

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

CONTRA COSTA


**HOUSING
AUTHORITY**

THE **F**AMILY **B**RIEFING
HANDBOOK

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affordable housing solutions

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Introduction

This Briefing Handbook has been prepared for you as a guide to participation in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

It is designed to provide you with accurate information about how the program works. Please take the time to read it carefully; it will help you to find a suitable place to live, and to remain in good standing with your landlord and the Housing Authority.

After reading the handbook, make sure you save it with your important papers so that you can refer to it as needed. If you have any questions, contact the Housing Authority.

Housing Authority's Goal

It is the Housing Authority's goal to provide excellent service to the families in Contra Costa County. The Housing Authority will make every effort to inform you of the program rules, and to advise you of how these rules affect you. Since federal regulations are not always easy to understand, it is very important to ask questions if you are not sure of something. Do not hesitate to contact the Housing Authority if you have a question or problem that pertains to the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Evaluations

In the back of this handbook you will find two forms that you may use to provide feedback or comments to the Housing Authority, a **Briefing Evaluation** form (Form B), and a **Customer Service Evaluation** form (Form C). Please complete the Briefing Evaluation form after your briefing and return it to a Housing Authority representative. You may submit the Customer Service Evaluation at any time during your participation in the program.

Requests for Reasonable Accommodations

Persons with disabilities may request a reasonable accommodation in order to utilize the housing program and any related services. The Housing Authority will make all reasonable efforts to be flexible in assisting persons with disabilities to participate in the program successfully. Requests for accommodation will be verified to ensure that the accommodation is reasonable.



Housing Choice Voucher Program

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines the rules and regulations for the Housing Choice Voucher Program. The purpose of the Housing Choice Voucher Program is to provide rental assistance to eligible families. The maximum amount that the Housing Authority will pay is an amount equal to the **Payment Standard** minus the family's total tenant payment.

Partnership

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is a three-way partnership between you (the family), the Landlord/landlord, and the Housing Authority.



The Family's Responsibilities

- Provide the Housing Authority with complete and accurate information.
- Make your best effort to find a place to live that is suitable for your family and qualifies for the program.
- Cooperate in attending all appointments scheduled by the Housing Authority.
- Take responsibility for the care of your housing unit.
- Comply with the terms of your lease with the Landlord.
- Comply with the Family Obligations of the Housing Authority.

The Landlord's Responsibilities

- Screen families to determine if they will be good renters.
- The Housing Authority can supply the Landlord with the current and previous address and landlord information if they have this information.
- The Housing Authority may also provide additional information pertaining to a tenant's performance as a renter.
- Comply with fair housing laws, and not discriminate against any family.
- Maintain the housing unit by making necessary repairs in a timely manner.
- Comply with the terms of the Housing Assistance Payments Contract with the Housing Authority.
- Collect the rent due by the family and otherwise enforce the lease.



The Housing Authority's Responsibilities

- Review all applications to determine if they are eligible for the program.
- Explain all the rules of the program to all families who qualify.
- Approve the family, unit, and Landlord.
- Make Housing Assistance Payments to the Landlord in a timely manner.
- Ensure that both the family and the unit continue to qualify under the program.
- Ensure that Landlords and families comply with the program rules.
- Provide families and Landlords with prompt, professional service.

Landlord Approves Family

Even though a family is determined to be eligible for the program, the Landlord must approve the family as a suitable renter. Most Landlords/managers will ask you to complete an application and will check on your rental history and credit. Landlords can deny you a rental unit if you have a previous history of not fulfilling your obligations under a lease.

The Housing Authority knows that the Landlord has approved the family when a Request for Tenancy Approval form is submitted.

Before Signing a Lease

- Have Landlord/manager complete Request for Tenancy Approval & Pre-Inspection form
- Submit Request for Tenancy Approval & Pre-Inspection form to the Housing Authority
- If Request for Tenancy Approval and lease meet HUD guidelines, an appointment will be scheduled to inspect the unit. (All utilities must be on.)
- If the unit passes inspection, the Housing Authority will enter into a contract with the Landlord/manager, and you will then sign your lease to begin after the unit passes the inspection.



Housing Authority Approves Tenancy and Unit

After a family finds a suitable housing unit and the Landlord approves the family, the Housing Authority needs to determine if the unit qualifies for the Program. This includes a Housing Quality Standards inspection.

Contract and Lease Signed

If the lease and unit are satisfactory, the Housing Authority will enter into a Contract with the Landlord, and the family will enter into a lease with the Landlord. **DO NOT** sign a lease until the Housing Authority inspects and passes the unit.

Housing Assistance Payments (HAP)

After the HAP Contract and lease are signed, the Housing Authority makes the initial HAP payment and continues to make monthly payments to the Landlord as long as the family continues to meet the eligibility criteria under the Voucher program.



Steps to Assistance

After a family has been selected from the waiting list, several steps must be completed before a family can receive rental assistance.

Housing Authority Determines Family's Final Eligibility

Family is selected from the waiting list. Income and household composition is reviewed for final eligibility.

Voucher Issued

When a family is determined to be eligible for the program and funding is available, the Housing Authority issues a Housing Choice Voucher at the required tenant briefing.

Your Voucher indicates the number of bedrooms for which your family is eligible. This unit size is based on HUD guidelines and the Housing Authority's written policy. The Housing Authority takes into consideration factors such as the total number of persons in the family, the sex of persons, and the relationship of persons.

These standards help us to make the best use of the funds HUD provides for housing costs, and to avoid overcrowding. The unit size for which you have been approved is indicated on your Voucher.

Expiration Date of Vouchers



Your Voucher is valid for 90 days. It is important that you do not delay your housing search. If your Voucher expires before you find suitable housing, you will have to reapply. You may request a 30-day extension as a reasonable accommodation. Keep track of all of the units you look at during the search period.



Housing Authority of the County of Contra Costa Key Activities in the Section 8 Program

Application Process

- A household in need of assistance applies for a Section 8 voucher by completing a PHA's application form.
- If the waiting list is "open," the agency administering the Section 8 program is accepting applications.
- If the waiting list is "closed," no one can apply for a voucher.

Screening and Verification of Eligibility

- When a household reaches the top of the list, the household will be required to supply documentation that verified eligibility for the Section 8 program.
- At this point, the PHA may also screen the household with regards to prior tenant history and/or recent criminal history.

