



**HOUSTON**  
HOUSING AUTHORITY

**Transforming Lives & Communities**

# Housing Choice Voucher Program

## Owner Information Packet

# **THE HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM**

## **Overview**

The federally-funded Housing Choice Voucher program (formerly Section 8) is designed to provide rental housing assistance to income eligible persons. The Housing Choice Voucher program is the largest federal low-income housing assistance program, providing over 2 million low income households with vouchers that help cover the cost of obtaining housing in the private market. The Houston Housing Authority is administered by local Public Housing Agencies with oversight by the US Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD). The Houston Housing Authority administers over 14,000 vouchers in the metropolitan area.

## **History**

HUD executed the Houston Housing Authority's first Section 8 Rental Assistance Program contract in June 1975 to serve 1,619 families. In June 1985, HUD executed the Housing Authority's first Housing Voucher contract to serve an additional 91 families. In 2000, the Housing Choice Voucher program was created as a hybrid of both the Section 8 certificate program and the Housing Voucher program.

## **How the Program Works**

The Housing Authority selects eligible applicant households from its waiting list and issues a Housing Choice Voucher. Family select reasonably priced rental housing of their choice in the private rental market.

Typically, program participants reside in multi-family residential communities; single family rental housing, duplex units, condominiums and townhouses are also eligible rental housing types.

The Housing Authority provides monthly rental assistance directly to participating property owners, while the tenant pays a portion of their income (generally 30%) toward rent.

The Housing Authority partners with private property owners to provide rental housing in this program, but the agency does not own these rental units. The Housing Authority inspects rental units prior to a family's move-in and annually thereafter.

## **BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATING IN THE HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM**

- **Free advertising of available units.**
- **Guaranteed rent checks the first of each month.**
- **Yearly Inspections.**
- **Market Rents.**
- **Help provide affordable housing to Houston families.**

# **THE PARTNERSHIP**

- **Houston Housing Authority partners with private sector Property Owners and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to ensure quality affordable housing for very low- and low-income families.**
- **Property Owner and the family enter a lease when rent is approved and the unit passes Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection.**
- **Family pays between 30 and 40 percent of their income toward rent and Houston Housing Authority pays the balance directly to the property owner.**
- **Houston Housing Authority and the Property Owner execute a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract funded by HUD's Housing Choice Voucher Program.**
- **HAP contract facilitates payment of the balance of rent made by the Houston Housing Authority directly to the Property Owner.**

# **THE PROPERTY OWNER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- **Thoroughly screens and interviews families who apply for units.**
- **Maintains the property by making repairs in a timely manner.**
- **Collects security deposits and tenant's monthly rent portion.**
- **Manages the property and enforces the lease.**
- **Complies with the terms of the HAP Contract.**
- **Complies with all fair housing laws and equal opportunity requirements.**
- **Notifies the Houston Housing Authority if a family vacates the property.**
- **Notifies the Houston Housing Authority of an ownership change.**

# **THE HOUSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY**

- **Houston Housing Authority determines the family's program eligibility, affordable rent and unit size.**
- **Conducts program briefings for families and enforces the rules of the program.**
- **Issues Vouchers to families.**
- **Inspects the properties to ensure housing quality standards compliance.**
- **Approves the property, the owner and the lease.**
- **Sends housing assistance payments to the owner.**
- **Conducts annual re-exams of the family's income and composition and adjusts rent portions if necessary.**

# **THE FAMILY**

- **Provides the Houston Housing Authority with complete and accurate information.**
- **Reports changes in household income and family composition.**
- **Locates a suitable unit and pays owner security deposit and application fees.**
- **Attends scheduled appointments and returns documents on time.**
- **Maintains the property and repairs any damages beyond normal wear and tear.**
- **Complies with the terms of the lease.**
- **Pays their portion of the rent on time to the owner.**
- **Complies with all family obligations under the Housing Choice Voucher Program.**

# PARTICIPATING IN THE HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

## Step One: Finding a Tenant

- Eligible families are issued a Voucher and will approach you.
- You can list your available unit with Houston Housing Authority by registering your unit information at [www.Gosection8.com](http://www.Gosection8.com). For additional information, contact, Akeshia Johnson-Smothers at (713) 260-0389, or by e-mail at [owner@housingforhouston.com](mailto:owner@housingforhouston.com).

## Step Two: Approving a Tenant

- Owners are encouraged to screen families on the basis of the family's tenancy history.
- Owners must comply with applicable federal and state fair housing laws when accepting applications for tenancy.
- Program admission of a family is **not** endorsement by the Houston Housing Authority of the family's suitability for tenancy.
- Application fees and security deposits are the tenant's responsibility but the amount charged **must not exceed** what is charged to unassisted applicants for a similar unit.



## **Step Three: Submitting a Leasing Packet**

- Submit a completed Leasing Packet, which the family will provide. The leasing packet will include the Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA).
- A preliminary/proposed lease agreement must be submitted at this time or the Leasing Packet will not be accepted.
- The preliminary/proposed lease agreement must include the names of all occupants, the proposed rent amount and the completed utility section.
- When the completed Leasing Packet is received, a Market Analyst will determine that the requested rent is reasonable and an inspection will be conducted.

## **Step Four: Approving a Reasonable Rent**

- A Market Analyst determines if the requested rent is reasonable as compared to an unassisted unit when considering the location, quality, size, type, age, amenities, housing services, maintenance and utilities to be provided.
- All requested rents must be approved by a Market Analyst for an initial lease or any requested rent increases.

