

5.0 The Application and Voucher Issuance Process

Applying to Pensacola Housing's HCV program involves two phases. The first phase is the initial application, known as the pre-application. The pre-application requires the family to provide limited information including the name, address, phone number, and social security number of the head of household, a list of other household members, declaration of all household income, racial and ethnic designation and disability status of the head of household, and information establishing any preferences to which the family may be entitled.

Upon receipt of the family's pre-application, Pensacola Housing will make a preliminary determination of eligibility. Pensacola Housing will notify the family in writing of this determination. If the family is determined to be ineligible, the notice will state the reasons and the family will have the opportunity to request an informal review.

If the family is determined to be eligible, they will be placed on the waiting list as of the date and time when the completed pre-application was received by Pensacola Housing.

An applicant may at any time report changes in their status, including changes in household composition and income. Pensacola Housing will annotate the applicant's file and will maintain their place on the waiting list. Any change of eligibility status will be confirmed with the family in writing. Applicants are also required to submit any changes of mailing address in writing.

The second phase of the application process is the final determination of eligibility, referred to as the full application. The full application takes place when the family nears the top of the waiting list. Pensacola Housing uses the full application to confirm the family's eligibility for admission into the HCV program.

5.1 Reasonable Accommodation during the Application Process

When Pensacola Housing has initial contact with an applicant or member of the public, staff shall determine whether the person requires an alternate form of communication. Examples of alternative forms of communication may include but are not limited to the provision of a qualified sign language interpreter; having written materials explained verbally by staff, either in person or by telephone; or provision of written materials in large/bold font. Housing personnel may also offer to make home visits to disabled and elderly applicants.

5.2 Managing the Waiting List

Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and local PHAs, long waiting periods are common. Pensacola Housing maintains a waiting list of potential applicants who've expressed interest in participating in the HCV

program. Pensacola Housing takes applications to compile the waiting list following the procedures described in this section.

5.2.1 Organization of the Waiting List

The waiting list will be maintained in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. The application will be a permanent file;
2. All applications will be maintained in order of date and time of receipt of the complete written pre-application;
3. Any contact between Pensacola Housing and the applicant will be documented in the applicant file.

Under current HUD regulations, the waiting list cannot be maintained by bedroom size.

5.3 Closing and Opening the Waiting List

Should Pensacola Housing determine that the waiting list needs to be closed for a period of time, the closure will be announced via public notice. The public notice will be published online, in a local newspaper of general circulation, and also via any available minority media. Notice of closure may also be sent to other local social service agencies.

The reopening of the waiting list will also be announced via public notice. The public notice will state where, when, and how to apply once applications are being accepted again. The notice will be published in a local newspaper of general circulation, and also by any available minority media. Notice may also be sent to other local social service agencies. The public notice will include information about who is eligible to apply.

The notice will state that applicants already on waiting lists for other housing programs must apply separately for the HCV program, and that applicants will not lose their place on other waiting lists when they apply for the HCV program. The notice will include the Fair Housing logo and slogan and otherwise be in compliance with Fair Housing requirements.

5.4 Taking Applications

Please note: The application process may change with notice.

Applications for the HCV program waiting list will be taken via a dedicated telephone line during regular business hours on the second Wednesday of each month, excluding holidays. Completed self-declaration pre-applications will be accepted from a minimum of 25 applicants who call the application line during the published hours. Pensacola Housing will later verify the information in the application relevant to the applicant's eligibility, admission, and level of benefit.

As a reasonable accommodation, each month elderly and disabled applicants are provided a second opportunity to apply by calling during regular business hours on the second

Thursday of each month, excluding holidays. A dedicated TDD line will be available to take application calls, in addition to the dedicated telephone line. A minimum of 25 applicant names will be taken during each application period for elderly and disabled applicants. Verification of age (government-issued ID including date of birth, etc.) and/or disability status (i.e., receipt of SSI or SSD, or a statement confirming disability status from a qualified medical provider) is required from applicants who call on Thursdays before they will be placed on the waiting list. Applicants may submit these verification documents with their pre-application.

5.5 Families Nearing the Top of the Waiting List

When a family appears to be within approximately 2 months of being offered assistance, the family will be scheduled for an intake interview and the verification process will begin.

The family will complete a Tenant Information Form, present Social Security Numbers and citizenship/eligible immigrant information, and sign the Consent for Release of Information forms.

5.6 Waiting List Admissions and Special Admissions

Pensacola Housing may admit an applicant for participation in the program either as a waiting list admission or as a special admission.