Selection from Waiting List

- Depending on how many vouchers are available, the application is either: placed on a waiting list or, after verifying the household's eligibility for the Section 8 program, the household is given a voucher right away.
- In most communities, there are not enough vouchers for everyone who needs one so there are usually long waiting lists.
- Households move from the bottom of the waiting list to the top. Sometimes this takes a short amount of time and sometimes this takes years, depending on many factors.

Section 8 Briefing

- When a household reaches the top of the waiting list, and is determined eligible for the program, the household is issued a voucher.

Housing Search

- The Section 8 household then has a short time (usually 90 to 120 days) to find a rental unit in the community that meets Section 8 guidelines (i.e., affordable and decent).
- In some cases, the household may already be living in a housing unit that meets the Section 8 guidelines and may choose to use the voucher in the existing unit.

Housing Quality Standards Inspection and Rent Reasonableness Determination

- If the owner agrees to participate in the Section 8 program, the unit is inspected to ensure that it is safe, decent, and of good quality.
- The rent of the unit is compared to rents of similar unassisted units in the community to ensure it is reasonable.

Annual Reexamination, Housing Quality Inspection, and Rent Reasonableness Determination

- At least annually, the Section 8 household must reestablish eligibility for the program and the unit is reinspected to ensure that it continues to meet Section 8 standards.

PHA Approves Unit and Computes Total Tenant Payment and Subsidy Amount

- All paperwork is signed (i.e., lease between household and owner; and contract between PHA and owner) and the household moves into the unit.
- At this point, the Section 8 rental assistance begins. The household pays between 30 and 40 percent of their income toward rent and any tenant-paid utilities, and the rent subsidy pays the difference. This subsidy is paid directly to the owner of the housing unit.



Determination of Payment Standards and Unit Size **(Subsidy Standards)**

The Payment Standard

- Is established by the Housing Authority.
- The payment standard is based on a percentage of the Fair Market Rent established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- Is based on the cost of housing and utilities for your area.
- Depends on the family composition and the bedroom size of the unit. For example, the payment standard is higher for families requiring 3-bedroom units than for families requiring 1-bedroom units.

Families may select smaller units than listed on the Voucher if the unit selected has at least one sleeping or living/sleeping room for each two persons in the household. The smaller payment standard will be used for the unit size. The Housing Authority may grant exceptions to the standards if circumstances presented by the family warrant an exception.

Attached is the current payment standard schedule !



Where to Live?

A family must locate a housing unit that meets the program rules. That can be where you live right now or a totally different unit. The Housing Authority can help in some ways, but the family has the primary responsibility for finding a suitable unit to rent. A family has 90 days to locate a suitable unit.

Leasing In-Place

You may be eligible to receive assistance at your present unit if the unit qualifies. The unit must:

- Be rent reasonable
- Pass a Housing Quality Standard Inspection

Moving to Another Unit

If you decide to look for another place to live, the procedures are the same. The unit must:

- Be rent reasonable
- Pass a Housing Quality Standards Inspection

Tips to Locate Suitable Housing

Landlords advertise rental properties in different ways. Here are some ideas on where to start.

- Check the classified section of local newspapers.
- Ask friends and neighbors.
- Drive through neighborhoods where you may want to live and look for rental signs.
- Check community bulletin boards.
- Check with real estate offices.
- Check your briefing packet for a rental referral list.



Housing Search

There are many factors to consider as you search for suitable housing. Select a unit that meets your family's needs. Here are some factors and suggestions to consider:

- Does the unit size meet your needs?
- Is the unit close to family and friends?
- Condition of Unit?
- Does it have air conditioning? Do you need or want it?
- Does it have a dishwasher?
- Is there a washer/dryer or laundry room?
- Is there a yard? Will you have to take care of it?
- Do you have a pet? Is it okay to keep a pet? Is there a pet fee?
- What utilities do you pay, gas, electric, oil, etc.?
- Yard (Maintenance required)
- Neighborhood and Safety
- Are stores close by?
- Childcare
- Schools
- Work
- Public Transportation
- Bank
- Church

When Applying for a Rental Unit

- Make an appointment, and try to make a positive first impression.
- Leave your children with a babysitter.
- Go early and look around the neighborhood.
- Let the landlord get to know you before asking if he/she accepts Section 8.
- Be prepared to furnish references if necessary.
- Make sure you have money for a security deposit and a deposit for utilities if required.
- Take your Voucher, Request for Tenancy Approval & Pre-Inspection form with you.
- Your **Voucher Expires 90 days** from the day you receive it.
- Turn your Request for Tenancy Approval into the Housing Authority **before** your Voucher expires.



Questions for the Landlord

- How much is the rent?
- What utilities are **not** included in the rent?
- How much is the security deposit?
- Is there a person and phone number to call for repairs or maintenance?

Security Deposit

The Landlord of the unit decides how much the security deposit will be. When you begin to search make sure that you have made plans in advance to have the money available for the security deposit and the deposit for utilities, if applicable. The Landlord may charge up to two months of the rent amount for security deposit. The security deposit may not exceed amounts charged for unassisted units.

Housing Program Documents

When you are searching for a housing unit, make sure that you have the Voucher and Request for Tenancy Approval with you.

Your Credit Record

Everyone has a credit record. It shows how well you pay your bills. Credit records are kept by credit reporting agencies. They sell your credit information to banks and other lenders. By looking at your records, landlords can decide whether they should rent to you.

It is a good idea to get a copy of your credit report once each year. Then you will know what the credit reporting agencies are telling lenders and landlords about you. Check your report carefully because it can sometimes contain wrong information. It can even list someone else's credit history under your name.

To get a copy of your credit report, call one of these toll- free numbers.

Trans Union 1-800-916-8800
Equifax 1-800-685-1111
CSC Credit 1-800-759-5979

Establishing good credit means getting a reputation for paying your bills (rent) on time. You will need to have good credit to achieve your dreams.



Confronting Housing Discrimination

You are entitled to decent, safe and sanitary housing regardless of your age, race, color, religion, sex, disability, national origin, marital status, or familial status.

