TECHNOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Technology facilitates multiple options for public housing agencies (PHAs) to improve their relationships with landlords, provide landlords with access to information previously only available by request or mail, and ease the concerns and frustrations surrounding the inspections process. Technology-focused strategies can range from simple, low-cost options such as adding information to a PHA website to high-tech software applications that can optimally route inspections appointments and provide real-time arrival updates to landlords.

The following strategies are included in this section:

- HCV Landlord Webpage
- HCV Landlord Portal
- Inspections Technology

Related strategies:

- Inspections
- Education and Outreach

The strategies in this technology chapter address the following areas:

Technology Process Improvements

PHA Process Improvement	HCV Landlord Webpage	HCV Landlord Portal	Inspections Technology
Increase Recruitment	X		
Increase Retention	X	X	X
Improve Responsiveness	X	X	X
Improve Tenant-Landlord Relationship	X	X	
Improve Inspections Process	X	X	X
Minimize Bureaucracy	X	X	X

STRATEGY: HCV LANDLORD WEBPAGE

Providing information to landlords about the PHA and the HCV program on the PHA's website.

Who: PHAs with a mid-sized or larger HCV program that already have a PHA website. PHAs located in areas where landlords are used to finding information online.

Cost: **$** $$ $$$ **Minimal for PHAs that already have and maintain a website.**

Implementation Considerations: ● LOW ○ MEDIUM ○ DIFFICULT

HCV Landlord Webpage
PHA Process Improvements

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

participation, how the program works, what to expect, what forms are required, and steps to participate!

WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: While many PHAs have websites, and many of those websites include information specific to the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program, the typical audience for HCV information has been tenants. PHAs should consider designating a section of their websites specifically for HCV landlord-related information. Making information available and easily accessible to landlords can serve multiple purposes. HCV landlord information on a website can:

- Encourage landlord participation in the HCV program through readily available and easily digestible information. PHAs can make joining the HCV program easier by providing basic information about the HCV program, including benefits of

TIP: Landlord-oriented information can answer many questions, but it is still important to provide ways that landlords can contact someone at the PHA if there are further questions. Be sure that someone regularly monitors the landlord website emails and/or telephone messages to provide timely responses.

- Address landlord questions up front: Providing landlords with easy access to information can save PHA staff time – a direct benefit to PHAs. Enabling landlords to access information via a PHA website could allow PHA staff to redirect time previously spent fielding inquiries from landlords toward other outreach and engagement activities.

- Empower landlords: By making landlord-specific information available on the web, landlords can obtain information quickly and easily, any time of day. Furthermore, providing information that is developed for landlords and, therefore, is presented in a way that makes sense for landlords, helps to highlight the importance of the landlord's role in the HCV process. The information provided will help build the knowledge base of HCV landlords so they are more comfortable with the program and their role.

Related Strategies:

- Landlord Portal

- New Landlord Orientation

- Information Sharing

IMPLEMENTATION AND DESIGN

This strategy will primarily address HCV landlord-specific information and features that PHAs should consider including on their landlord-specific webpage rather than focusing on the PHA's general website design. However, below are a few things PHAs should consider when thinking about general PHA website design.

PHA Website

While many PHAs already have websites, they vary in design and complexity depending on the resources of the PHA. PHAs that do

NOTICE: For the purpose of this strategy, **website** refers to the online collection of webpages linked together. The term **webpage** refers to a specific page with specific content located on a PHA's website. A website is typically comprised of multiple webpages.

not currently have websites should consider setting up a simple website that contains basic information such as contact information and the programs the PHA offers. Websites do not have to be complex — even a simple webpage with minimal graphics can be effective in delivering information. There are even several website platforms that are very user-friendly and would allow PHA staff to quickly design and publish a website at minimal cost, without having to engage an outside vendor.

Designated HCV or HCV Landlord Webpage(s)

Depending on the size of the PHA's HCV program, PHAs should consider dedicating a webpage to the HCV program and, specifically, an area for landlords. If the PHA frequently receives inquiries from landlords regarding certain aspects of the program or requests for particular forms, a page dedicated to landlords providing that information might be especially useful. Navigation to these pages should be prominently placed and easy to find from the PHA website's homepage.

TIP: Make your website easy to use! For PHAs that provide lots of information, a prominent main navigation menu for key topics with easy-to-find subtopics will help website users quickly locate the information they need. When deciding how to organize a website, PHAs should imagine they are completely unfamiliar with the HCV program and consider what headings and links from the main page would be most helpful to a new user.

More and more, users access websites from their mobile telephones. Developers should test how a webpage will looks on the smaller screen. Is text readable; can the user click through?

Webpages must also meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility requirements.

Updates and IT Content Development

The content on a webpage may need to be changed quickly! PHAs should identify who will be responsible for developing and updating content. Additionally, PHAs should have a plan for updating webpage content. For example, will this be an internal function or will the PHA contract these services to an outside vendor?

Web content must be accessible for persons with disabilities, in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA. The obligation to ensure web content accessibility for persons with disabilities includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that all images, including graphs and charts, include appropriate alt-text.

CONTENT

The content on a PHA's landlord-specific webpage is generally focused on meeting the needs of two groups of individuals:

- New or prospective landlords: Those who are interested in becoming an HCV landlord or have recently joined
- Current landlords: Landlords who currently participate in the HCV program

While some information will be applicable to both groups, each will have unique reasons for visiting the PHA's HCV webpage. The information below will discuss content that should be included to address the needs of both groups, as well as content that is of interest to a wider audience.

