



## **Office of Housing Voucher Programs**

### **Report on the Convening Session on SEMAP and Portability**

#### **Convening Session Overview**

The Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Housing Voucher Programs (OHVP) held a Convening Session on Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) and Portability on March 2 and 3, 2010, at HUD Headquarters in Washington, D.C. The session brought together Public Housing Agencies, industry group representatives, and HUD staff to discuss current challenges and brainstorm possible solutions related to the topics of SEMAP and Portability in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

30 participants attended the session, including representatives from 24 public housing agencies and four housing industry organizations. The public housing agencies in attendance varied in size of their voucher program, type of area they serve (urban, suburban, rural) and location throughout the country, including 11 states from seven HUD Regions. The housing industry organizations that were present included the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA), the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO), the National Leased Housing Association (NLHA), and the Council of Large Public Housing Agencies (CLPHA). A full list of all of the participants and their agencies and organizations can be found at the end of this report.

The Convening Session discussions were moderated by HUD OHVP staff, and were also attended by staff from throughout the Department, including the Office of Policy Development and Research (PD&R) and the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (FHEO).

The Convening Session was held over two days, one day for each topic (SEMAP and Portability), and then divided into several discussion sessions, each with its own sub-topic.

#### **Tuesday (March 2) – SEMAP Indicators**

- Rent Burden and Calculation of HAP Payment
- Utilization
- Housing Quality Standards (HQS)
- Deconcentration

#### **Wednesday (March 3) – Portability**

- PHA Administrative Burdens and Billing Issues
- Barriers Participants face with Portability
- Additional Comments and Recap of Convening Session

The following two sections of this report include overviews of the discussions held on each topic. These overviews are reflections of the comments and ideas that were raised and discussed, as best captured in the notes taken by the moderators and note-takers, and do not reflect group consensus, nor are they intended to document each of the dialogues in their entirety or all comments made during a session. These notes do not reflect the opinion of the Department or any specific organization or PHA participating in the event. Please notify Chris Bailey at: ([christopher.r.bailey@hud.gov](mailto:christopher.r.bailey@hud.gov)) of any major topic omissions.

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## **Section 1: Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) Indicators**

### **Part A –Rent Burden and Calculation of HAP Payment**

#### **Rent Burden**

- HUD should monitor levels of rent burdens at PHAs, but it should not be assessed as part of the SEMAP scoring process.
- More analysis needs to be done to understand current state of rent burden and how big of a problem it is. HUD should also study how deconcentration and rent burden affect one another.
- PHAs would rather lease to more families rather than focus on lowering rent burdens. PHAs only get admin fees for those units that are leased up, so it is therefore incentivized to rent to as many families as possible.
- PHAs should be allowed to use their local market-specific knowledge to choose whether to serve additional families with a shallower subsidy as opposed to fewer families with a deeper subsidy.
- The rent burden level should be raised from 40% paying over 30% of adjusted income, to something more like 60% paying over 40%. This would help eliminate from the calculation those families who choose to stay in a unit and pay a higher percentage of rent and better identify PHAs who may have more serious issues with rent burdens.
- Increasing the rent burden threshold to a percentage above 40% would be more in line with the current 40% rent burden allowed for new admissions and participants who move.
- Unreported income is a possibility in some cases where a family is experiencing a high rent burden.
- Scoring for this indicator should consider If the PHA has taken steps to reduce rent burdens such as increasing payment standards.
- There is a fear that more cash payments will be made to the landlord under the table if there is a focus on rent burden as a primary issue.
- HUD should not consider mixed families in the calculation of the percentage of rent burden at a PHA.

#### **Calculation of HAP payment**

- Self Certification of correct HAP amounts is not effective. Independent auditors or HUD QA staff could be used to confirm accuracy of HAP payments.
- Since HUD staff cannot travel to every PHA, HUD should provide training for auditors so they can perform the quality control of HAP.
- HUD staff cannot audit remotely. This type of review requires an on-site visit to the PHA.
- Both the total dollar amount of errors and the number of errors are equally important. A more complex indicator is most likely needed- taking into account the percent of the error relative to that HAP payment, or total error dollars relative to total HAP payments. A systemic error should be looked at more seriously.

- Some participants want HUD to regulate the contents and organization of tenant files.
- The EIV system is great.
- In an effort to reduce errors and “gaming of the system,” HUD should stay with the original guidance in the Refinement of Income and Rent Rule, leaving it up to the discretion of a PHA whether to use last year’s income or future income as basis. This is especially important for sporadic and seasonal work.
- Errors in utility allowance determinations are a major concern. HUD could give the PHAs the ability to choose whether to use contract rent or contract rent + utilities. Alternatively, HUD could get rid of utility allowance all together and just have contract rent.

