

STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE EFFICIENCY IN THE SCHEDULING AND COMPLETION OF INSPECTIONS

A critical component of a successful inspection program is ensuring that inspections are scheduled and conducted in a timely manner. The speed in which inspections can be scheduled and conducted can have financial implications for landlords. Long wait times can cause units to remain vacant, causing landlords to lose income. Landlords also spend time and money waiting for inspectors to arrive at their units. These strategies address internal changes that PHAs can take to reduce the amount of time it takes to both schedule and conduct inspections.

There are two main strategies designed to address this issue:

- 1. Inspection Scheduling**
- 2. Administrative Inspection Flexibilities**

These strategies are designed to target different elements surrounding inspection scheduling, but both are rooted in internal change. One is targeted at streamlining the scheduling process, the other at simplifying the overall process. The strategies depend on PHAs reviewing their practices to see if they can be optimized and, if so, making changes. While landlords might not see the changes being made, if successfully implemented landlords will see a reduction in the time it takes to schedule and conduct inspections.

When approaching these changes, PHAs should gather information on the areas targeted for improvement and then compare them against current policies and procedures to identify areas for change. PHAs might consider focusing on one area at a time. For example, are landlords experiencing greater delays with initial or annual inspections? Are inspections being scheduled in a reasonable timeframe, but inspectors not arriving to the unit at the appointed time? While some activities will address multiple areas of concern, others might be targeted at a single issue.





STRATEGY: INSPECTION SCHEDULING

Analyzing how PHAs schedule and staff inspections for patterns or gaps and making administrative changes to improve efficiency.

Who: All PHAs; Some activities are targeted to PHAs that have inspectors on staff.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

Implementation Considerations: ● LOW ○ MEDIUM ○ DIFFICULT

Inspection Scheduling Process Improvements

PHA Process Improvement	Inspection Scheduling
Increase Recruitment	
Increase Retention	X
Improve Responsiveness	X
Improve Tenant-Landlord Relationship	
Improve Inspections Process	X
Minimize Bureaucracy	X



WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: PHAs that have long delays between the time an inspection is requested and subsequently scheduled may find that a slight change in how inspections are scheduled can lead to significant improvements in efficiency. This strategy requires the PHA to gather and analyze internal data, which can be a time-intensive process. Once compiled, however, the data can provide insight into how PHAs can maximize the time spent scheduling and conducting inspections.

Related Strategies:

- Inspections Technology
- Alternative Inspections Policies

IMPLEMENTATION

If the PHA uses an inspection software module or a third-party inspection service, much of the data below may be available through a report and data can be queried to analyze a longer period of time, up to a year or more, to gain big picture trends. PHAs should begin by gathering the following information:

- How are inspections scheduled? Are initial or re-inspections scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis? Are landlords able to select dates and times that work best? Are inspectors assigned by area? By inspection type? How often are re-scheduled inspections requested?
- On average, how much time passes between when an inspection is requested and when it is conducted? Does this vary by the type of



inspection? Are these timeframes in line with the timeframes that the PHA has told landlords they can expect?

- How many inspections are conducted on a weekly basis and what is the breakdown by type? PHAs should review data going back a couple of months to get an accurate picture.
- Are inspectors having issues making it to the property on-time? Why are there delays? How often do inspectors encounter no-shows?

Once this data has been gathered, PHAs may be able to see certain trends or issues.

The PHA may identify that inspectors are spending significant portions of their day commuting. This minimizes the number of inspections that can be completed daily and also increases the risk of delays and missed inspections windows due to unexpected traffic delays. The activities below offer ways that PHAs can minimize the amount of time spent commuting to maximize inspectors' and landlords' time.

Group Inspections: Grouping inspections by ZIP Code or by buildings can minimize travel time for inspections, reducing the potential for travel-related delays. This can help keep inspections on-time as well as increasing overall efficiency. Account for whether the PHA will perform annual or biennial inspections early to accomplish grouping and, if so, communicate these impacts to landlords.

Use Software to Optimize Inspection Routes: PHAs can also invest in software that can create optimal routes for inspections. While software can pose a significant upfront cost, PHAs with large service areas and a large number of units, might find manual grouping by ZIP Code or building challenging. Software is available that can group inspections, optimize travel routes based on real-time traffic, and update landlords with arrival times.

Grouping Inspections by Type: Some PHAs may find that dedicating certain days or times for certain types of inspections may streamline the scheduling process. For example, if a PHA finds that their numbers of initial inspections are low and infrequent, they could dedicate a portion of the day for these, keeping the remainder of the day open for other types of inspections. It should be noted that this type of scheduling is based on current trends and should be adjusted as needed. In the example above, should the PHA see an increase in the number of initial inspections, an adjustment to the scheduling process might be needed. PHAs should also make sure to allow time for emergency inspections.

Inspector Assignments: Depending on the volume and frequency of different types of inspections, PHAs might consider assigning certain types of inspections for individual inspectors. Similar to the activity above, a PHA with a high volume of annual inspections could assign two of their inspectors to conduct annual inspections and leave their remaining inspector available to conduct initial and emergency inspections. Assignments should be reviewed periodically to ensure that they are in line with the current inspection trends.

Create some flexibility in inspectors' schedules with some extra open appointment slots. These would allow for emergency inspections or last-minute landlord appointment requests. They would also allow for people who forgot about an inspection but who may still be available. Make sure inspectors can easily contact the tenant and the landlord so an inspection does not need to be rescheduled if the inspector is still in the area.



STRATEGY: ADMINISTRATIVE INSPECTION FLEXIBILITIES

Reviewing the PHA's current inspection policy to identify where implementing existing administrative flexibilities can simplify the process.

