

St. Petersburg Housing Authority

Housing Choice Voucher program Landlord/Owner Guidebook

Landlord Information



Dear Property Owner,

The following information is intended to introduce the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program offered to rental property owners and managers by the St. Petersburg Housing Authority. The St. Petersburg Housing Authority provides rental subsidies to more than 3,000 families throughout the Pinellas area. This information provides a property owner or manager with a better understanding of how the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program works.

As with most metro areas, there is frequently a shortage of decent, affordable housing. The Section 8 Voucher Program assists families with rental subsidies throughout Pinellas County. Many different types of households participate in the Section 8 Voucher Program, including the elderly, persons with disabilities, and working families that do not earn enough income to compete with rising rental costs.

Part of the success of the Section 8 Program depends on the ability of the St. Petersburg Housing Authority to provide connections with property owners that have decent, safe, and sanitary rental units available. Many low-income families in our community rely on property owners who are willing to participate in the Section 8 Program. Leasing to a Section 8 participant can be a profitable - as well as a rewarding - venture to any real estate investor.

Thank you for your interest in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. Sincerely,

Larry Gonzalez
Vice-President of Housing Choice Voucher
Email - lgonzalez@stpeteha.org

How the Section 8 Program Works

1. The family applies for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.
2. Then the family is put on a waiting list. The family could be on the waiting list anywhere from a month to two years - contingent on the amount of funds available to lease new Section 8 families.
3. The family is selected from the waiting list. Once selected the family is certified for eligibility, i.e. criminal history, all household income, family composition.
4. The family attends a Section 8 Briefing and is issued a Section 8 Voucher. A Section 8 Voucher allows free choice of housing units in the Pinellas area and surrounding area, provided the unit passes Inspection and the property owner is willing to sign a one year rental lease with the participant and a Housing Assistance Payment Contract with the St. Petersburg Housing Authority. The number of bedrooms is determined by the family size. Rent reasonableness is determined at the time of Inspection by comparing rents with other unassisted units in the immediate area.
5. Each selected family then seeks housing in the private market (possibly the unit in which they already reside). They are given a Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) packet to be completed by the participant and property owner/manager and returned to the St. Petersburg Housing Authority prior to the voucher expiration date.
6. Once the RFTA is returned to the Housing Counselor, it is reviewed to make sure the participant qualifies for the unit.
7. Then the unit is inspected for Housing Quality Standards, and to ensure that contract rent is reasonable. A rent comparison review of non-subsidized units in the immediate area will be conducted to establish the final contract rent.
8. After a satisfactory inspection of the unit the rental lease is submitted to a Housing Counselor and the Housing Assistance Payment Contract is completed with the St. Petersburg Housing Authority.