## **Part B –Utilization**

### **PHA size considerations**

- Some participants want no special treatment given to small PHAs - small PHAs should be held to the same standard.
- Other participants want small PHAs to be given special consideration or a separate metrics since the loss of a single voucher can have an enormous negative impact on a small PHA.
- The utilization threshold for small PHA should be lowered from 98-95% to 90%.

### **Rating methodology**

- Thresholds and Percentage range:
  - Give broader ranges: 95-100% gets full points; 90%-94% partial points; below 90% no points.
  - Percentage range a good indicator as it currently is. Argument for this was that if the PHA does not fully utilize it will result in a decrease of program size and administrative fees.
- Considering BA and/or UMLs:
  - Considering either/or utilization of UMLs and BA is important because every jurisdiction is different. It is harder to meet utilization of UMLs than BA.
- Bonus points for reaching both BA and UMLs:
  - No bonus points should be given for meeting both BA and UMLs because of market variations and economic considerations.
  - No real incentive to receiving bonus points.
  - A bonus can potentially offset low points in other areas of SEMAP (HQS, Deconcentration) not reflecting an accurate picture of the PHA’s performance.
- Use of fiscal year or calendar year for scoring of SEMAP:
  - Rating should be based on a calendar year to line up calculation with funding cycle.
  - The point in time when the PHA receives their funding notice should be taken into consideration. In other words, prorate throughout the year based on when the PHA receives the BA.
  - If implemented, PHAs should be given a transitional period to adjust to the change from fiscal to calendar year.

**Other considerations in calculating utilization**

- Use a longer cycle as the snapshot for utilization. Use a 2-year snapshot to account for economic cycles, housing market changes and others. A longer cycle may help PHAs adjust for volatilities and potential over-leasing/over-spending issues.
- Take into account the time it takes for increase in vouchers to result in outcomes.

**NRA Considerations**

- NRA should not be used as part of the calculation for utilization of budget authority. It is a complex metric to use NRA. Need for NRA depends on local conditions.
- Reserve replenishment should be allowed for NRA. Allow NRA to convert into a reserve with no cap. No program should run without a reserve. Allow PHAs to have a certain amount of NRA to be converted into reserves (which is protected from recapture).
- PHAs should not be punished for having NRA balances (1 month, 2 months, 10%) to account for unforeseen circumstances with no threat of recapture. PHAs should be allowed a cushion to meet utilization. If no reserves are allowed in NRA then you are going to see PHAs' programs shrinking through time.
- PHAs should not be required to have a minimum NRA/reserves, such as in PHAS. There should be a maximum NRA. Investigate and then recapture if needed. Should not receive full points if utilizing BA fully, but severely under-leased and sitting on a significant amount of NRA.

**Over-spending/Over-leasing**

- A PHA should not be a high performer if over-leased. The score for utilization should be reduced if a PHA over-leases.
- Allowing PHAs to use other non-federal sources to lease HCVs results in other PHAs getting prorated down for funding. Funds should not be comingled (local funding goes to local programs).

**Other suggestions**

- Give utilization indicator more weight by increasing the amount of points a PHA can obtain.
- Consider portability when measuring utilization: it has the potential to negatively and unpredictably affect utilization (i.e. last minute absorptions).
- Build in a special circumstance policy or appeal process to allow PHAs to explain problems in utilization when they receive a low score. PHAs should not be penalized under this indicator for unforeseen factors beyond their control.
- Have a central reserve fund that PHAs can go to for additional funding to improve utilization rates.

## **Part C – Housing Quality Standards (HQS)**

### **Accuracy of HQS inspections:**

- Current process and timing for QC Inspections:
  - Most PHAs reported that QCs are done within 30 days.
  - One large PHA reported that QCs are done on a rolling basis, with heavy over-sampling, while others perform so many per month.
  - The larger PHAs tended to have in-house inspection staff, while smaller PHAs reported having perhaps one in-house inspector and / or would contract out for inspections.
- Suggestions / comments for Accuracy:
  - IG audits are performed too late after QC inspections. They should perform the audits at the same time as the QCs, or within a few days time.
  - When IG inspections are done, there's a need for the conditions of the unit to be documented.
  - IG is not using consistent standards.
  - Some PHAs said that HQS regulations/guidance should be changed to include flexibility, rather than changing SEMAP.
  - Because under HQS one item can fail the entire unit, there arises a Public Relations problem for PHAs.
  - Inspectors at each PHA, and at HUD, should operate in a consistent way.
  - HQS inspections, or rates of failure, don't accurately reflect market conditions.
  - There were various opinions on the value of scoring accuracy.