## **Step Five:            Inspecting the Unit**

Prior to move-in and at least annually, the Houston Housing Authority conducts an inspection to ensure the unit meets HUD's minimum Housing Quality Standards (HQS). Having the unit “**move-in**” ready at the time of inspection will prevent delays in processing housing assistance payments.

- HQS inspections are conducted within 7 to 10 days after the Market Analyst approves the rent.
- All utilities must be on before the inspection can be conducted.

### **Most Common HQS Failed Items**

- ✘ Non-functional smoke detectors.
- ✘ Missing or cracked electrical outlet cover plates.
- ✘ Railings not present where required.
- ✘ Peeling interior or exterior paint.
- ✘ Trip hazards caused by installed floor coverings (carpets/vinyl).
- ✘ Cracked or broken windowpanes.
- ✘ Inoperable burners on stoves or inoperable range hoods.
- ✘ Missing burner control knobs.
- ✘ Inoperable bathroom fan/no ventilation.
- ✘ Leaking faucets or plumbing.
- ✘ NO temperature/pressure relief valve on water heaters.

## **Step Six:            Signing the HAP Contract**

### **After HQS Inspection Passes**

- After the property passes inspection, a letter is sent notifying you that the HAP Contract is ready for signature and of the approved contract rent and rent portions to be paid.
- Housing Assistance Payments will begin within sixty days of receipt of the signed HAP Contract and a signed lease.

### **Lease Requirements**

The Housing Choice Voucher Program includes the following lease requirements:

- The lease between tenant and owner is the same lease for unassisted tenants.
- Lease terms and conditions are consistent with State and local law.
- The lease specifies utilities and appliances supplied by the owner and supplied by the family.
- The lease includes the HUD-required Tenancy Addendum (provided by the Houston Housing Authority) whose terms prevail over any other provisions of the lease.
- The lease effective date must match the HAP Contract.
- The approved rent amount must match the HAP Contract.
- Provide a copy of the signed lease when you sign and return the HAP Contract.

## **Step Seven:        Receiving the HAP Payment**

- The effective date of the first Housing Assistance Payment (HAP payment) can start the day the unit passes inspection and the tenant moves into the unit.
- The tenant is responsible for any rents due prior to the HAP Contract effective date.
- Housing Assistance Payments will begin within sixty days of receipt of the signed HAP Contract and a signed lease.
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- A Tax I.D. number or Social Security number is required for tax purposes.

### **Adjustments to Family Rent**

- During the term of the lease, if the family has a change in income or family composition rent portions will be adjusted.
- A rent change, known as a Contract Change Clause, notice will be mailed to the family and Property Owner to reflect any changes in the rent portions.

### **Review of Family Income and Composition**

- The family's income and composition is reviewed annually.
- The rent portions will be re-calculated and a Contract Change Clause Notice will be mailed to the owner and family.

## Property Owner/Manager Check list

- ☑ **Free Advertising** – Reach new and current families by registering available units for lease on-line at [www.Gosection8.com](http://www.Gosection8.com). For more information, you can contact the Gosection8 website it staff at 1-866-466-SEC8 (7328)
- ☑ **Select and Screen the applicant** – Follow your regular application screening procedures when approached by a family with a Housing Choice Voucher. We do not screen participants for tenancy suitability.
- ☑ **Collect a Security Deposit, if you require one** – The tenant is responsible for paying the security deposit. Such deposits may not exceed those charged to non-assisted tenants.
- ☑ **Return a completed Request for Tenancy Approval to our office** – Both tenant and Property Owner must complete sections of this form to initiate the free inspection. Please call with any questions.
- ☑ **Complete the Owner Information form and a W-9** - Housing Assistance Payments cannot be released prior to receiving these documents.
- ☑ **Inspection of the unit** –Housing Quality Standards inspections occur 7 – 10 days after the Market Analyst approves the rent. The unit must pass inspection prior to the signing of a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract.
- ☑ **Provide signed Lease and Contract** – You will be notified when the HAP Contract is ready for signature. Housing assistance payments will be released only after the HAP contract is signed. You will receive a copy after all signatures are obtained.
- ☑ **For initial leases, expect to receive the first Housing Assistance Payments approx. 60 days from the date the unit passes inspection** – Payment will not commence until the unit passes the inspection, the tenant moves into the unit and the HAP Contract is signed.
- ☑ **After the initial lease is executed-** Houston Housing Authority’s rent portion will be sent the first week of every month.
- ☑ **Affordable rent for the tenant** - The tenant pays approximately 30% of their adjusted income towards rent. The tenant is responsible for paying their portion directly to the Property Owner by the due date set forth in the lease.
- ☑ **The lease/contract will be reviewed in one year** – You will receive a notice regarding lease renewal 90 days before the year-end.
- ☑ **The tenants rent portion** - is adjusted when the tenant’s income/composition changes
- ☑ **Notify us** - when there is a change in ownership/management or address or if the family vacates the unit.



**HOUSTON**  
HOUSING AUTHORITY

The Houston Housing Authority appreciates your support in providing rental units to the many Houston families in need of quality affordable rental housing.

**Information Resources on Texas Rental Housing Laws**

<p>HOUSTON APARTMENT ASSOC 10815 FALLSTONE RD HOUSTON, TX 77099 (281) 933-2224</p>	<p>GREATER HOUSTON FAIR HOUSING CENTER 2900 WOODRIDGE, SUITE 303 HOUSTON, TX 77087 (713) 641-3247 (641-FAIR)</p>
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**Contact Information:**

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