TIP: Information should be written with landlords as the audience. Not all landlords or website viewers will be familiar with the program.

Don't reinvent the wheel! The **HUD HCV Landlord Resource webpage** has many resources that PHAs can use or link to:

https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_ indian_housing/programs/hcv/landlord

New or Prospective Landlords

A PHA website might be one of the first exposures a potential landlord has to the HCV program. PHAs should develop content based on the reasons why a prospective landlord might visit a PHA website. What programs or PHA services would interest a prospective landlord? The PHA's website design and content can make it easier for the landlord to locate HCV program information rather than, for instance, other PHA programs or general operations. The table on the following page is framed with potential headings the PHA could use on its website or HCV webpage to point landlords toward the information they seek. This content could be organized into an informational hierarchy using sub-navigation menus.

SUBJECT	CONTENT
HCV PROGRAM OVERVIEW	Potential landlords who are interested in the HCV program may have little to no knowledge of what the program is, why they should participate, and steps they should take if they are interested in participating. PHA websites should contain a concise overview of the program. This is also a great opportunity for PHAs to promote participation by including benefits to landlords.
STEPS TO BECOMING A LANDLORD IN THE HCV PROGRAM	Landlords may seek different information on becoming a landlord based on where they are in the process. If a voucher family has viewed a vacant unit, the landlord may want information about required forms, the lease and housing assistance payments (HAP) contract, and inspections. Other landlords will benefit from information about how to market vacant units to voucher families and list units with the PHA, if that is an option. If possible, the PHA should provide links to required forms, information on how and where to submit completed forms, how to request additional information and how to join the PHA's list of participating landlords.
HCV ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	If not included in the program overview, PHAs should include the roles and responsibilities of the PHA, the landlord, and the tenant. Information should include required actions as well as the limitations of each party.
HCV PROCESS OVERVIEW	Providing information on the HCV process can help landlords feel more comfortable. It also sets and manages expectations. Based on the information provided in this section of the website, landlords should be able to understand: • How a voucher family is briefed and searches for a unit • When the PHA accepts a Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) form and inspects • How a landlord joins the program, lists units, and accepts a voucher family as a tenant If possible, information about the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections process and requirements, as well as general timeframes for all steps mentioned above, should be included. Some of these topics can be elaborated upon in greater detail in other areas of the website. PHAs can link to these sections in order to keep the process overview section brief.
CALENDAR AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES	PHAs should include important deadlines and, if offered, opportunities for landlords to learn about the program. If the PHA has an online calendar, a link should be provided or the PHA should list landlord events.

See Appendix E1 for sample language or additional information related to the content tables for PHA landlord websites.

Current Landlords

Landlords that currently participate in the HCV program are most likely seeking targeted, issue-specific information about the HCV program. If the PHA has a landlord portal, some of this content might also be made available there (see the Landlord Portal strategy in this chapter).   Keep in mind, this information could also be useful for prospective landlords who are seeking more detailed information about the HCV program up front.

SUBJECT	CONTENT
INSPECTIONS INFORMATION	The inspections process can be an area of confusion and frustration for landlords. PHAs should include information on the typical inspections process at their agency, including timing and scheduling, as well as general HQS requirements. PHAs might also want to include information on unit deficiencies that frequently cause units to fail inspections. This information can help manage landlord expectations and minimize the number of re-inspections. **TIP:** Consider making information, such as a checklist, about inspections available in PDF format on the webpage so landlords can print the information and take it with them to their unit. PHAs can provide checklists or materials they developed specifically to help landlords prepare for inspections or link to the *HUD HCV Landlord Resources webpage* inspection checklist and form or the *HUD Housing Quality Standards webpage*.
PAYMENT STANDARDS AND UTILITY ALLOWANCE SCHEDULES	A common question from landlords is, "How much money will I receive?" PHAs should provide information on their agency's payment standards, including an explanation of what payment standards are, and how they are calculated by explaining concepts like Fair Market Rents (FMRs) or Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs). PHAs might also want to include a chart of payment standards to indicate the maximum amount of rent landlords could receive or provide a way for landlords to request and receive a reasonable rent estimate. To ensure that expectations are managed, PHAs should be sure to explain that PHAs must determine the amount of rent that is reasonable for a specific unit in comparison to similar units. Therefore, the landlord may be offered a rent amount that is lower than the payment standard or the landlord can sometimes get a rent amount that is more than the payment standard, if the voucher family is willing to pay the amount above the payment standard. Some PHAs post their utility allowance schedules on their website. They may post a link to allowance schedules with a breakdown by utility type and bedroom size. They may discuss the methodology behind the schedule. Some PHAs also provide a utility calculator. PHAs should explain that their payment standards are meant to cover the rent to owner and utility costs. PHAs should consider providing information on how to request a rent increase as this is a commonly misunderstood process.

PROPERTY LISTINGS	The HCV program can provide an opportunity to fill vacant units quickly. PHAs should offer information on how landlords can market vacant units based on local practice.
NEWS	The Information Sharing strategy in the Education and Outreach chapter discusses the types of information that PHAs might want to share with landlords. One potential method mentioned is sharing information via the PHA's website. Designating a section of the website to landlord and HCV-specific news is a cost-effective way of making news available to landlords as well as the general public.

REMINDER: The amount that a PHA determines is necessary to cover the resident's reasonable utility costs is the **utility allowance**.