### **Timeliness of Inspections:**

- What is the estimated average time elapsed between receipt of an RTA and an initial inspection?
  - Most PHAs reported average times of 7 - 15 days to complete initial inspections.
- What types of delays can lead to longer timeframes for initial inspections?
  - If units are not ready for initial inspection, timeframes can be longer, and many owners use the HQS inspection as a punch list that requires a second inspection.
- What data is collected regarding timely re-inspections in PIC, or otherwise?
  - Some PHAs were dissatisfied with the use of PIC in capturing HQS data.
  - The date of a Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA), or receipt of the RTA, is not recorded on the 50058. Date of RTAs and initials are recorded by PHAs in their internal software programs. PHAs upload 50058s for inspections when the entire inspection process is complete.
  - Some PHAs, mostly larger ones, have inspectors that use electronic equipment for HQS inspections.

- Suggestions / comments for Timeliness:
  - PHAs often wait to update the annual HQS field in PIC until the time of the annual reexamination of income and rent which do not always correspond. It appears in PIC that HQS inspections are late when they are actually not. HUD should pull PIC data that is 3-4 months old when determining late HQS inspections to give PHAs time to submit the data to PIC. PIC is not always timely – things such as EOPs would have weeded out of the system.
  - PHAs would like to be able to schedule annual HQS inspections based on geographical areas to be more efficient and conserve resources but the current inspection requirement do not allow them to do this. *(HUD note: Current regulations do not prevent PHAs from following this approach. Although inspections must be done at least annually, they do not have to coincide with the family's annual reexamination).*

#### **Enforcement of HQS:**

- Suggestions / comments for enforcement:
  - HUD should not examine the number of HQS failures in addition to enforcement for failed units.
  - Participants suggested lowering the percentage to receive full points on this indicator to from 98% to 95%.

#### **Part D – Deconcentration**

##### **What are solutions to the problems of poverty and race concentration?**

- Increase and improve supportive services in places where families choose to live (e.g. education, transportation, healthcare) as opposed to moving people to places they don't want to live.
- Use FSS program to invest in families to improve families' abilities to have real choice.
- Increase landlord participation through outreach, education and incentives.
- Increase development of affordable housing in low poverty areas.
- Tenant education of opportunity areas (maps, school districts, transportation, local amenities).
- Consider incentive payments to landlords or other incentives to encourage owner participation in areas of opportunity...otherwise unlikely to do so.
- Community education is needed so that neighbors change mindset, feel comfortable.
- Use FHEO to eliminate discrimination barriers that families face.
- HUD should look at FMRs and payment standards, and consider smaller FMRs.
- Dedicated mobility/deconcentration staff person is needed, similar to FSS coordinator.
- Mobility programs should be encouraged.
- Recognize and address additional administrative burden and cost to PHAs to increase housing opportunities for families in non-impacted areas.
- Federal partnerships should be created to allow for holistic approaches.
- Fix portability problem to help families move to deconcentrated areas.

### **Problems with current SEMAP indicator for Deconcentration**

- Many barriers to deconcentration are out of the PHA's control.
- Deconcentration does not always equal "choice" or "opportunity".
- The current indicator assumes all PHAs are the same, does not take into consideration varying market, political, funding factors that impact ability to expand opportunity.
- It is administratively burdensome for PHAs to gather the necessary data to submit with this indicator. HUD already has the data and should provide it for this indicator.
- Calculations are too complicated for PHAs in relation to the amount of points awarded.
- PHAs don't get credit for deconcentration when a family moves outside the jurisdiction.

### **Solutions/Improvements to SEMAP indicator for Deconcentration**

- PHAs should be evaluated based on a PHA assessment of barriers to choice and opportunity, the PHA's plan to remove those barriers, and the results of those efforts.
- HUD should provide a checklist of actions a PHA *could* do to improve neighborhood choice, and then give points based on the number of items the PHA meets on this list.
- The deconcentration indicator should remain as a bonus indicator.
- Measurement should be effort-based, not outcome-based. PHAs have too little control over outcomes related to where families choose to live.
- Give credit for portability – when a family moves to a deconcentration area even when it's outside the jurisdiction.
- HUD should provide data to PHAs for tracking and assessment.
- Deconcentration efforts should be measured based on other programs/efforts: affirmatively furthering fair housing, FIP, FAP, FSS, regional opportunity counseling, and reducing impediments to portability.
- Measure individual household improvement, such as increases in earned income.
- Compare assisted vs. unassisted by quintile in census tract.