If you think you have been refused housing for the reasons listed above, notify your Housing Specialist immediately, or one of the agencies listed below. You may also complete the complaint form in the "Fair Housing" brochure (form HUD 903.1) and mail it to:

Office of Fair Housing & Equal Opportunity Division (9E)
U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Pacific/Hawaii Region
P.O. Box 36003
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco CA 94102-3448

Agencies authorized to investigate and/or give legal advice regarding housing discrimination (current as of publication date):

Department of Fair Employment
30 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102
(415) 557-2005

Project Sentinel/Fair Housing
430 Sherman Ave. Suite 308
Palo Alto, CA 94306
(415) 321- 6291

United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
See above for address
(415) 436-6591 (General Information)

Bay Area Legal Aid
Contra Costa Regional Office
1017 Macdonald Avenue
Richmond, CA 94802
(510) 233-9954

Appointments made with an attorney specializing in Landlord/Tenant Law; one-half (1/2) hour consultation for thirty dollars (\$30.00).

Senior Adults Legal Assistance (SALA)
Central County Office
160 E. Virginia Street, Suite #260
San Jose, CA 95112
(408) 295-5991



**Equal Housing
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Determining Housing Assistance Payment

Annual Income

Annual income is defined as the anticipated total annual income from **all** sources. The family is responsible for reporting all sources of income for the household. This is the first step toward determining the amount of rental assistance the family receives.

If a family member's welfare income is sanctioned by the welfare agency for noncompliance with self-sufficiency program requirements, the Housing Authority is required to include the amount of sanctioned welfare income in the family's annual income. The Housing Authority must verify the amount and reason for the sanction with the welfare agency.

EXAMPLES OF INCOME

- * Employment
- * Social Security
- * TANF
- * Public Assistance
- * Disability
- * Unemployment
- * SSI
- * Pensions
- * Child Support
- * Net Income of a Business
- * Net Income from Real Personal Property
- * Worker's Compensation
- * Interest from Assets
- * Regular Contributions/Gifts
- * Relocation Payments
- * Military Pay
- * Alimony
- * Annuities

Examples of income exclusions: Resident Service Stipends; Adoption Assistance Payments; Full Amount of Student Financial Assistance; Earned Income of Full-Time Students; Adult Foster Care Payments; and State or local employment training programs and training of resident management staff.

Adjusted Income

After determining the total annual income for the household, the Housing Authority makes any necessary adjustments to the annual income in accordance with HUD regulations. If the family qualifies, there are five (5) possible deductions and allowances.

Allowance for Dependents

A \$480 deduction is made for all minors under the age of 18, and for family members 18 and over who are full time students or a person with a disability, other than the Head or Spouse.

Allowance for Elderly/Disability



A \$400 household deduction is made for families whose head, spouse, or sole member is 62 or over, or is a person with a disability.

Allowance for Medical Expenses

For an Elderly or Disabled Family, medical expenses for all family members that are greater than 3% of the Annual Income will be deducted.

Allowance for Disability Assistance Expenses

Disability assistance expenses that exceed 3% of the Annual income will be deducted if they permit a family member to work.

Allowance for Childcare Expenses

Reasonable childcare expenses, for family members 12 years old and younger, will be deducted if they enable a family member to work, attend school, or seek employment.

Total Tenant Payment (TTP)

After calculating the adjusted monthly income, the Housing Authority determines the TTP for the family. The TTP in the Voucher Program is the *greater* of:

- 30% of the family's monthly adjusted income
- 10% of the family's gross monthly income

Utility Allowance

A Utility allowance is the Housing Authority's estimate of the average monthly utility bills for an energy-conscious household. If all utilities are included in the rent, there is no utility allowance. The utility allowance will vary by unit type, size and utilities the family is responsible to pay. When the TTP is lower than the utility allowance, the family may receive a utility reimbursement check from the Housing Authority.

Maximum Rent at Initial Occupancy

At the time a family initially receives assistance or is moving to another rental unit, if the gross rent for the unit is greater than the payment standard for the family, the family share may not exceed 40% of the family's monthly-adjusted income. The family share is the gross rent minus the HAP.



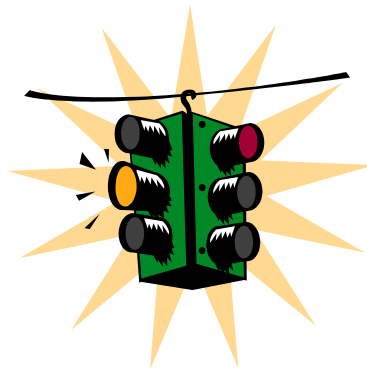
Family Obligations

Family Obligations to the Housing Authority

- (A) The family must supply any information that the Housing Authority or U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines is necessary in the administration of the program, including submission of required evidence of citizenship or eligible immigration status.
- (B) The family must supply any information requested by the Housing Authority or HUD for use in a regularly scheduled reexamination or interim reexamination of family income and composition in accordance with HUD requirements. A change in family income, composition or other relevant circumstances must be reported immediately to the Housing Authority.
- (C) The family must disclose to the Housing Authority any information they receive from HUD.
- (D) The family must disclose and verify social security numbers and must sign and submit consent forms for obtaining information.
- (E) Any information supplied by the family must be true and complete.
- (F) The family must not damage the unit or premises (other than damage from ordinary wear and tear) or permit any guest to damage the unit or premises.
- (G) The family is responsible for any Housing Quality Standard breach caused by the family.
- (H) The family must allow the Housing Authority to inspect the unit at reasonable times and after reasonable notice.
- (I) The family may not commit any serious or repeated violation and breach of the lease.
- (J) The family must notify the Housing Authority and the Landlord in writing before the family moves out of the unit, or terminates the lease on notice to the Landlord.
- (K) The family must promptly give notice to the Housing Authority a copy of any Landlord eviction notice.
- (L) The family must use the assisted unit for residence by the family. The unit must be the family's only residence.
- (M) The composition of the assisted family residing in the unit must be approved by the Housing Authority. The family must promptly inform the Housing Authority of the birth, adoption or court awarded custody of a child. The family must request in writing and receive written approval from the Housing Authority to add any other family member as an occupant of the unit.
- (N) The family must promptly notify the Housing Authority if any family member no longer resides in the unit.