FORMS

PHAs should consider making common forms available via a website. When possible, adding processes that allow forms to be completed, signed, submitted, and processed digitally can be a good long-term investment. These processes make it even easier for landlords to complete required documents from a location and at a time of the landlord's choosing. They can type in the information and then send via email or print and submit a paper copy. Several common forms are available on the *HUD HCV Landlord Resources webpage*.

Electronic forms related to federal housing programs must conform to HUD Section 504 accessibility regulations.

STRATEGY: LANDLORD PORTAL

Providing information to landlords about their individual profile, units, payments, and tenants in a secure electronic website portal.

Who: PHAs that already use a vendor that provides portals, and PHAs that are considering investing in a portal (which includes tenant and PHA elements as well as landlord elements).

Cost: $ **$$** $$$ Moderate for PHAs that already work with a vendor offering web-based services. May be more substantial for PHAs that do not currently work with a vendor, or would like to develop this feature in-house.

Implementation Considerations: ● LOW ● MEDIUM ○ DIFFICULT

HCV Landlord Portal
PHA Process Improvements

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

WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: One of the major challenges facing PHAs is responding in a timely manner to landlords' requests for information. The HCV program is the largest rental housing assistance program in the United States and, for many PHAs, their single largest program. As a result, the number of landlords who participate can be quite large and the volume of requests for information can be challenging, at times, for PHAs. In an online portal, current landlords log into a secure website where they can access a broad range of information specific to their HCV housing portfolio. This 24/7 access to information may decrease the volume of inquiries PHAs receive.

In addition to reducing the number of inquiries received, PHAs might also see a reduction in postage costs as a result of distributing information electronically.

While a PHA website with a landlord page offers information relevant to all landlords, a portal provides current HCV landlords with secure access to information specific to their portfolio. Commonly, this includes useful payment information including the dates and amounts of payments broken out by tenants and units. This information is especially helpful for landlords with multiple units in the program.

Note: Providing payment information online typically requires that landlords accept direct deposit of HAP. For some PHAs and some landlords, switching to direct deposit may be an extra first step in implementing a portal.

Many portal accounts also provide inspection appointment dates, inspection reports, and results. When the inspection and portal software are compatible, these reports and results may be sent from a mobile device, such as a mobile phone, and uploaded to the portal in real or near-real time.

Some portals are designed to allow forms, other paperwork, or messages to be sent between landlords and PHAs.

Related Strategies:

- Inspections Technology

- Landlord Outreach Events

- Information Sharing

IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

A landlord portal is an investment for PHAs. PHAs should carefully consider whether the information they want to share with landlords is best provided through the PHA website and/or through a dedicated portal. To get a sense of the types of information that portals can provide, PHAs may want to review the products of different software vendors.

If a PHA has a tenant portal, the information provided there to assist voucher families with navigating the process may offer the PHA ideas about what to offer from the landlord's perspective. Also, the experience that voucher families or case managers report in using the portal may offer the PHA areas of interest to follow up on when researching the landlord portal.

Understanding what a portal can provide can help PHAs decide whether they want to implement a portal by using vendor software or by developing one in-house. PHAs must also consider how they will roll out their new portal, including providing training to their current landlords who may have varying levels of comfort with technology and with passwords or user names.

Is a Portal Right for Your PHA?

Below are ways PHAs can evaluate if a landlord portal may be a good fit:

- Talk to staff: Review the number of inquiries received that could be addressed in a portal. Ask staff if they think landlords would utilize a portal. Does the PHA have IT staff to maintain the portal? Does the PHA have staff available to train landlords on the new portal, including some hands-on assistance for those less familiar with technology? If a portal is an additional module on vendor-supplied software, training and support may be part of that contract, but PHA staff will still find situations where they will need to provide support to some users.

- Ask landlords: Consider doing a formal, or even an informal, poll of landlords to gauge their level of interest in a portal and their comfort level with online technology. The PHA could administer a poll at an upcoming PHA event or via email. When designing the poll, PHAs should have an idea of the range of portal functions and what the PHA would be open to implementing.

  Note: Portals do not serve prospective landlords. Information that the PHA wants to provide digitally to a prospective landlord would be more accessible from a website, rather than a secure portal requiring a username/password for access.

Tip: Talk to other PHAs, your industry group(s), and local government agencies to see if they utilize a landlord portal and ask them about start-up costs, operational costs and needs, and the successes and challenges.

Portal Selection

A PHA that has determined a landlord portal would be beneficial will next examine whether they will design and create a portal in-house or whether they will contract with a vendor.

Costs

PHAs should note that they may see a slight cost savings due to the reduction of printing and postage expenses. A landlord portal may also result in savings of staff time answering questions.

Using a Software Vendor

Since portal software typically interacts with other PHA information such as HAP amounts, inspection appointment dates and results, and direct deposit dates, the most important characteristic of any portal software is that it can interact with existing PHA computer systems to share the information the PHA wants to have available on the portal. PHAs will want to check with any portal software vendor to see if that software can function as a standalone module if that software vendor is not the PHA's primary vendor. Costs vary depending on the vendor and the services offered. Be sure to review what services commercial vendors offer and compare start-up and operational costs before deciding to develop an in-house portal. It is important to understand the ongoing support or training that a vendor may offer, the associated cost, and what in-house IT staff may need to learn to supplement the vendor in operations or emergencies.

