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.