Who: All PHAs; Some activities are targeted to PHAs that have inspectors on staff.

Cost: \$ \$\$ \$\$\$

Implementation Considerations: ● LOW ○ MEDIUM ○ DIFFICULT

Administrative Inspection Flexibilities Process Improvements

PHA Process Improvement	Administrative Inspection Flexibilities
Increase Recruitment	
Increase Retention	X
Improve Responsiveness	
Improve Tenant-Landlord Relationship	
Improve Inspections Process	X
Minimize Bureaucracy	X



WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: There are several flexibilities that PHAs can implement to simplify and expedite the inspection process. PHAs should routinely review their policies to determine if a change might improve and simplify the process both for the PHA itself, landlords, tenants, and inspectors.

The following is a list of flexibilities that PHAs can implement. Incorporating any policy change to the inspection process will necessitate changes to written PHA policies and procedures. Additionally, the flexibilities listed below all have impacts for landlords, whether in the timing/frequency of inspections or the ways that they can conduct inspections and certify repairs. PHAs will need to consider how any change will be communicated to landlords and build adequate time for notification into their implementation timetable.

Related Strategies:

- Administrative Flexibilities to Increase Landlord Satisfaction

Alternative Inspections: PIH Notice 2017-20 Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act of 2016 (HOTMA) – Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Implementation Guidance includes a provision allowing PHAs to approve an assisted tenancy of a unit prior to the HQS inspection if the property has passed an alternative inspection within the past 24 months. The initial HQS inspection must still take place and the landlord will not receive HAP until the unit is inspected and determined to pass. However, once it is determined that



the unit meets HQS, the landlord will receive retroactive HAP for the period prior to the HQS determination. This can reduce the time that a landlord is not receiving HAP while awaiting an inspection. PHAs that implement this provision must take certain actions regarding their administrative plan and how they notify HUD and landlords. See PIH Notice 2017-20 for additional information.

If an inspection has non-life threatening (NLT) deficiencies, the landlord has 30 days to correct the deficiencies. The PHA may adopt policies that allow for a certification of corrected deficiencies through an alternate means of certification rather than requiring a re-inspection. The alternate means may include submission of photographic evidence that deficiencies are corrected. Additionally, for initial inspections, the PHA may adopt policies that allow for the payment of HAP prior to the correction of NLT deficiencies only.

Biennial (and Triennial) Inspections: Per 24 CFR 982.405, HUD requires that PHAs inspect each unit at least biennially (or triennially for some small rural PHAs). While PHAs are still required to conduct an initial inspection before a landlord receives HAP, a change to biennial (or triennial) inspections can alleviate administrative burden on PHAs, and in turn, the administrative burden on landlords. Moving to biennial or triennial inspections also frees up PHA resources to conduct other inspections more quickly. For more information on adopting biennial inspections, see PIH Notice 2016-05, Attachment K. For more information on triennial inspections, see 85 Fed. Reg. 11318 (Feb. 27, 2020).

Remote, Video-Assisted, or Virtual Inspections: Due to the COVID pandemic, PIH Notice 2020-13 (HA), REV-1 provides PHAs additional flexibilities for conducting inspections to meet HCV program requirements. With these flexibilities, a proxy, or person other than an HQS inspector or PHA staff member, utilizes video technology to show the HQS inspector around the unit, allowing the HQS inspector to complete the

New Policy?

Implementing a new inspection policy is a great opportunity for PHAs to reach out to landlords. Whether instruction on the new policy is delivered via video clip, webinar, newsletter, or in-person training, PHAs use the opportunity to improve communication and demonstrate the PHA's commitment to landlord satisfaction.

PHAs can use this opportunity to let landlords know about other changes and also as an outreach opportunity to hear from and interact with landlords. Even if notification is delivered through a static delivery method such as a newsletter, PHAs should include ways that landlords can reach out with questions or concerns.

PHAs should notify landlords about upcoming changes with plenty of lead time to allow for questions.

See Education and Outreach for additional information on how PHAs can provide information on new policy to landlords.

inspection remotely. HUD has issued some guidance on remote video inspections in COVID frequently asked questions (FAQs) documents. HUD is working to release guidance specific to conducting remote video inspections (RVI). Based on HUD's future assessments, the remote inspection options may extend beyond COVID-era, potentially becoming permanent part of the inspection protocol. PHAs should look for HUD guidance on how to conduct an RVI that will be issued shortly.

While conducting inspections remotely would involve some upfront planning and training (for both inspectors and landlords), this would potentially allow PHAs to increase the number of inspections completed daily, as travel time would be eliminated. In turn, appointment times/windows could be predicted with greater

accuracy minimizing the burden on landlords to set aside portions of their day.

See PIH Notice 2020-31 for additional information.

Verifying Deficiencies are Remedied: HUD provided PHAs the flexibility to allow landlords of voucher families to self-certify or otherwise document corrected deficiencies for certain types of inspections. PHAs that have made use of this flexibility have been able to decrease the number of re-inspections. Although landlords are already responsible for making corrections, a policy that enables the PHA to use landlord-provided information to verify that deficiencies have been corrected saves landlords time and money by eliminating the need to schedule and be present at a re-inspection.

PHAs are able to customize this flexibility to meet their needs. For example, PHAs can restrict self-certification to landlords who have a documented history of compliance with HUD-established physical inspections standards or to certain NLT deficiencies (or a maximum number of NLT deficiencies). A PHA may require landlords to submit work orders, bills, or photos as proof of repair. The decisions that the PHA makes must be incorporated into the Administrative Plan.

See PIH Notice 2011-29 and PIH Notice 2013-17 for additional information.