The PHA will need to devote some resources to evaluating which software and/or services fit best and what offerings will provide the PHA the greatest return on investment. The PHA should also consider what features will help landlords do their jobs effectively. PHAs should ask how the potential portal features interface with current and desired PHA practices. For instance, will it allow PHAs to move to direct deposit of HAP? Will landlords be able to

receive inspection results through the portal the same day as an inspection or quicker than they normally would? How might a portal impact PHA staff time beyond fewer landlord requests for information? Is the portal similar to neighboring PHAs' portals, so landlords that own units in both jurisdictions do not have to learn to use very different portal designs?

Portal features PHAs have noted are helpful to their landlords or that they hope to add to their existing portals include features where landlords can:

- View HAP history and remittances
- View inspections results and deficiencies
- Submit photos of corrected deficiencies to meet HQS requirements
- See previous and upcoming inspection dates
- Request rent changes
- Review status of rent increases
- Receive notifications and send messages
- Download forms
- View electronic copies of signed forms including contracts and leases
- Submit completed forms with electronic signature
- Download 1099 tax forms

Whether the product of a vendor or designed by the PHA, access to the portal and content on the portal must be accessible for persons with disabilities, in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA. The obligation to ensure web content accessibility for persons with disabilities includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that all images, including graphs and charts, include appropriate alt-text..

Procurement

PHAs must follow their procurement policy if they contract with a vendor.

If the PHA implements any feature that allows for the submission of forms or inquiries, the PHA will need to plan for staff to process the forms and requests in a timely manner. It will also want to ensure that the feature provides the landlord with a confirmation that the item was submitted. Ideally, the confirmation should provide the landlord with a brief message about what he or she can expect as next steps. These actions help to build satisfaction for the user, in this case, the landlord.

Whether a portal is developed using vendor software or in-house IT resources, the PHA must develop and implement policies and procedures to ensure the security of data on the portal. Data requiring security includes, for example, personally identifiable information and bank account information of tenants and landlords. The PHA should post information in the portal to let landlords know what these policies and procedures are.

In-House Portal Development

Some PHAs develop their own landlord portals if they have robust IT support and specific items they want to share with landlords that commercial vendors do not provide. To ensure that development costs, including updates and modifications to the initial version, are kept within a budget, the PHA will need to invest substantial time in planning to ensure that the portal can access needed information from other PHA computer systems and operate in an intuitive manner for landlords. A portal that serves the entire housing authority may be most cost-effective, since costs can be spread among departments, but, naturally, the planning process is more extensive. At the same time, creating a budget for a project that spans departments could also be quite complex since different departmental funding sources could have varying commingling constraints. It is important to allocate adequate staff time to planning so that the portal meets expectations, is useful to landlords, and does not require costly frequent changes. There will, of course, be operational

updates that are regularly or periodically needed and the PHA will need to budget for these.

Tip: Some PHAs develop their own portal. One PHA noted that they chose this approach because they wanted the portal to serve their entire PHA and their departments were organized differently than vendor software allowed. It is important to note that the development time and financial investment were significant.

Training

Introducing a portal as an information resource may be a big change for PHA staff and landlords. Although the increased access to information is likely to improve landlord satisfaction in the long term, in the beginning, staff and landlords may experience some confusion and frustration. Offering training to familiarize landlords, including some initial intensive hands-on assistance, may lessen the learning curve – just be sure that PHA staff members are also comfortable accessing the features of the portal. If the PHA uses vendor software, be sure to explore all of the virtual webinars or other training opportunities available through the vendor.

REMINDER: Report on the implementation of a portal in the PHA newsletter or post on the PHA's website. This is an opportunity to highlight the PHA's commitment to landlord support and how the portal can increase PHA staff's ability to provide requested information more quickly and effectively than in the past. If the PHA decides to implement a portal based on a discussion with another PHA, briefly profile that PHA's experience in the newsletter or in social media.

Staff needs and concerns should be thoroughly addressed prior to introducing the portal to landlords. Staff members need to understand what landlords will see and experience to be able to offer the best assistance. When the portal is new, it may not always function as imagined, and staff will be able to meet expectations better if they can confidently say, "I don't know the answer, but let me check and get back to you."

Some training options include:

- In-person trainings: PHAs can include portal demonstrations in large and/or small group trainings. This may be offered as part of an already-scheduled education and outreach event. Staff should test the portal in the training location prior to the event to ensure smooth access. Staff should be prepared to walk landlords through the log-in process one by one and answer questions. Individual meetings can also be beneficial for landlords who may have limited experience with technology.

- Webinars: Hosting a virtual event through a webinar is a cost-effective way to train groups and individuals. A benefit of virtual events is that they can be filmed or recorded and, thus, available for landlords to review on their own timeframe.

- Pre-recorded demonstration: The PHA can post a video demonstration of a staff person logging in (password hidden) as a landlord, navigating through the features in the portal while explaining what she or he is doing, and providing tips such as noting whether log-in or password information is case sensitive or how to search on the portal, if appropriate.

No matter what option the PHA chooses for providing training, landlords will have questions when they access the system for the first time. During any training session, PHAs should provide information on how to contact the PHA for assistance, specifying contacts that are appropriate for portal questions. Ensure that replies and assistance are thorough and prompt to overcome reluctance or concerns.

Although support needs will lessen as landlords become used to the portal, there will always be some support required, particularly for new landlords that join the program. PHAs that currently have portals noted there can be challenges with staff turnover, especially at large property management companies, and new staff may need assistance with new passwords and usernames.