## Section 2: Portability

### Part A: Session 1 - PHA Administrative Burdens and Billing Issues

#### **Issues with Portability**

- Difficult to transfer families from non-MTW agencies to MTW agencies.
- PHAs who submit late billings and/or make late payments.
- PHAs that absorb a large number of port-in families to increase their utilization rates cause problems for the initial PHA and their utilization rates.
- Policy differences between PHAs cause confusion for PHAs and families (e.g., criminal background checks, occupancy standards, payment standards).
- Disputes and confusion with jurisdictional boundaries between PHAs.
- PHAs' lack of understanding of mechanics and rules of portability (e.g., who gives extensions, proration- administrative fees).
- Tedious to determine if the PHA has sufficient funding.
- Coordination of PIC reporting between PHAs on portability families can cause issues if data is not entered correctly or timely.
- Initial PHAs not wanting to be responsible for participants once they leave their jurisdiction even if billing arrangement remains in place.
- Different payment standards, overpayments, changes in HAP amounts, and double payments cause many billing related issues and is time consuming for PHA staff to resolve.
- Difficult to make contact with other PHAs to resolve issues
- Portability accelerates population drain
- Absorption prevents PHAs from serving their local waiting list
- Portability billing circumvents fair share system, undermining national goals of meeting worst case housing needs
- Pressure to meet SEMAP utilization requirements drives PHAs to absorb versus serving waiting list families

#### **Solutions to Billing Problems**

- HUD should encourage/expand consortia, cooperative agreements
  - Provide incentives- financial , SEMAP scores, budget-based admin fees for regional entities
  - Require mutual absorption
  - Consolidate reporting requirements for consortia
  - Educate commissioners and local politicians on benefits of consortiums
- Put a time limit on a receiving PHA billing an initial PHA for a portability voucher and require absorption after that time limit expires (e.g., 12 months, 18 months, etc.)
- Create central pool of money to eliminate billing. Put percentage of PHAs' renewal money into a central fund. Reimbursement on real time basis using VMS. Transfer funding of voucher after a specified period of time
- Standardize and/or further explain how administrative fees are billed under portability
- Use NRA offsets to allow absorption of vouchers; supply incremental vouchers
- Create national loan program for security deposits
- Limit the reasons a family may move (e.g., employment, education, medical reasons, etc.)
- Reduce the number of moves allowed over a certain time period (e. g., one move every 2 to 3 years)

- Extend Bridges to Work program
- HUD staff should provide online based training so PHAs could have this resource when needed.
- Receiving PHA should inform the initial PHA of the occupancy standards and payment standards before issuing voucher to assist the initial PHA in determining if funds are available to support the voucher

#### **Why Don't PHAs use Enforcement Mechanism in Notice for Late Billing?**

- Capacity issues of late billing PHAs
- Difficult to resolve billing issues when more than one HUD Field Office is involved
- The current procedures are more effective on resolving inner-state PHAs issues than out-of-state issues

#### **Should PHAs be required to report late billings to HUD to remove burden from PHAs to report other PHAs?**

- Collecting and providing the documentation to show the late billing/payment would create more administrative burden
- Late billing is problem with a few large PHAs. HUD should publish a list of problem PHAs, which would create incentives to comply with the billing requirements.
- HUD should enforce sanctions for PHAs who do not comply
- Train HUD field office staff on enforcing the billing requirements so the information does not have to be forwarded to HQs. This adds additional time and confusion in resolving the issues.

### **Part B: Session 2 - Barriers Participants Face with Portability**

#### **Barriers: Family Mobility**

- PHAs who do not perform HQS Inspections timely cause delays for families
- Lack of timeliness by the receiving PHA to conduct briefings which reduces the families search time
- Additional funding for high rent burdens, different payment standards, etc.- would allow families more choice.
- Some barriers are normal part of a move for any family and cannot be simplified: (security deposit, landlord not letting out of lease, transportation, registering to vote, registering with school, etc.)
- Some initial PHAs automatically disallow port-out if going to a higher rent area; PHA needs to provide more proof of lack of funding. More HUD enforcement is needed to prevent this practice.
- Pressure from lower-cost PHAs on high cost area PHAs to absorb
- Pressure from PHAs on families that can only port-out if the receiving PHA is absorbing
- HUD should use existing funding spreadsheet for enforcement of PHAs who claim lack of funding to support portability moves

### **Additional Barriers to Family Mobility**

- Lack of communication between initial and receiving PHAs
- Some Initial PHAs are requiring families to contact the receiving PHA to determine if the receiving PHA will bill or absorb the family's voucher
- Different PHA policies are confusing to families
- PHAs who are slow in processing incoming portable families cause the families to lose search time because the time on the voucher continues to tick away
- Ported families who want to move to a third PHA are sent back to the initial PHA which causes confusion. Families have no idea they were still connected to the initial PHA even after several years. Families think they are done with the initial PHA and don't understand that they must go through the initial PHA for second port. (Solution: Institute time limits to absorb family)
- Tenants wait until last minute to search for units regardless of length of search/extensions
- Families move without knowing about the area, and expect to get a voucher when they arrive.