If HUD should award funding that is targeted for families with specific characteristics or families living in specific units, Pensacola Housing will use the assistance for those families.

5.7 Preferences

Pensacola Housing will give preference to those families on the waiting list who are victims of federal or state-declared natural disasters. Thirty-party verification of displacement may be required before a voucher is issued.

In addition, federal guidelines stipulate that at least 75% of the families newly assisted by Pensacola Housing each fiscal year must be extremely low income families. To ensure this goal is met, there may be occasions when Pensacola Housing will assist an extremely low income household from the waiting list before assisting a very low income household, even if the very low income household has been on the waiting list longer.

Some of the vouchers administered by Pensacola Housing have been allocated to assist specific populations; for example, non-elderly disabled families (NED) or homeless veterans (VASH). Pensacola Housing will follow HUD guidelines regarding the administration of these programs. At times this may result in a NED family receiving a voucher before other families from the Section 8 waiting list, or in a VASH family receiving a voucher before all families on the Section 8 waiting list.

5.8 Exceptions

Notwithstanding the above, if necessary to meet the statutory requirement that 75% of newly admitted families in any fiscal year are families who are extremely low- income (unless a different target is agreed to by HUD), Pensacola Housing must skip higher income families on the waiting list to reach extremely low-income families. This measure will only be taken if it appears the goal will not otherwise be met. To ensure this goal is met, Pensacola Housing will monitor incomes of newly admitted families and incomes of families on the waiting list.

If there are not enough extremely low income families on the waiting list, Pensacola Housing will conduct outreach on a non-discriminatory basis to attract extremely low income families to reach the statutory requirement.

5.9 Auditing and Purging the Waiting List

Pensacola Housing will audit and update its waiting list periodically to ensure that the pool of applicants reasonably represents interested families. Auditing also enables updating of applicants' information regarding address, household composition, income category and preferences.

5.10 Setting Applicants on the Waiting List to Inactive

Pensacola Housing will change the status of an applicant on the waiting list to inactive under the following circumstances only:

1. The applicant requests that their name be removed;
2. The applicant fails to respond to a written request for information and/or a request to declare their continued interest in the program, or misses a scheduled appointment, or
3. The applicant does not meet the eligibility criteria for the program.

5.11 Intake Meeting

When the applicant's name nears the top of the waiting list, the applicant will be notified in writing of the next scheduled pre-certification intake meeting. Applicants will be given a checklist of required eligibility materials, which must be brought to the intake meeting for review by Pensacola Housing staff.

At the intake meeting, Pensacola Housing staff will review the applicant's materials and make an eligibility determination. If the application is incomplete, staff will provide the applicant with a checklist of outstanding materials and a deadline for completing the application. Failure to complete the application by the deadline will result in the applicant being set to Inactive on the waiting list.

When the application is complete, the applicant will be mailed an invitation to attend the next scheduled Eligibility Briefing.

5.12 Pre-Certification for Persons with Disabilities

For applicants identifying as persons with disabilities, Pensacola Housing is required to verify that the applicant qualifies as a person with a disability under voucher program guidelines before granting the rent deduction, disability expense allowance, or deduction for un-reimbursed medical expenses. Applicants cannot be compelled to reveal they have a disability; however, if they do not, they may not receive the program benefits such status confers.

Pensacola Housing will not require applicants to provide access to confidential medical records in order to verify disability, nor will Pensacola Housing require specific details as to the disability. Pensacola Housing **may not** seek the individual's specific diagnosis, nor seek information regarding the nature and/or severity of effects of the individual's disability.

If Pensacola Housing receives documentation from a verification source that contains the individual's specific diagnosis, information regarding the individual's treatment, and/or information regarding the nature or severity of the person's disability, that documentation will immediately be disposed of, not maintained in the individual's file, as it is confidential information.

Pensacola Housing will ensure that all employees who are involved in the screening application process understand how to conduct participant selection and screening without discriminating on the basis of any protected class, in particular applicants with disabilities.

Home visits are available as a reasonable accommodation. In addition, a Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD) is available during all Housing Department business hours.

If requested to do so by an applicant who is a person with disabilities, Pensacola Housing will consider verifiable, mitigating circumstances that explain and/or overcome any prior misconduct related to a previous assisted tenancy. If a reasonable accommodation would allow an applicant who is a person with a disability to meet the eligibility criteria, these circumstances will be taken into consideration. If eligibility is denied by Pensacola Housing, disabled applicants will be notified in writing, and will be advised of their right to request an informal review. A reasonable accommodation may also be requested by the applicant during the informal review process. Pensacola Housing will provide such reasonable accommodation, unless doing so would result in a fundamental alteration in the nature of the programs offered by Pensacola Housing.