- (O) If the Housing Authority has given approval, a foster child or a live in aide may reside in the unit. The Housing Authority will annually request the family to justify and document the necessity for and verify services that the live in aide is providing.
- (P) Members of the household may engage in legal profit making activities in the unit, but only if such activities are incidental to primary use of the unit for residence by members of the family.
- (Q) The family must not sublease or let the unit.
- (R) The family must not assign the lease or transfer the unit.
- (S) The family must supply any information or certification requested by the HA to verify that the family is living in the unit, or relating to family absence from the unit, including any Housing Authority requested information or certification on the purpose of family absences. The family must cooperate with the Housing Authority for this purpose. The family must promptly notify the Housing Authority in writing of absence from the unit.
- (T) The family must not own or have any interest in the unit.
- (U) The members of the family must not commit fraud, bribery or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with the programs.
- (V) The members of the family may not engage in drug-related criminal activity, or violent criminal activity, or other criminal activity that threatens the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of other residents and persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises.
- (W) The members of the family must not use alcohol in a way that threatens the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of other residents and persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises.
- (X) An assisted family, or members of the family, may not receive Section 8 tenant-based assistance while receiving another housing subsidy, for the same unit or for a different unit, under any duplicative federal, state or local housing assistance program.
- (Y) The family must not owe rent and/or other monies to the Housing Authority or to another Housing Authority in connection with Section 8 or Public Housing Assistance.



Family Briefing

All applicants are required to attend a Briefing. The purpose of the Briefing is to:

- Issue your Housing Choice Voucher.
- Provide you with all of the information you need in order to be successful in your search for suitable housing and to maintain good standing while you are on the program.

Briefing Packet

The Briefing Packet contains materials to explain how the program works. It includes:

- A Housing Choice Voucher
- Rules regarding the term of your Voucher
- Explanation of how to request an extension of Voucher term
- Information about maximum rents (*fair market rents and payment standards*) and utility allowances & Utility Allowance (UA) Schedule.
- A Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA) & Pre-Inspection Checklist
- Sample Lease
- HUD-required HAP contract and Tenancy Addendum
- Fair Housing Discrimination Complaint Form
- Lead-based paint information
- HUD booklet “A Good Place to Live”
- Information about portability
- A list of landlords who may be willing to lease units under the program



Housing Authority Approves Tenancy of Unit

When the Housing Authority receives your RTA, they will determine if the unit size and rent are acceptable and reasonable according to HUD guidelines.

If the RTA and proposed lease are approved, the Housing Authority will make an appointment to inspect the unit.

Most Landlords will ask you to complete an application and will check on your rental history and credit. Landlords can deny you a rental unit if you have a previous history of not fulfilling your obligations under a lease.

Submitting a Request for Tenancy Approval

When you find a housing unit that you want to rent, and the Landlord approves you, the Landlord must complete a *Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA) and Pre-Inspection form*. Both forms must be submitted to the Housing Authority along with the proposed unsigned lease (if owner using own lease). The lease must be filled out but not signed.

Remember: Your Voucher will expire 90 days from the date you receive it. You need to turn in a Request for Tenancy Approval to the Housing Authority before your Voucher expires.

Once the unit passes the initial inspection, the Housing Authority will prepare the necessary paperwork and your assistance will begin. If the unit does not pass the initial inspection, the Landlord will be given a reasonable time period to correct any items that failed.

Rental assistance cannot begin until the repair items are completed, re-inspected, and approved by the Housing Authority inspector. If the Landlord is unwilling to make the repairs, the Housing Authority will provide you with another Request for Tenancy Approval form.

Contract and Signing Lease

Once the unit passes the inspection and the contract begins, the Housing Authority will enter into a Contract with the Landlord, and you will sign a lease agreement with the Landlord.



Moving In!

- You have signed the lease and paid the security deposit.
- You and the landlord have agreed when you can move in.
- The landlord gives you the keys.
- Call the electric company and the gas or oil company and tell them when to transfer the utilities in your name to the new apartment or house. If you are paying for utilities where you live now, you should also tell the companies when to turn them off there. A security deposit is required if this is the first time you have gotten utilities turned on in your own name.
- Call the telephone company and make an appointment for them to turn on your service in your new home. Be sure they know when to turn off the telephone in you old home.
- Call the cable company and make an appointment to turn on or put in the cable service. Let them know when to turn it off in the place you are living now.
- Go to the post office and fill out a change of address form. They also have postcards you can send to your family and friends to tell them your new address.
- Go to the bank or credit union and change your address.
- Tell the people who mail checks at your job your new address.
- Get boxes, tape and markers and pack up your things. Be sure to write on each box what is inside or what room it should go into.

A new contract cannot begin unless a key receipt for the previous unit has been signed by the owner and submitted to the Housing Authority.



Taking Care of Your Home

Your Tenant Responsibilities

As a tenant you must take care of the unit/house you are renting. Other rules include no loud noises, music or parties. You must respect the rights of other tenants. Suggestions for maintaining and cleaning your unit include, but is not limited to the following:



Floors

If you have carpeting, you should vacuum at least once a week.

If you have wood floors they can be vacuumed too. Every couple of months you should use a special wood cleaner to keep the floors from getting too dirty.

The kitchen and bathroom floors will either have tile or vinyl covering them.

This makes it easy to wipe up anything you spill.

At least once every two weeks you should wash the kitchen and bathroom floors with a mop and disinfectant cleaner.

Cleaning Chart

One of the best ways to keep track of major cleaning jobs is to use a chart or calendar to mark off each time you clean.

	M	Tues	W	Th	F	Sat/Sun	Notes
Date							
Clean bathroom							
Clean kitchen							
Vacuum							
Clean pet litter & bowls							
Take our garbage							
Pay bills							
Recycle							



Lawn and Yard Care

If you have a yard, be sure you keep the grass cut and raked and bushes have to be trimmed. Most people cut the grass about once a week. Paths, doorways and sidewalks should be clear of any trash. If you rent a house, drain pipes and gutters should be kept clear of leaves or anything that can block them. You also have to clear the sidewalk of snow and ice in the winter months.

Trash and Garbage

Keep loose papers and trash off of the balcony or deck. If you keep a bicycle or anything else stored outside be sure to keep it stacked neatly. Don't leave things outside that can blow away. Get a garbage can with a lid and keep it covered so dogs and other animals cannot get into it. Never leave garbage in a paper bag.

Always use a plastic bag and put it in the garbage can. If you recycle, make sure you wash out bottles and cans with soapy water before you put them in the recycling bin.

Balcony and Deck

If the balcony or deck gets any holes or broken rails or other damage check your lease to see who has to pay to have them fixed, you or the landlord.

Doors, walls, cabinets

You want to take pride in your new home by keeping things neat and clean. Keep the paint clean and without scratches around the doors, walls, cabinets, and around windows. It is easy to paint over chips and scratches to make it look like new.