### **Solutions for Family Barriers**

- HUD should make a field in PIC to identify portability contact information to ease the communication barriers.
- Require PHAs to provide checklist for families of tasks and chronology (steps to portability, relocation costs)
- Require PHAs to use a standardized form to educate family on differences between PHAs (procedures, inspections, renewing, criminal and landlord screenings; occupancy standards)
- Mandatory absorption after certain amount of time, if PHAs have funding to pay for it
- HUD should analyze the relationship between absorption rates and economic downturns. If lack of absorptions is a cyclical problem, establish a funding pool every few years to allow absorption during problem time period
- Leave extension policies to PHA discretion
- HUD should designate that only one PHA extends and/or terminates the voucher to prevent confusion
- PHAs should determine if a portability move will result in an increase in the HAP amount before they deny a move
- HUD should enforce requirements outlined in Notice 2008-43 and in regulations
- HUD should work individually with PHAs to resolve portability issues
- Use dedicated fund to create national loan program for security deposits
- HUD should require initial PHA to send birth certificates and Social Security cards with the 52665 and 50058 to the receiving PHA
- HUD should define success in terms of family mobility in the voucher program
- HUD should use PD&R data, ACS, and/or census information to show voucher mobility

### Section 3: List of Participants

	First Name	Last Name	PHA/Organization Name	City, State	Group
1	James P.	Armstrong	Public Housing Authorities Directors Association	Washington, D.C.	A
2	Lisa	Baker	Housing Authority of the County of Yolo	Woodland, CA	A
3	Karen	Boykins	Tampa Housing Authority	Tampa, FL	A
4	Lisa	Dove	Michigan State Housing Development Authority	Lansing, MI	A
5	Marilyn	O'Sullivan	Boston Housing Authority	Boston, MA	A
6	Preston	Prince	Housing Authority City of Fresno	Fresno, CA	A
7	Ellen J.	Schmidt	Siouxland Regional Housing Authority	Sioux City, IA	A
8	Joseph	Villarreal	County of Contra Costa Housing Authority	Martinez, CA	A
9	Shannon	Young	Seminole County Housing Authority	Oviedo, FL	A
10	Ron	Dion	County of Alameda Housing Authority	Hayward, CA	B
11	Tom	Dobies	Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority	Columbus, OH	B
12	Jean	Goebel	County of Monterey Housing Authority	Salinas, CA	B
13	Bob	Hoskins	Kings County Housing Authority	Hanford, CA	B
14	Peter	Lynn	Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles	Los Angeles, CA	B
15	Margaret	Murphey	Davenport Housing Commission	Davenport, IA	B
16	Dr. Peggy J.	Pimentel	Arlington County Dept of Human Services	Arlington, VA	B
17	Ron	Steele	Tampa Housing Authority	Tampa, FL	B
18	Kendra	Woodard	Housing Authority of the City of East Point	East Point, GA	B
19	Jonathan	Zimmerman	National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials	Washington, D.C.	B
20	Leslie	Gleason	City of Alameda Housing Authority	Alameda, CA	C
21	Margaret	Jones	Tampa Housing Authority	Tampa, FL	C
22	Marion	Morris	National Leased Housing Association	Washington, D.C.	C
23	Sylvia	Peterson	Housing Authority of the County of Cook	Chicago, IL	C
24	Wayne	Pollard	Tarrant County Housing Assistance Office	Ft. Worth, TX	C
25	Bill	Russell	Sarasota Housing Authority	Sarasota, FL	C
26	Lynn	Santos	County of Monterey Housing Authority	Salinas, CA	C
27	Deloris	Sawyer	Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority	Las Vegas, NV	C
28	Sherri	Scheetz	Akron Metropolitan Housing Authority	Akron, OH	C
29	Dick	Yerington	Muscatine Municipal Housing Agency	Muscatine, IA	C
30	Leah	Staub	Council of Large Public Housing Authorities	Washington, DC	