Creating Opportunities for Stronger Communities

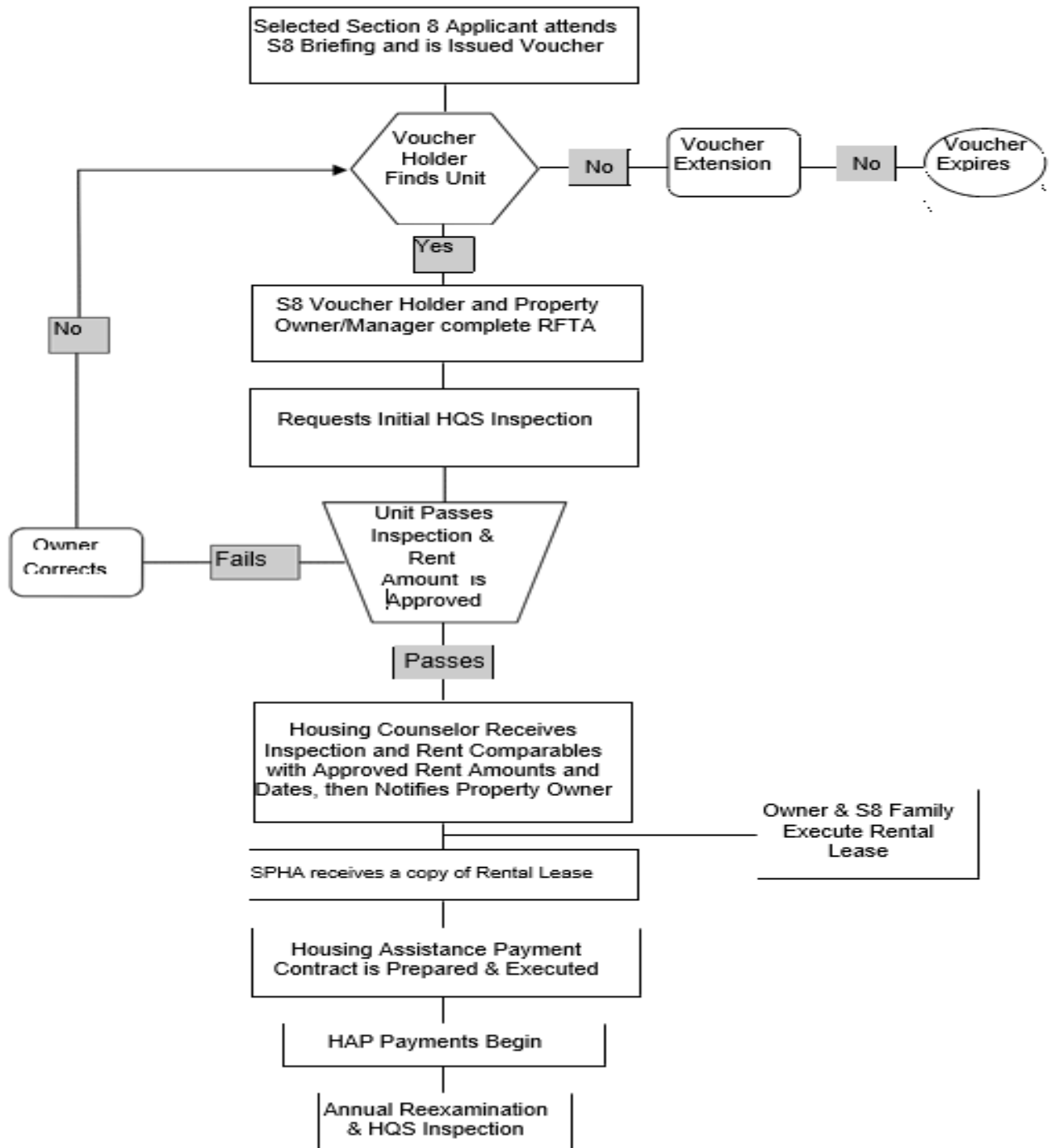
Housing Choice Voucher Checklist

Checklist for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

- ◆ Please note, the Estimated Maximum Contract Rent to Look For is listed on the Voucher. If the amount is less than the rent you are willing to accept, the family is not eligible for your unit. Ensure that the Section 8 Voucher is current, and be sure to get the name and telephone number of the Housing Counselor.
- ◆ **EQUALLY SCREEN ALL PROSPECTIVE TENANTS.** It is your responsibility to find a family who will take care of your property.
- ◆ Once the security deposit is established and the participant meets the approved rental criteria, complete and return all necessary documents to the Housing Counselor indicated on the participant's voucher.
- ◆ Documents to be returned to the St. Petersburg Housing Authority:
 1. Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA)
 2. Designation by Owner Form
 3. IRS Form W-9
 4. Reminder Notice
 5. Disclosure of Information on Lead-Based Paint and Lead-Based Hazards
 6. Section 8 Rental Inspection Checklist
 7. Contract Utility/Signature Page
- ◆ Upon receipt and acceptance of the RFTA and related paperwork, an initial inspection will be scheduled within 7-10 business days. The date the unit will be ready for inspection must be shown (field 8) on the RFTA.
- ◆ To ensure a timely inspection, the RFTA should include a current daytime telephone number of the property owner/manager. By the date of inspection, all work should be completed and all utilities should be turned on and in working order.
- ◆ An excellent time to prepare the Rental Lease Agreement is during the wait period for the initial inspection. Make sure to leave the rental amount, effective date, and lease expiration date fields blank.
- ◆ Rental amounts are determined by comparables to similar open market units within a one to two mile radius of the prospective unit. To support the requested rental amount, the property owner/manager should be prepared with at least two comparables of unassisted units within the required radius. Location is an important factor in determining approved rental amounts.
- ◆ Once the unit passes the initial Housing Quality Standards Inspection, confirm with the Housing Counselor the approved rental amount, effective date, and lease expiration date. Promptly submit a copy of the Rental Lease Agreement to the Housing Counselor, so the contract can be processed for payment.



Diagram of Section 8 Process



Property Owner/Manager Responsibilities

- ◆ Section 8 participants should be screened the same as private market prospective tenants. The property owner may elect to complete a credit check, background check and/or contact references. Once again, it is the responsibility of the property owner to properly screen the prospective tenant.
- ◆ Property owners/managers are responsible for all management functions for Section 8 units.
- ◆ Owners must maintain the unit and surrounding area to ensure that it is decent, safe, and sanitary at all times.
- ◆ If the rental lease agreement includes owner paid utilities, then it is the responsibility of the property owner to pay for them - not the tenant.
- ◆ It is the responsibility of the property owner/manager to enforce the lease.
- ◆ All governmental fees and taxes are the responsibility of the property owner - not the Section 8 participant.
- ◆ It is the responsibility of the property owner/manager to know and abide by the Fair Housing Laws.

