



HOUSTON HOUSING AUTHORITY

Transforming Lives & Communities

2640 Fountain View Drive ■ Houston, Texas 77057 ■ 713.260.0500 P ■ 713.260.0547 TTY ■ www.housingforhouston.com

Notice to All Public Housing Residents and Housing Choice Voucher Program Participants: Intent to Participate in the Moving to Work Demonstration Program

October 13, 2020 - The Houston Housing Authority (HHA) intends to submit an application to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development on January 8, 2021 to participate in the Moving to Work (“MTW”) Demonstration Program. This notice provides important information on opportunities for Public Housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program participants to express their views and learn more about HHA’s planned participation in the MTW Program.

EMPOWER (Elevate & Modernize Programs & Opportunities With Emphasis on Residents) Housing is a pending HHA initiative to apply for and implement this initiative through HUD’s MTW program. The program is designed to put residents’ needs for simplified, flexible and empowering housing solutions first through innovative, locally-designed housing and self-sufficiency strategies.

The HHA plans virtual meetings / calls with its residents, resident council and program stakeholders to talk about what you think works and does not work about the current income and rent structure in the Public Housing, Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher and Project-Based Voucher programs. HHA wants to know if you have general or specific recommendations about how you would like it to be changed as part of our application to HUD.

Dates and Times of HHA’s Virtual Meetings / Calls with Residents and Program Stakeholders

HHA is planning to hold two separate virtual sessions with our Public Housing residents, Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) participants, Project-Based Voucher (PBV) participants and program stakeholders to help us develop a proposed income, rent and program flexibility proposal to HUD. HHA’s virtual meetings / calls will take place with:

- **HHA’s Resident Council / Leadership on Wednesday, October 21 from 1 p.m. – 2 p.m. (Central); and**
- **HHA residents / tenants and program stakeholders on Wednesday, October 28 from 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. (Central). To request the conference call and hypertext link for the October 28 virtual meeting please e-mail us at: RSVP@housingforhouston.com**

Whether you can participate in a virtual meeting or not, on an ongoing basis HHA invites its residents, applicants and program stakeholders to provide their comments, recommendations and questions regarding improvements to the way existing Public Housing and Voucher program tenants / residents’ rents are designed and calculated and other features of the way these programs are administered. **For comments and/or questions about EMPOWER Housing please email us at: empower@housingforhouston.com**

This notification is in advance of developing Part I of the MTW Plan and application package that will be subject to another virtual public hearing and 30-day comment period regarding the income, rent and flexibility design that HHA develops with input from you.

Why is HHA pursuing this program?

If awarded, the demonstration will allow HHA to pioneer innovative and tailored strategies to best serve Public Housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher Program participants. The benefits include:

- Expanding housing options;
- Simplifying the rent payment system;
- Empowering families toward economic self-sufficiency; and
- Improving cost-efficiency in HHA' administration of programs

How does this program work?

- HUD's demonstration has been in existence for 24 years. Under the demonstration, 39 Housing Authorities developed unique self-sufficiency strategies with assisted housing residents tailored to the needs of their local communities, to increase housing choices for low-income families, and to improve the cost effectiveness of federal housing programs. These locally-designed strategies improved upon the one-size-fits-all approach of the Public Housing and Section 8 voucher programs. HUD's demonstration helps local communities leverage their strengths, resources, and partnerships to ensure they continue meeting the needs of the families they serve. In December 2015, Congress passed a bill to expand the MTW demonstration to 100 additional Housing Authorities to join the program.
- By contrast with traditional Housing Authorities, agencies in the demonstration have the flexibility to design and implement the Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) and Public Housing programs to better benefit the communities they serve. Agencies can also streamline administrative procedures and enjoy greater financial flexibilities to run more efficient and cost-effective operations. During the upcoming meetings, HHA welcomes the opportunity to show the outcomes from independent studies of the demonstration for residents.

If HHA is awarded this opportunity, how will it impact my rent and utilities?