Kitchen

You want to keep your kitchen as clean as possible for your own health and safety. Because you will use it every day, the kitchen will need extra attention to keep it clean. You will need containers with tight fitting lids to store things like pasta, rice, flour, sugar, cereal, raisins, chips and other food you don't keep in the refrigerator. This will keep bugs and mice from getting into your food.

Dishes, pots and pans need to be washed each time you use them. The sink and counter tops need to be washed daily. Get a garbage can with a top and always be sure to keep it closed. Don't leave open garbage in the sink or on the floor. When the can is full take it to the outside garbage can or dumpster as soon as possible.

Your burners and oven must be kept clean and free of grease, food and anything paper or cloth that could catch fire. The stove and oven should be cleaned when you spill or something boils over on them. Stoves have a smooth surface that is easy to wipe off with a cloth and soapy water.



Be sure all the burners and oven are turned off when you are finished cooking. And never leave the house if something is cooking, not even for a minute.

Your refrigerator has to be kept clean too. Keep food covered or in storage bags to keep it fresh and from spilling. Refrigerator shelves have to be washed when they get dirty. Anything you store in the freezer should have a label on it so you know what it is. You can also put the date on it., so you can be sure to use it before it gets too old.

Some refrigerators have to be defrosted. You want to be sure not to let too much ice build up in the freezer. To defrost the freezer you place pots of hot water in it until the frost melts. You may need help doing this. The kitchen floor should be swept or vacuumed too.

If you have a garbage disposal, be sure to use it properly. Run water into the garbage disposal while using.

Never pour grease down the sink. It will harden and stop up the pipe and you will have to pay for the services of a plumber to fix it. A plumber can charge you \$50.00 an hour or more. Pour grease into a coffee can and throw it out with the garbage.

Smoke Detectors

There should be a smoke detector on every level. Smoke detectors make a loud noise if smoke or fire is in your home. Grease on the stove burners, a dirty oven or a pan that has overheated can all cause smoke or fire. Most smoke detectors use batteries to operate. You can tell it is time to put in new batteries when it starts beeping every few seconds. It is always good to keep some fresh batteries on hand. A low battery will also make the smoke detector beep until it is changed.

Bathroom

The next most important room is the bathroom. The sink, bathtub and toilet have to be washed regularly. The toilet also has to be free of objects and wads of paper. Never put pads, tampons, paper towels or food in the toilet or it can become stopped up and overflow. Be sure to keep a plunger nearby to free the toilet if it starts to back up. You can also get what is called a “snake”, a long metal coil that threads through the toilet pipe to clear it. What do you do if this does not work? Call a plumber.

Laundry

If you have a washing machine and dryer in your apartment or house, there are a few things you need to do to keep them working well. Always set the water at the right level for the size of the load you are washing.

If you only have a few pieces of clothing you want to use a smaller amount of water. If it is a full load you want to set the water level on high. And always use the amount of laundry soap recommended on the soap box label. If you use too much soap, the washing machine will overflow.



The most important thing to remember when using the dryer is to clean out the lint trap every time you use it. A clogged lint filter can cause a fire. Also be sure that there is nothing blocking the dryer vent and there should not be any problems.

If something goes wrong with the washer or dryer you need to know if you are responsible for getting it fixed. Your lease will explain who is responsible for these repairs.

Heat and Air Conditioning

Keeping the heat and air conditioning in good working order is important to having a safe and comfortable home. It is necessary to change the filters and have the heat and air conditioning units serviced and maintained. It is your job to be sure you use them in the right way. Read your lease to see who is responsible.

It is important to keep the heat and air conditioning set at the right level by using the thermostat. A comfortable temperature to set the thermostat is usually between 68 and 70 degrees. Remember when the heat or air conditioning is on, the windows and outside doors should be closed. If you heat the house too warmly or set the air conditioning so it is too cool your electric or fuel will cost you much more than normal.

Electricity

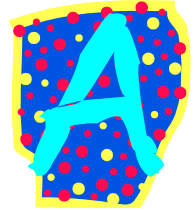
Electricity should be used wisely. Use a night light in the bathroom, kitchen and maybe the hallway so you don't have to leave a lamp on late at night to see. You can put a timer on a light in the living room or dining room that will come on at the time you choose such as in the early evening or morning. That way you won't have to walk into a dark house. It will also make people think someone is at home. Keep a supply of light bulbs on hand. When a light burns out, you are responsible for changing it. You must also change the fuses. A fuse (or a circuit breaker) keeps the electricity from overloading and helps prevent fires. If a fuse keeps blowing out, call an electrician or ask for help from the landlord.



Moving to Another Unit After the First Year

If you want to move from one assisted unit to another and continue to receive housing assistance, you must:

1. Give the Landlord **and** the Housing Authority proper written notice.
2. Make arrangements and have your current unit inspected;
3. Have the Key Receipt form completed by the current landlord; and
4. Complete paperwork with the Housing Authority.



Once you have completed all four steps, and are in good standing, you will receive your Voucher and Request for Tenancy Approval for moving to another unit.



Family Obligations to the Landlord

The family obligations to the Landlord are contained in the lease agreement. Please read it carefully.

Families are obligated to:

Pay the rent on time

Take care of the housing unit

The Landlord is required to make reasonable repairs and provide routine maintenance. However, if a housing unit fails to meet Housing Quality Standards because of the following items, it is the responsibility of the family.

- The family is required to provide any utilities (*such as electricity, gas, or water*) that are not furnished by the Landlord. If you are responsible to provide utilities, make certain that they remain in service.
- The family is responsible for providing and maintaining any appliance that the Landlord does not furnish, such as a stove or refrigerator.
- The family is responsible for damages to the unit or premises (beyond normal wear and tear) that are caused by any family member or guest.

If the unit does not meet Housing Quality Standards and the deficiencies are not corrected within the time period set by the Housing Authority, the Housing Authority will discontinue assistance payments to the Landlord. **Also, your participation in the Housing Choice Voucher Program would terminate.**

If you are not sure of a lease requirement, ask the Landlord!

Family Rent Payments to Landlord

When you sign a lease with a landlord, you are obligated to pay your share of the rent on the first of each month in accordance with your lease. If you fail to pay your rent, you will be subject to eviction by the landlord. Serious and repeated violations of the lease may also result in the termination of housing assistance. Remember, the lease that you sign is a legal contract, and both parties must comply with their obligations.