5.13 Eligibility Briefing

After eligibility has been confirmed at the intake meeting, the family will be scheduled to attend an Eligibility Briefing explaining how the program works. The family is required to attend the briefing in order to receive a voucher. If they cannot attend the originally scheduled briefing, they may attend a later session. If the family fails to attend two briefings without good cause, they will be denied admission to the program.

Families unable to attend a briefing due to a disability may request a reasonable accommodation, such as having the briefing presented at an alternate location or during a one-on-one appointment. If an applicant with a disability requires auxiliary aids or other assistance to gain full benefit from the briefing, Pensacola Housing will furnish such aids where doing so would not result in a fundamental alteration of the nature of the program or in an undue financial or administrative burden. In determining the most suitable auxiliary aid, Pensacola Housing will give primary consideration to the request of the applicant.

Pensacola Housing will provide, upon request, a qualified sign language interpreter. However, the Housing Department's responsibility to provide a qualified sign language interpreter does not preclude an individual's right to have a friend, relative, or advocate accompany him or her when conducting business with Pensacola Housing.

The briefing will cover at least the following subjects:

1. A description of how the program works;
2. Family and owner responsibilities;
3. Where the family may rent a unit, including inside and outside Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction;
4. Types of eligible housing;
5. An explanation of how portability works;
6. An explanation of the advantages of living in an area that does not have a high concentration of poor families; and
7. An explanation that the family share of rent may not exceed 40% of the family's monthly adjusted income if the gross rent exceeds the applicable payment standard.

5.14 Eligibility Packet

During the Eligibility Briefing, Pensacola Housing will provide the family with an information packet covering at least the following subjects:

1. The term of the voucher and Pensacola Housing's policy on extensions and suspensions of the term.
2. How Pensacola Housing determines the Total Tenant Payment (TTP), family share, and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) for the family;
3. Information on payment standards and the utility estimate schedule;
4. How Pensacola Housing determines the maximum rent for an assisted unit;

5. Where the family may lease a unit. For families qualified to lease outside Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction at initial lease up, the packet includes an explanation of how portability works;
6. The HUD-required tenancy addendum that provides the language that must be included in any assisted lease, and a sample HAP contract;
7. The Request for Tenancy Approval (RTA) form and an explanation of how to request Pensacola Housing approval of a unit;
8. A statement of Pensacola Housing's policy on providing information to prospective owners. This policy requires applicants to sign disclosure statements allowing Pensacola Housing to provide prospective owners with the family's current and prior addresses, and the names and addresses of the landlords for those addresses. Upon request, Pensacola Housing will also supply any factual information or third party verification relating to the applicant's history as an assisted tenant or their ability to comply with material standard lease terms;
9. Pensacola Housing's payment standards, including when Pensacola Housing will consider granting exceptions to the standards;
10. The HUD brochure on how to select a unit ("A Good Place to Live");
11. The HUD-required lead-based paint brochure;
12. Information on federal, state, and local Fair Housing laws; the brochure "Fair Housing: It's Your Right"; and a copy of the housing discrimination complaint form;
13. A list of landlords known to Pensacola Housing who have expressed an interest in hearing from rental applicants with vouchers;
14. A list of accessible units known to Pensacola Housing that may be available;
15. The family's obligations under the program;
16. The grounds upon which Pensacola Housing may terminate assistance because of the family's action or inaction;
17. Pensacola Housing's informal hearing procedures, including when Pensacola Housing is required to provide the opportunity for an informal hearing, and information on how to request a hearing; and
18. An informational brochure and form explaining VAWA (the Violence Against Women Act).

In addition, landlord packets are available in the office and on the internet for all interested parties.

5.15 Issuance of Voucher

Once a family's eligibility has been confirmed and its subsidy standard calculated, all household information, including household income, has been verified, and the family has attended an Eligibility Briefing, Pensacola Housing will issue the voucher. At this point the family begins their search for a unit.

5.16 Term of the Voucher

The initial term of the voucher will be 60 days. The Issue Date and Expiration Date will appear on page 1 of the Housing Choice Voucher.

