number.

PHA Panel Discussion



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Questions or Comments?
Submit using the chat feature.

Email an additional questions to hcv@firstpic.org

Other HUD Efforts for HCV Landlords

- Symposiums
- Newsletter
- HUD's landlord mailing list:
 - Sign up now, regular updates coming soon
 - landlordtaskforce@hud.gov

Conclusion

- Join us this winter for the final Guidebook webinar.
- HUD HCV Landlord Resources:
https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/landlord
- Housing Choice Voucher Landlord Strategies Guidebook for Public Housing Agencies