Benefits of a Portal

To encourage the use of the portal, PHAs may consider highlighting incentives related to portal use like receiving payment more quickly through direct deposit or quicker access to inspection results. When landlords log into the portal for information that was typically mailed – HAP history, for example – landlords may have access to other useful features of the portal. They will have the opportunity to discover information that might replace the need to call the PHA. The PHA should balance these benefits against the risk that some landlords might be unable or unwilling to use the portal and may be deterred from participating in the HCV program.

STRATEGY: INSPECTIONS TECHNOLOGY

Utilizing technology to improve the inspections process.

Who: **All PHAs regardless of size and/or location.**

Cost: **$ $$** $$$

Implementation Considerations: ● **LOW** ● **MEDIUM** ○ DIFFICULT

Inspections Technology PHA Process Improvements

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

WHAT THIS IS AND WHY IT WORKS: PHAs are using technology to improve the inspections process including:

- Helping both landlords and PHAs to schedule and track inspections using scheduling and notification apps and direct electronic communications. Technology can be used to alert landlords to an appointment date, offer available windows of time, and update the landlord via text or email with changes to appointment times or an inspector's expected arrival time.

- Providing inspection results quickly – sometimes in real time – to landlords through portal and inspections software applications. This may include conducting an inspection with the HQS form on a mobile device that can be submitted

to an inspection company website or a PHA portal as soon as the inspection is completed. It might also include conducting a video inspection of a location using a mobile device and interacting with a remote inspector who may request certain photos be submitted during the inspection. The adoption of new technology to facilitate inspections can require changes to PHA procedures and policies. Some of these strategies require specific equipment and some require additional costs of vendor software or third-party inspections contracts. Others may require in-house IT or other staff resources.

Incorporating strategies like these into the PHA's HCV inspection process may make the process more predictable and streamlined. This may save the landlord time, energy,

and money, which increases the landlord's satisfaction with the HCV program.

For information on additional strategies PHAs can use to improve their inspections process, see the Inspections chapter.

Related Strategies:

- Landlord Portal

- Education and Outreach

- Inspections

MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF RE-INSPECTIONS

HUD has made administrative flexibilities available to PHAs to reduce administrative burden and optimize service provisions within their HCV programs. One of these flexibilities, outlined in *PIH Notice 2013-17*, provides PHAs with the ability to use photographs to verify corrected deficiencies to minimize physical re-inspections, saving time and money for both landlords and PHAs, while still ensuring housing safety and quality. See the reference guide for information about this administrative flexibility.

To use this flexibility, the PHA would follow PIH Notice 2013-17 and create a process to include these actions: After a unit fails inspection due to non-life-threatening deficiencies, the landlord has the correction completed. The landlord provides proof of the corrected deficiency by electronically sending a labeled photograph to the PHA. If the photo provides adequate evidence of the corrected deficiency, the PHA notifies the landlord that no re-inspection is required and saves the photo to a secure location.

Please note, there are instances when PHAs are required to conduct re-inspections. PIH Notice 2013-17 provides additional information on when a re-inspection of a unit must occur.

Implementation Considerations

To determine whether using photographs to minimize physical re-inspections would be beneficial to landlords and PHAs, PHAs should consider the following questions:

- Do the parties who would be responsible for taking the photos and approving the photos want to use this flexibility?

- Will it save the PHA and landlords time?

- Does the PHA have the staffing and computer storage or software to carry out this strategy?

PHAs should consider talking with landlords to gauge their interest in utilizing photos to verify corrected deficiencies. The landlords would need to have a way of taking photos and sending images. This may be done on a smart phone or tablet with a data plan or internet access, for example. They would also need to understand and have the technological ability to label the electronic photos in a manner that would match specific deficiencies (as outlined by the PHA), and transmit the photos via email, text, or other electronic means to the PHA. With landlord interest, the PHA can implement a session to train landlords on photo submission.

PHAs should also discuss the types of deficiencies that commonly cause units to fail inspections with inspections and PHA staff:

- Could those corrections be documented in photos?

- Would a process that uses photos to decrease re-inspection visits save time for inspectors and landlords?

If the PHA finds there are administrative or systematic barriers to using photographs, other strategies may be more useful in addressing landlord concerns with inspections (see the Inspections chapter). As noted in PIH Notice 2013-17, there are several steps PHAs must take before using photos to document inspections. PHAs should follow guidance in the notice, but PHAs must plan on how they will

store and label photos, match photos to specific deficiencies, and match photos submitted by landlords appropriately.

Procedural and Technology Consideration

If the PHA allows for landlord-submitted photos, the PHA must provide a process for how the landlord submits the photos and how the PHA will verify the photographic proof. This may include providing an instructional handout to landlords during the initial inspection and creating an email address for receiving pictures. Procedural changes to the HQS inspection process should be documented in the PHA's Admin Plan per 24 CFR 982.54.

It is important for the PHA to evaluate how it will store these photos or photo files. As digital files, the photos would take up computer storage space and may require an upgrade of PHA technology. Printing the photos would also require storage space and attention to ensuring that the labeling stays with the photo. Whether storing digital or physical photos, PHAs also need to ensure that photos are maintained securely and do not violate the privacy of tenants.

Tip: One PHA noted that inspectors may use a video call to confirm that minor corrections were completed.

PROVIDING QUICK RESULTS TO LANDLORDS

PHAs may use software programs or contract with third-party inspections companies to notify landlords of inspections results quickly or in real time. Both the services and the software involve inspectors conducting their inspections through a software application on a mobile device or laptop computer. In some cases, results are emailed to landlords and/or uploaded to a housing authority's computer system or landlord portal. PHAs that have this capacity via a landlord portal have noted that it

is one of the features that landlords utilize the most often.