Pensacola Housing may grant extensions to elderly and disabled families, if requested, or to any family on a case-by-case basis due to mitigating circumstances, including, but not limited to: documented hospitalizations; death; or serious, incapacitating illness in the family. Pensacola Housing may also grant extensions on vouchers for families that are considered hard to house, according to HUD's criteria.

Upon the family's submittal of a completed RTA form, Pensacola Housing will suspend the term of the voucher until tenancy is approved or the RTA is denied. If the RTA fails to result in lease up, Pensacola Housing will extend the term of the voucher by the length of time the voucher was suspended.

5.17 Missed Appointments

Pensacola Housing will allow the family to reschedule intake meetings and attendance at an Eligibility Briefing for good cause. Generally, no more than one opportunity will be given to reschedule without good cause, and no more than two opportunities for good cause. When good cause exists, Pensacola Housing will work closely with the family to reschedule at a suitable time. Applicants who are persons with disabilities may request rescheduling as a reasonable accommodation; missing an appointment due to a disability may be considered good cause. Applicants will be offered the right to an informal review before being terminated from the waiting list. Disabled persons will be afforded reasonable accommodations to afford them participation in the review process. All applicants who fail to keep a scheduled appointment in accordance with these guidelines will be sent a notice of denial.

For applicants who reside outside of Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction, transportation issues and travel expenses will not be considered good cause.

5.18 Grounds for Denial

Pensacola Housing will deny assistance to applicants who:

1. Do not meet one or more of the eligibility criteria;
2. Do not supply information or documentation required by the application process;
3. Fail to respond to a written request for information or a request to declare their continued interest in the program;
4. Fail to complete any aspect of the application or lease-up process; or
5. Have a history of criminal activity by any household member involving crimes of physical violence against persons or property, and any other criminal activity including drug-related criminal activity that would adversely affect the health, safety, or well-being of other tenants or staff, or cause damage to the property.

In addition, Pensacola Housing will deny or terminate assistance if any household member:

1. Has one or more drug-related or violent-crime-related felony convictions within the last 3 years;
2. Has a debt to Pensacola Housing or to another PHA due to oversubsidy or for some other monies owed in connection with Section 8 Assistance or Public Housing Assistance under the 1937 Act;
3. Has committed fraud or bribery in connection with any federal housing assistance program, including the intentional misrepresentation of information related to their housing application or benefits derived therefrom;
4. Was evicted from federally assisted housing for non-payment of rent within the last 3 years;
5. Was evicted from federally assisted housing, other than for non-payment of rent, within the last 3 years;
6. Was evicted from assisted housing within 3 years of the projected date of admission because of drug-related criminal activity involving the illegal manufacture, sale, distribution, or possession with the intent to manufacture, sell, or distribute a controlled substance as defined in Section 102 of the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. 802;
7. Is illegally using a controlled substance or abuses alcohol in a way that may interfere with the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents. However, Pensacola Housing may waive this requirement if:
 - a) The person demonstrates to Pensacola Housing's satisfaction that the person is no longer engaging in drug-related criminal activity or abuse of alcohol;
 - b) The person has successfully completed a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program;
 - c) The person has otherwise been rehabilitated successfully; or
 - d) The person is participating in a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program.
9. Has engaged in or threatened abusive or violent behavior towards any Pensacola Housing Department staff member;
10. Has been terminated for a violation of family obligations under the HCV program during the last 3 years;
11. Has been convicted of manufacturing or producing methamphetamine (speed) while residing in federally assisted housing, resulting in a lifetime ban from the program;
12. Is a sex offender subject to a registration requirement; or
13. Is a welfare-to-work (WTW) family who fails to fulfill obligations under the Welfare-to-Work voucher program.

5.19 Notification of Negative Actions / Informal Reviews

Any applicant whose name is being inactivated on the waiting list will be notified by Pensacola Housing, in writing, that they have 10 business days from the date of the written correspondence to present mitigating circumstances or request an informal review. The letter will also indicate that their name on the waiting list will be set to inactive if they fail to respond within the timeframe specified.

Pensacola Housing's system of inactivating applicants' names on the waiting list will not violate the rights of persons with disabilities. If an applicant's failure to respond to a request for information or updates was caused by the applicant's disability, Pensacola Housing will provide a reasonable accommodation. If the applicant indicates that he or she did not respond due to a disability, Pensacola Housing will verify that there is in fact a disability and that the requested accommodation is necessary based on the disability. An example of a reasonable accommodation would be to reinstate the applicant on the waiting list based on the date and time of the original application.