Payment Changes

When a change in your income occurs, contact your Housing Assistant immediately for further instructions. When your income changes, your payment and the Housing Authority's payment to the Landlord may change. Both you and the Landlord will be given a written notice on any change in HAP payment.

No Additional Payments

It is illegal for you to make additional rental payments to the landlord that is higher than the family Rent to Landlord. The Housing Authority must approve all separate agreements for additional payments between the Landlord and family.

Annual Re-certifications

HUD requires that all families be re-certified annually. You will receive a letter from the Housing Authority advising you when you are due to be re-certified. An appointment will be scheduled or a packet mailed to review your household income and composition. You will receive your recertification letter by mail.

The Housing Authority is also required to inspect your housing unit annually. You will be notified by letter of the date of the inspection. It is your responsibility to be home or make sure that an adult (at least 18 years old) is there to allow the inspector to enter the premises. Again, we are counting on your cooperation so that there will not be any interruptions in your housing assistance.

Sufficient Income

If your family has an increase in income that causes your share of the rent to equal or exceed the amount of the total rent, the Housing Assistance Payment from the Housing Authority to the landlord will be reduced to zero. However, if your family remains in the unit, and you have a reduction of income and become eligible for assistance within 180 calendar days from the last HAP payment, the Housing Authority will resume payments to the Landlord based on the new amount of the family's income.



If You Receive a Notice from HUD...

HUD matches income data you supplied to the Housing Authority with IRS income data. If the income you reported to the Housing Authority does not match the income information the IRS has for the same period, HUD will notify you.

- You are required to give the Housing Authority any letter or other notice that you receive from HUD concerning the amount or verification of your family's income. If you receive a notice or letter from HUD concerning your income, contact the Housing Authority right away.

The Housing Authority will verify the information and make any necessary adjustment to your rent and Housing Assistance Payment.

- If you failed to correctly report your income, you may have to repay the Housing Authority for the amount of overpaid housing assistance payments.
- If you misrepresented your income, your assistance may be terminated and you could be prosecuted.



Program Integrity

The Department of HUD determines the amount of funding that is available for rental assistance in each community. It is important to ensure that the funds are used to assist only those families who are eligible. The reason Housing Authority has waiting lists is that there isn't enough funding to assist all of the families who apply.

The Housing Authority assumes that the information provided by families is complete and accurate but occasionally we find that it is not.

Making false statements and providing false information are serious violations of program rules as well as violations of State and Federal Criminal Laws.

Please be aware that if families provide false information or documents:

- They will be subject to denial or termination of assistance.
- They will be required to repay any amounts that were paid by the Housing Authority.
- If it is determined that these actions are intentional, the family may be subject to criminal penalties under State or Federal Law.

If you are not sure about the rules or procedures, please contact your Housing Assistant to get the correct information. No one should be evicted or lose their assistance unnecessarily.

The Most Common Program Violations

Most families who are selected for the program comply with the rules, but occasionally some do not. It is always unpleasant when someone violates the rules and penalties are required. To prevent families from embarrassment and hardship, the program rules need to be thoroughly understood. The most common violations are listed below.

Unauthorized Household Members

The persons you list on your application and are approved by the Housing Authority are the only persons who may reside in your housing unit.

If you permit anyone who has not been approved by the Housing Authority and the landlord to reside in your unit, it is a violation of your Family Obligations, and it could result in the loss of your housing assistance. Contact your Housing Specialist and the landlord before you allow someone to move into your unit.



Under-Reporting Income

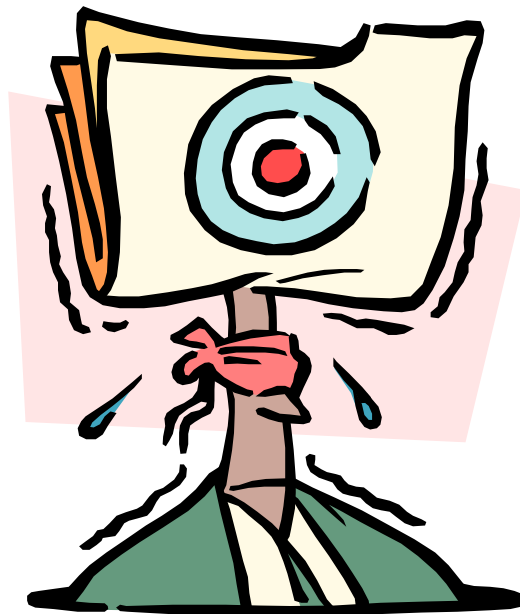
When the Housing Authority interviews you, you will be asked to report all income received by everyone in your household.

Subleasing the Unit

When the Housing Authority approves a unit for your family, it is for your family only. It is illegal for any family on the program to lease all or part of their unit to anyone.

Reporting Changes

Any changes in income and household composition must be reported to your Housing Assistant.



Denial or Termination of Assistance

- A family's housing assistance may be denied or terminated if:
- The family violates a Family Obligation.
- Any member of the family has ever been evicted from federally assisted housing in the last five years.
- A Housing Authority has ever terminated assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher Program for any member of the family.
- Any member of the family commits fraud, bribery or any other corrupt act in connection with any federal housing program.
- Any member of the family commits drug-related criminal activity or violent criminal activity.
- Any family member is illegally using a controlled substance.
- Any family member's abuse of alcohol interferes with the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents.
- The family currently owes rent or other amounts to the Housing Authority or to another Housing Authority in connection with Section 8 or any housing assistance program under the 1937 Housing Act.
- A family participating in the FSS program fails to comply, without good cause, with the family's Contract of Participation.
- The family has engaged in or threatened abusive or violent behavior toward Housing Authority personnel.
- The Housing Authority must permanently deny eligibility or terminate the assistance of any person convicted of manufacturing or producing methamphetamine, commonly referred to as "speed" or anyone who is subject to sex-offender registration requirements.

Withdrawals

Occasionally, families who have been certified eligible to participate in the Section 8 Voucher program decline initial program participation or choose to withdraw from the program after receiving assistance. Keep in mind that if you withdraw from participating in the program, you will have to reapply if you happen to need assistance again in the future.