Implementation Considerations

PHAs need to identify software or companies that can receive and upload mobile inspection results. If the software desired is not an optional module on the PHA's current software, then the PHA will want to ensure that the software it is considering for purchase can be used as a stand-alone module. PHA inspectors also need access to appropriate technology including a wireless connection to be able to upload inspection results. This may include purchasing equipment, such as cameras, smart phones, and/or tablets, as well as providing remote internet access to upload locations service to inspectors (for example, via a large data phone plan or hot spot).

SCHEDULING

Inspections scheduling poses challenges to PHAs with internal inspection staff, landlords, and third-party inspection companies. Landlords can lose time and money when they receive an inspection date without an associated time. A landlord with a different full-time job may have to take a day off to wait for the inspector. Landlords, PHAs, and inspectors can lose time and money if a scheduled inspection is cancelled at the last minute.

PHAs can improve the appointment and scheduling process through expectations and resource management (see the Inspections chapter). PHAs can also use software modules and applications to make the process more predictable and reliable, improving the experience for all involved.

Some automated inspection scheduling letters will offer the PHA the ability to set a potential window of time during which the inspector will arrive. The software may allow the letter to designate the appointment for a morning or afternoon slot as defined by the PHA.

Others provide even shorter windows. Some inspection scheduling software modules can assign appointments in half-hour to one-hour increments on the inspection scheduling letter for a given set of appointments on a given day. Of course, having such a very specific appointment time sets an expectation the inspector may not be able to meet due to traffic and any number of other factors. If a PHA chooses to set specific times, they may want to include a note in the letter stating that circumstances might cause the time to change and ensure the inspector can communicate scheduling changes to the landlord in a timely manner. Improvements PHAs can make to provide better estimates for when the inspector will be at a property can go a long way in improving PHA and landlord relationships.

It can also happen that the inspector arrives for an inspection to find no one present at the unit. A PHA can use a calendar application to create an alarm to remind PHA inspection staff to call residents or landlords in advance of an inspection. A PHA might also use software that automates scheduling reminder calls. One benefit of a reminder call application is that the software creates a contact list that offers the PHA a record of its attempted outreach.

The same software applications that create appointment letters can group these appointments by proximity to allow for some scheduling efficiency. For example, the PHA can select all inspections that are located in a certain section of town or all the inspections due in a particular building. These appointment software applications generally have the capability to interact with mobile inspections software (if that is not a built-in feature) to populate the appointments, including a map and unit contact information, onto a mobile device. The mobile inspections software does not typically offer an option to email the landlord automatically through the software. The inspector may have the ability to see contact information on the appointment notification. The PHA may decide to have the inspector text or email a landlord when the
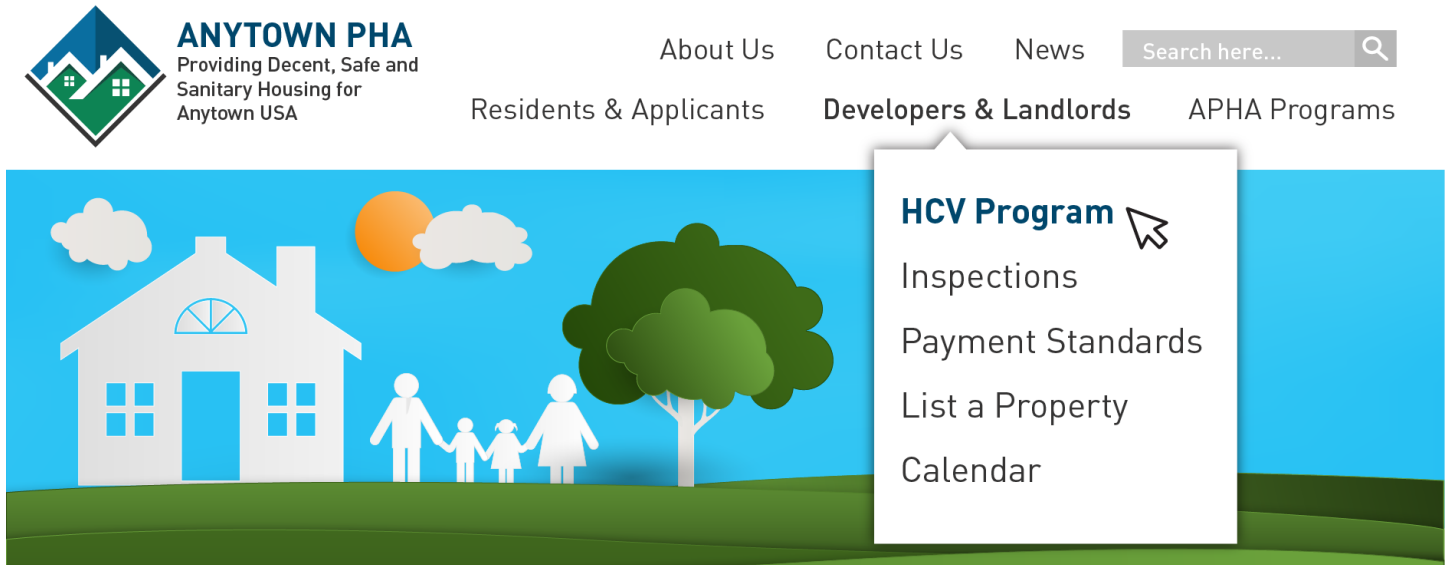
inspector is on the way or if an inspection is delayed as a way of improving the inspections process.