- The demonstration is designed for HAs to improve service to residents by designing and evaluating innovative, locally-designed housing and self-sufficiency strategies. A part of this program includes implementing and evaluating an alternative rent system that will apply to some Public Housing residents and HCV participants. HHA is seeking input on the design of the alternative rent system, with the goal of making rent calculation simpler and more transparent while providing incentives for HHA residents to increase household income. While several examples of possible income and rent designs will be part of the discussion during meetings, HHA's EMPOWER Housing proposal has not been designed yet without your input.
- Following these virtual meetings there will be an additional public virtual hearing where HHA will gather all of the comments made by residents and program stakeholders. All of the details of a proposal that HHA develops will be presented and discussed with a 30-day comment period before a final application is submitted to HUD.

Program Flexibilities

- Designing a proposal for this demonstration is not just about using an improved income and rent structure to incentivize applicable households to increase their income and retain more of it without having your rent go up shortly afterwards, it also includes designing and applying for other program flexibilities. Agencies applying in this round of the demonstration are able to establish alternative reexamination schedules for households. For example, HHA will establish recertifications every three years instead of annually. Another example is that HHA may establish higher levels for households' self-certification of assets. HHA will be able to apply for a range of program flexibilities, to the extent each flexibility does not impact the evaluation of a specific policy to be studied.
- At the same time, please know that HHA's EMPOWER Housing proposal will help and protect assisted households if they experience a hardship. In addition, no flexibilities or activities will create a mandatory self-sufficiency program, impose a time limit and/or work requirement, or alter rents.

Residents and Programs Included & Excluded from HHA's Housing Demonstration

- HHA's EMPOWER Housing proposal will give incentives to families with children where the head of household is working; is seeking work; or is preparing for work by participating in job training, educational programs, or programs that assist people to obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient.
- The following households and special purpose groups are excluded from the income and rent component of the program:
 - Seniors;
 - Those with disabilities;
 - HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Vouchers;
 - Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program;
 - Family Unification Program (FUP) Vouchers;
 - Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Vouchers;
 - Non-Elderly Persons With Disabilities (NED) Vouchers;
 - Mainstream Vouchers;
 - Relocation Tenant Protection Vouchers ; and
 - Voucher Homeownership program.
- The demonstration provides a set of flexibilities, both programmatic and financial, that can be applied throughout HHA, such that elderly and disabled households can also benefit from and participate in such activities.

All Agencies in the Demonstration Must Continue to Comply With Five Statutory Requirements

All agencies in the demonstration must continue to meet five statutory requirements established under law, which are as follows:

1. Very Low-Income Requirement: Agencies must ensure that at least 75 percent of the families assisted are very low-income families in each fiscal year.
2. Reasonable Rent Policy: Agencies must establish a reasonable rent policy which must be designed to encourage employment and self- sufficiency by participating families.
3. Substantially the Same Requirement: Agencies must continue to assist substantially the same total number of eligible low-income families as would have been served absent participating in the demonstration.
4. Comparable Mix Requirement: Agencies must maintain a comparable mix of families (by family size) as would have been provided had the amounts not been used under the demonstration.
5. Housing Quality Standards (HQS): Agencies must ensure that housing assisted under the demonstration meets Housing Quality Standards.

HUD Monitoring and Oversight

- Agencies in the demonstration remain subject to the full range of HUD monitoring and oversight efforts and use of HUD data systems to assess agency program performance, among other activities.

Is HHA in the running for this national competition and when will HHA apply?

- The HHA is one of 36 agencies that qualified with HUD to work with our residents, resident councils and program stakeholders to develop and submit an income and rent application under the demonstration. Of the 36 Housing Authorities, HUD plans to make an award to 10 HAs of different geographies and sizes.
- HHA's plan and application packages must be received before midnight on January 8, 2021.

A Q&A about the MTW demonstration and HHA's EMPOWER initiative can be accessed by clicking here: <http://www.housingforhouston.com/media/59188/mtw%20q&a%20guide.pdf>