Hearings

It is important to the Housing Authority that families are provided all rights and protections under the law and HUD regulations. It is suggested that you seek an explanation from a Housing Assistant before you request a hearing; it may be a matter of misunderstanding that can be resolved easily. A family may request a hearing to consider whether the following Housing Authority decisions or determinations pertaining to the family are in accordance with the law, HUD regulations and Housing Authority policies:

- Determination of the family's annual or adjusted income used to compute the Housing Assistance Payment.
- Determination of the appropriate utility allowance from the Housing Authority's utility allowance schedule.
- Determination of the family unit size under the Housing Authority subsidy standards.
- Decision to terminate housing assistance because of the family's action or failure to act, including absence from the assisted unit for longer than the maximum period permitted.

If a family does request a hearing, one will be scheduled promptly and the family will be notified by mail in writing of the date, time and location of the hearing. Families may bring legal counsel, witnesses, and evidence to the hearing.

Upon request, the family may also obtain copies of any documents or evidence upon which the Housing Authority's action or inaction is based, prior to the hearing and at the family's expense. The family will also be required to provide to the Housing Authority, prior to the hearing, copies of any documents or evidence it plans to use at the hearing.

A Final Note

Information and cooperation are two key ingredients to achieving decent, safe, and affordable housing.



Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program

The Family Self -Sufficiency Program (FSS) is one of the initiatives under the Homeownership and Opportunity for People Everywhere (HOPE) program enacted in 1990 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

FSS offers a financial incentive to families through the establishment of an escrow account, which becomes available to the family upon successful completion of their Contract of Participation.

Families who volunteer to participation are oriented, evaluated, and enter in to a Contract of Participation with the Housing Authority. This Contract is geared to meet the families' need for services. It also spells out the goals and objectives, which the family must fulfill during the contract term.

The Contract of Participation is for five (5) years.

The family continues to pay its share of rent to the Landlord in accordance to their income. The Housing Authority will compute and credit any escrow to which the family is entitled.

Upon successful completion of the contract, the Housing Authority disburses the amount, which has been escrowed to the family.

**Check out the attached
FSS Program Flyer!**



Portability

One of the great features of the rental assistance program is that your assistance “moves” with you. You can use your assistance to move anywhere in the United States. The HUD term for the ability to move outside your Housing Authority’s jurisdiction with rental assistance is *portability*. The Housing Authority may limit moves under portability.

If you are not a county resident, but received a Voucher because you are working in the county, you will have to live in Contra Costa for the first year.

Facts about Portability You Should Know

- The Housing Authority where you want to move may have different rules, policies and deadlines.
- There may be a different payment standard.
- The new Housing Authority will probably have different utility allowances that will affect the amount you pay for rent.
- A different size Voucher may be issued to you.
- When you are first issued a Voucher, you are always subject to the income limits of the Housing Authority where you want to live.

Portability and FSS

If you are participating in a Family Self -Sufficiency (FSS) program, make sure that you discuss moving with the Housing Services Counselor. If you cannot fulfill your FSS obligations in the new location, your FSS contract may be terminated and you may lose your escrow balance, if you have one.



Glossary of Housing Choice Voucher Program Terms

Admission: Admission is the effective date of a resident's lease in a public housing program or the execution date of a resident's HAP Contract in a tenant-based program.

Annual Income : The anticipated total income of an eligible family from all sources for the 12-month period following the date of determination of income.

Applicant: A family that has applied for admission to a housing program but has not yet been admitted to the program.

As - Paid States: States where a welfare agency adjusts the shelter and utility component of welfare grant in accordance with actual housing costs.

Child Care Expenses: Amounts paid by a family for the care of minors under age 13 if such care is necessary to enable a family member to be employed, to further his/her education, or to seek employment.

Co-Head: An individual in a household who is equally responsible for the lease with the Head of Household. A family may have a co-head or spouse but not both. A co-head never qualifies as a dependent.

Contract Rent : See Rent to owner.

Covered Families: Statutory term for families that are required to participate in a welfare agency economic self-sufficiency program and that may be subject to a welfare benefit sanction for noncompliance with this obligation.

Dependent : A member of a family (excluding the family head, spouse, and any foster children) who is under 18 years.

Disabled Family: A family whose head, spouse, or sole member is a person with disabilities, two or more persons with disabilities living together; or one or more persons with disabilities living with one or more live-in aides.

Disabled Person: See Person with Disabilities.

Displaced Person: A person who has been displaced by governmental action or whose dwelling has been extensively damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster declared or otherwise formally recognized pursuant to Federal Disaster Relief laws.

Drug Trafficking : The illegal manufacture, sale, or distribution of a controlled substance or the possession of such a substance with intent to manufacture, sell, or distribute it.

Economic Self -Sufficiency Program: Any program designed to encourage, assist, train, or facilitate the economic independence of assisted families or to provide work for such families, including job training, employment counseling, work placement, basic skills training, general



education, English proficiency training, Workfare, financial or household management training, apprenticeships, and other programs necessary to prepare people to work (such as treatment for drug abuse or mental health treatment).

Elderly Family: A family whose head, spouse, or sole member is a person who is at least 62 years of age; two or more persons who are at least 62 years of age living together; or one or more persons who are at least 62 years of age living with one or more live-in aides.

Excess Medical Expenses: Any Non-reimbursable medical expenses incurred by an elderly family in excess of 3% of the family's Annual Income.

Extremely Low Income Family: A family whose annual income does not exceed 30% of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD, with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

Fair Market Rent (FMR): The amount that must be paid in a given area to rent existing, privately owned housing of a modest nature, with suitable amenities, and in decent, safe, and sanitary condition. HUD establishes FMRs. They vary by unit size as well as by housing market area and include the cost of all utilities except phone.

Live-in Aide: A person who resides with an elderly or disabled person and who (a) is determined by a Housing Authority to be essential to the care and well being of the person and (b) is not obligated for support of the person and, (c) would not be living in the unit except to provide necessary supportive services.

Family Rent to Landlord: Rent to Landlord minus the Housing Assistance Payment.

Family Share: The portion of rent and utilities paid by a family.

Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS): A program developed by PHA to promote the self-sufficiency of assisted families, including the provision of supportive services.

Foster Childcare Payment: Payment to eligible households by state, local, or private agencies appointed by the State to administer the care of foster children.

Full-Time Student : A person who is carrying a subject load considered full time for day students under the standards and practices of the educational institution school offering a diploma or institution offering a college degree.

Gross Rent: The sum of the rent to Landlord plus any utility allowance. If there are no tenant paid utilities, the rent to Landlord equals the Gross Rent.

Head of Household: The person who assumes legal and financial responsibility for a household and is listed on a housing application as its head.