Most HCV inspection software does not have the capability to create a route of the inspector's appointments through the course of a day or to optimize the routing based on current circumstances or most efficient trips. The inspector more often maps the day's schedule appointment-by-appointment using a map application. Software is available for purchase that uses artificial intelligence, which can help create optimal routes for inspectors and provide changes in real time based on traffic. The application also offers real-time updates to landlords on when inspectors will arrive; PHA management can access the application from their own devices to view statistics or inspector progress. PHAs might want to consider partnering with other PHAs to obtain better pricing for this software.

APPENDIX E1: SAMPLE PHA WEBSITE

Sample PHA HCV Website Layout and Content

The below is a sample of how a PHA could lay out their website. Sample language or suggested content is also included below. PHAs can take this information and tailor it to their programs. Information that PHAs can utilize is also available on the **HUD HCV Landlord Resource page** at: *https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/landlord*.

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HCV Program

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is the Federal Government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses and apartments.

The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program.

Housing Choice Vouchers are administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs) like Anytown PHA. Anytown PHA receives federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to administer the voucher program.

NOTICE: This overview section should include a high-level description of the HCV program. The majority of this sample text is taken from the HUD HCV Landlord Resource page. The overview of benefits for landlords of participating in the HCV program include:

- Reliable, guaranteed payments and comparable rents.
- Ability to give back to the community through providing affordable housing for families.
- PHAs should include highlights specific to their HCV program.
- Services that the PHA provides such as free property listing, landlord portal, orientation sessions and other landlord events, direct deposit, and tenant screening.

A family that is issued a Housing Choice Voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family's choice where the landlord agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family's present residence. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety.

A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by Anytown PHA on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by Anytown PHA.

Learn more about the HCV program below. When you're ready to sign up, see the "Steps to Becoming a Landlord in the HCV Program" section below or contact Ms. Jane Doe at anytownlandlord@apha.org or 111-111-1111.

> **NOTICE:** Make sure to include information on how to reach the PHA.

Steps to Becoming a Landlord in the HCV Program

Becoming an Anytown Housing Authority landlord is simple! To become a landlord with the HCV program, you will need an HCV tenant. To get your property seen by HCV families:

1. **In your marketing materials, always mention that your property is available for voucher families.**

2. **Market your unit with us.** [Link to the Anytown PHA property list]

3. **Attend one of our outreach sessions to learn more about the HCV Program.** [Link to Anytown PHA calendar.]

> **NOTICE:** This information will be relevant to landlords who want to attract a voucher family and also to landlords who have already had interest from a voucher family. It will be PHA-specific. However, steps should be clearly outlined and, if possible, applicable forms should be linked.

4. **If a voucher family requests to rent your property:**

    a. **Conduct your usual screening.**

    b. **You and the voucher family fill out and submit the request for tenancy approval (RFTA), which the voucher family will have.**

    c. **Prepare the property for inspection using the Housing Quality Standards checklist.** [link to the inspections page of Anytown PHA]

    d. **You and the voucher family will sign your lease and you and the PHA will sign the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) contract.**

Roles and Responsibilities

The HCV program has many partners. A summary of each party's role is below.

HUD: HUD provides funds to allow PHAs to make housing assistance payments on behalf of the HCV tenants. HUD also pays the PHA a fee for the costs of administering the program. HUD monitors PHA administration of the program to ensure program rules are properly followed.

> **NOTICE:** This information is from the HUD HCV Landlord Resources webpage. PHAs can tailor this section, but should include the major roles and responsibilities of each party to set up expectations from the start.

Public Housing Agency: The PHA administers the HCV program locally and provides the HCV tenant with the housing assistance. The PHA must examine the tenant's income and household composition, and ensure that the housing unit meets minimum housing quality standards. The PHA enters into a contract with the landlord to provide housing assistance payments on behalf of the family.

Landlord: The role of the landlord in the voucher program is to provide decent, safe, and sanitary housing to a tenant at a reasonable rent. The dwelling unit must pass the program's housing quality standards and be maintained up to those standards as long as the owner receives housing assistance payments. In addition, the landlord is expected to provide services as agreed to in the lease signed with the tenant and the contract signed with the PHA.
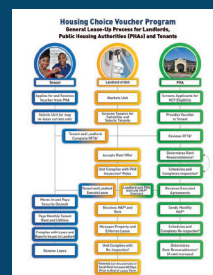
Tenant: When a tenant selects a housing unit, they are expected to comply with the lease and the program requirements, pay their share of rent on time, maintain the unit in good condition, and notify the PHA of any changes in income or family composition.

HCV Process Overview

NOTICE: This section may share some content with the "steps for becoming a landlord." The PHA can include information in a narrative or graphics such as a flow chart. The narrative or graphics should reflect the process at the PHA.

The flowchart is available on the HUD HCV Landlord Resources webpage.

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Inspection Information

Before a Voucher family can rent a unit, it must pass a Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection.

Initial inspections are usually scheduled within **[___]** days of receipt of the Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA). The PHA will provide a **[___]**-hour visit window. The landlord must be present for the inspection to take place. The inspector will conduct the inspection using **[_____]**. The inspector sends the inspection results to the **[_____]** and the landlord can access the results via **[_____]**

Any items that do not pass the inspection are called "deficiencies." The inspector will provide information on what corrections are needed for the deficiency and the timeframe to make corrections.