Section 8 Participant Responsibilities

- ◆ Section 8 participants must report changes in their income or family composition, in writing within 10 business days. A family must obtain the approval of the property owner/manager and Housing Assistance Division in order to add family members to the lease.
- ◆ No other person other than the family members listed on the rental lease and Housing Assistance Payments Contract, may reside in the unit. Failure to adhere to this obligation may result in termination from the Section 8 program.
- ◆ The Section 8 participant's portion of rent is due to the property owner/manager by the date determined by the lease.
- ◆ Section 8 Participants are responsible for any damages caused by members of the family or visitors. The property owner/manager may repair damages and bill the participant for the cost of repair.
- ◆ The Section 8 participant will be held responsible for any disturbances or excessive noise caused by family members or visitors in a unit complex or common area.
- ◆ The exterior of the unit as well as maintenance of grounds are the responsibility of the Section 8 participant who resides in a single family dwelling.
- ◆ Section 8 participants may not apply wallpaper, contact paper, attach or display anything to the unit without the written consent of the property owner/manager.
- ◆ The unit must be maintained in a clean and sanitary manner. High standards of housekeeping are necessary and must be maintained for health and safety.
- ◆ If the Section 8 participant's utilities are turned off due to a delinquent bill, the unit is in violation of Housing Quality Standards and Housing Safety Codes.
- ◆ Section 8 participants may not engage in drug-related, violent, or criminal activity.
- ◆ Continually trashing a unit beyond the ordinary wear and tear of use and failing to keep the unit in a clean and sanitary manner will be cause for termination from the Section 8 Program.



ST. PETERSBURG HOUSING AUTHORITY HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

Q: How Do I List My Property with the Section 8 Program?

A: SPHA has partnered with <http://spha.gosection8.com> to list rental properties online. Listings are available to potential Housing Choice Voucher / Section 8 tenants seeking apartment units, duplexes, single-family homes or townhomes in the private market. It is recommended that landlords add photos to their listing for better advertising and faster lease up.

Q: Who qualifies and picks my tenant?

A: You must do your own tenant screening and test for suitability.

Q: How Much Can I Rent My Unit for?

A: The SPHA has Payment Standards by bedroom size that are guidelines for determining the maximum subsidy we can pay for a family. This Payment Standard is generally a gauge of the current rental market. However, each unit is evaluated by the Inspector on a case-by-case basis. Each unit's rent must be reasonable and comparable to unassisted private market rental units of similar size, location, amenities, quality, unit type, maintenance, utilities and services.

Q: Who Pays the Security Deposit?

A: All tenants are responsible for their own Security Deposit pursuant to State and local laws.

Q: What Happens After I Find A Tenant?

A: Once you have identified an acceptable Section 8 Participant, complete the Request For Tenancy Approval (R4TA) form & package that the tenant provides you with. Once that document is received in our office, a Housing Inspector will contact you to schedule an inspection of the unit. The lease may begin once the inspection is completed with a "passed" status.

Q: What Will the Inspector Be Looking for?

A: The Housing Inspector will be checking to see whether the unit is in compliance with Housing Quality Standards (HQS). These are minimum standards that any unit rented under the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program must meet.

Q: Can I Use My Own Lease?

A: You are free to use your own lease. However, HUD regulations require that the HUD Tenancy Addendum be attached to an owner provided lease. If the owner's lease contradicts anything in the HUD Tenancy Addendum, the HUD addendum shall prevail.

Q: When Can I Expect My First Check?

A: After we have executed the Lease and Housing Assistance Payments Contract and the owner has provided the SPHA with proof of legal ownership, the contract is processed for payment. Generally, the first check takes approximately two weeks. After the first payment is generated, subsequent checks are sent on the first of each month.



ST. PETERSBURG HOUSING AUTHORITY HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

Q: Who Do I Call If I have a Question or Problem with The Tenancy?

A: Each tenant is assigned a Housing Eligibility Analyst. The Eligibility Analyst handles any matters concerning the family's income or household composition and payments.

Q: Is My Unit Inspected After the Initial Inspection?

A: Yes. The SPHA must inspect all participant units annually. This is generally done near the contract anniversary date. In addition, in the case of an emergency or complaint by the owner or tenant, a special inspection will be done.

Q: Can I Cancel the SPHA Contract If I'm Not Satisfied?

A: No. Only the SPHA can cancel the Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) Contract. An owner is free to terminate a lease agreement pursuant to the terms of the lease and applicable Florida law. Once the Lease agreement ends, the HAP Contract terminates automatically. In the case of malfeasance by the tenant, the owner is free to initiate eviction proceedings.

Q: How Long Can I Rent to a Section 8 Family?

A: The initial lease term is for one year. After the initial term, the lease continues on a month-to-month basis indefinitely so long as HUD continues to provide the appropriations needed to fund the Section 8 Program.