Housing Assistance Payment: The monthly assistance payment by a PHA, which includes: (1) A payment to the Landlord for rent to the Landlord under the family's lease; and (2) An additional payment to the family if the total assistance payment exceeds the Rent to Landlord.



Housing Choice Voucher: A document issued by a PHA to a family selected for admission to the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. The voucher describes the program and the procedures for PHA approval of a unit selected by the family.

Housing Quality Standards : The: Total medical minimum quality standards for housing assisted under the Public Housing and Section 8 programs.

HUD: The Department of Housing and Urban Development or its designee.

Imputed Asset: An asset disposed of for less than Fair Market Value during two years preceding certification or re-certification.

Imputed Income : The HUD passbook rate times the total cash value of assets when assets exceed \$5,000.

Imputed Welfare Income : An amount of Annual Income that is not actually received by a family as a result of a specified welfare benefit reduction but is included in the family's Annual Income and is therefore reflected in the family's rental contribution.

Landlord: Either the legal Owner/Property Manager of a property or the Owner/Property Manager's designated representative or managing agent.

Lease: A written agreement between a Landlord and an eligible family for the leasing of a housing unit.

Lease Addendum: See Tenancy Addendum.

Low Income Family: A family who's Annual Income does not exceed 80% of the median income for the area, as determined by HUD, with adjustments for smaller and larger families.

Medical Expenses: expenses that are anticipated during the period for which Annual Income is computed and are not covered by insurance. (Only elderly families or disabled families qualify.)

Landlord Orientation: A meeting with a Housing Authority representative for the purpose of learning the rules and procedures for participating as an Owner/Property Manager in the Section 8 Program.

Landlord: Any person or entity with the legal right to lease or sublease a unit to a participant.

Payment Standard: The maximum subsidy payment for a family under the Voucher Program. The PHA sets a Payment Standard between 90% and 110% of the current HUD-published FMR.

Person with Disabilities: A person who has a disability as defined in 42 U.S.C. 423 or 42 U.S.C. 6001. A person who has a physical or mental impairment expected to be of long and indefinite duration.

Portability: The ability of a family to move with its Section 8 tenant-based assistance from the jurisdiction of one HOUSING AUTHORITY to that of another.



Premises: The building or complex in which a dwelling unit is located, including common areas and grounds.

Public Housing Authority (PHA): Same as Housing Authority. Any state, county, municipality, or other governmental entity or public body that is authorized to engage or assist in the development or operation of housing for low- income families.

Public Assistance: Welfare or other payments to families or individuals that are based on need and are made under programs funded separately or jointly by federal, state, or local governments.

Reasonable Rent : A Rent to Landlord that is not more than either:

- (1) the rent charged for comparable units in the private unassisted market or
- (2) the rent charged by the Landlord for a comparable unassisted unit in the building or one the premises.

Security Deposit: A dollar amount that can be collected from a family by a Landlord and used for amounts owed under a lease according to State/local law.

Specified Welfare Benefit Reduction: A reduction of welfare benefits (for a covered family) that may not result in a reduction of a family's rental contribution. A reduction of welfare benefits because of fraud in connection with the welfare program or because of welfare sanction due to noncompliance with a welfare agency requirement to participate in an economic self -sufficiency program.

Spouse: The marriage partner of a Head of Household.

Subsidy Standards : Standards established by a Housing Authority to appropriate subsidy for families of different sizes and composition.

Tenancy Addendum: A HUD designed addition to a Landlord's lease that includes, word for word, all HUD required language.

Tenant (or Resident): The person who executes a lease as lessee of a dwelling unit.

Tenant Rent : The amount payable monthly by a family as rent to a PHA in a public housing program or to an Landlord in a Section 8 program.

Unit (or Housing Unit): Residential space for the private use of a family. The size of a unit is based on the number of bedrooms contained within the unit.

Violent Criminal Activity: Any illegal criminal activity that has as one of its elements the use, attempted use, or threatened use of physical force against the person or property of another.

Voucher: See Housing Choice Voucher.

Voucher Program: See Housing Choice Voucher Program.



Documents Provided to Me



The following documents have been provided to me on this date: _____
(Check the documents you have received)

- Housing Choice Voucher**
- Request for Tenancy Approval**
- Pre-Inspection Checklist**
- HUD Required HAP Contract & Tenancy Addendum**
- Sample Lease**
- Payment Standard & Utility Allowance Schedule**
- Family Briefing Handbook**
- Documents provided to me (Form A)**
- Briefing Evaluation (Form B)**
- Customer Service Evaluation (Form C)**
- Housing Discrimination Complaint Form**
- Lead-Based Paint Brochure**
- Rental Referral Listing**

It is my responsibility to locate suitable and eligible housing before the expiration date of my voucher, and to notify the Housing Authority if I am having difficulty. I understand the rules of the program and will comply with them as long as I participate in the program.

Family Representative _____ Date _____

Housing Authority Representative _____ Date _____

Tenant File





Briefing Evaluation

As a part of our commitment to provide you with the best service possible, we would like you to complete this evaluation form. Please complete it after your briefing and return it a Housing Authority representative

The Briefing

Please rate each question by circling a number from one to five. 1 is the lowest rating and 5 are the highest rating.

RATING

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. The information provided at the briefing was explained thoroughly. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. The material provided to me was helpful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The speaker was helpful to my understanding of the material. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. The material was easy to understand. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. How would you rate the overall presentation? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Please comment as appropriate below:

1. One thing that could have improved the briefing is:

2. What I liked best about the briefing was:

3. One thing I didn't understand was:

If you want to write more than will fit here, please continue on other side.





Customer Service Evaluation

Instructions: This customer service evaluation may be completed after your first annual recertification on the program, or at any time while you are on the program and wish to provide feedback to the Housing Authority.

1. When I come into the Housing Authority with a question, a problem, or for an appointment, I receive good service.

Yes ___ No___

Explain _____

2. When I telephone the Housing Authority, people are friendly.

Yes ___ No___

Explain _____

3. When I leave a telephone message for a staff person, they always return my call within 24 hrs.

Yes ___ No___

Explain _____

4. I have confidence in the Housing Authority.

Yes ___ No___

Explain _____



5. The Housing Authority could improve its service.

Yes___ No___

Explain_____

6. Rate the overall service of the Housing Authority.

Poor ___ Below Average ___ Average ___ Above Average ___ Superior ___

Comments:

Optional

Name:_____

Address:_____

Telephone Number:_____