Additional inspections are required on an **[_____]** basis or may be requested for emergency circumstances. For periodic or emergency inspections, if the landlord does not make corrections within the required timeframe, Anytown PHA may have to take enforcement action. For deficiencies which are non-life-threatening, Anytown PHA allows a landlord to provide evidence of the non-life-threatening correction by emailing a photo of the correction. Please contact the landlord liaison for additional instructions.

> **NOTICE:** The PHA can include information about what is inspected under an HQS inspection including a link to the inspection form, how inspections are scheduled, the process for correcting deficiencies, and when the landlord can expect to receive pass/fail results.
>
> Inspections information is also available on the HUD HCV Landlord Resource webpage.

Payment Standards and Utility Allowance Schedules

A payment standard is Anytown PHA's maximum allowable monthly assistance toward a voucher family's gross rent. The gross rent is the total of the rent charged by the landlord and the utility allowance (for those essential utilities that are the voucher family's responsibility). PHAs determine the amount of rent that is reasonable for a specific unit in comparison to similar units. Follow this link to the payment standards, by submarket and bedroom size, for Anytown PHA.

Information is also available on the HUD HCV Landlord Resource webpage. [Include link]

Please note the amounts listed are the maximum payments that the PHA may pay the landlord. PHAs determine payments based on an analysis of current rents for comparable units, preferably within the same submarket or within close vicinity of the unit. The landlord may be offered a payment amount that is lower than the payment standard or the landlord can sometimes get a rent amount that is more than the payment standard, if the voucher family can afford to pay the amount above the payment standard.

Payment standards do not limit the rent a landlord may charge. The maximum contract rent a landlord may charge is based on the reasonable rent for the unit and the family's income.

NOTICE: In this section, a PHA would include information on payment standards. Often, this is in the form of a table containing each submarket and the maximum payment standards for each bedroom size. Some PHAs include this information linked to a map so landlords can see where their property is located and the associated payment standard.

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Property Listings

Anytown PHA posts property listings for landlords including up to five photos. Listings should include the number of bedrooms, the street address, information on who pays utilities, and contact information.

If you are interested in listing a property, please contact Ms. Jane Doe at anytownlandlord@apha.org or 111-111-1111.

Listings can be found here [LINK to property listings or search engine].

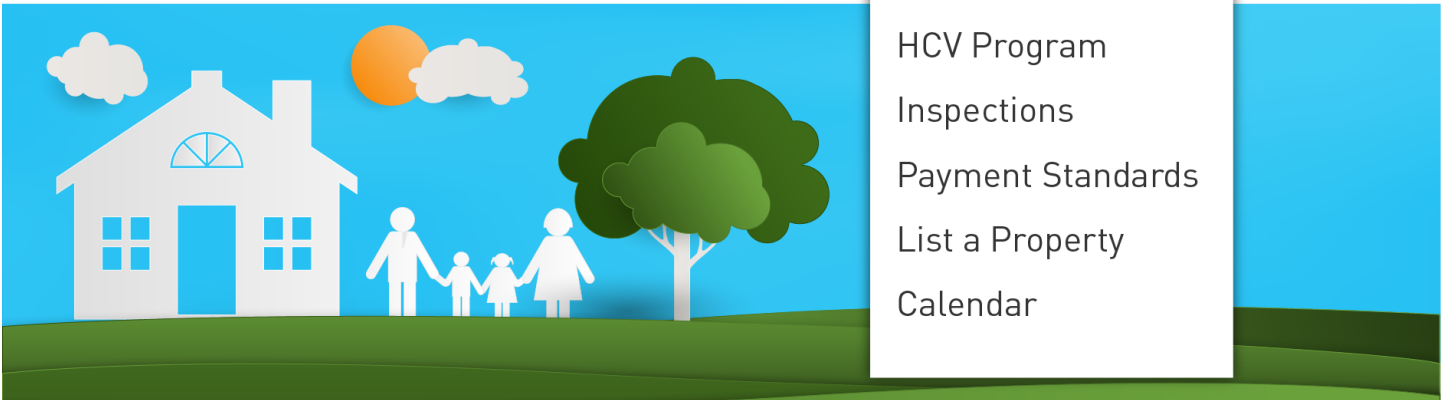**NOTICE:** PHAs should use this section to offer guidance for landlords on what to include in HCV property listings.

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Calendar and Training Opportunities

This is where the PHA can provide dates of importance and upcoming events. They can link to marketing flyers or registration sites.

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News

The Anytown PHA has recently reorganized its HCV case manager department. If you need to speak with a case manager regarding an HCV family in your unit, please make use of the following new list

Client last name beginning with A – L, contact Ms. Hanes at [111-111-1111]

Client last name beginning with M - S, contact Mr. Jones at [111-111-1111]

Client last name beginning with T – Z, contact Ms. Weber at [111-111-1111]

All direct deposit statements are available to view on the landlord portal. Anytown PHA recently stopped mailing direct deposit statements. To register for the landlord portal, current HCV landlords may visit this [link].

NOTICE: If the PHA has important information or policy changes, that information should be posted here.

Website Organization

There might be limitations on a PHA's ability to reorganize its website. For example, PHAs that do not have in-house staff dedicated to website development may need to work within an existing website template. The tips in this guide can help PHAs prioritize and organize information within an existing website framework.

Save time! Instead of creating new content from scratch, copy the content in this guide or use content already available on the HUD website: *www.hud.gov*