

B.3 Progress Report.

Provide a description of the PHA's progress in meeting its Mission and Goals described in its 5-Year PHA Plan.

2020-2025 GOALS UPDATE:

1. Continue collaboration with Public Housing Authorities to create efficiencies through shared administrative functions such as inspections and shared jurisdictions.

UPDATE: In 2016 RIHousing launched the Centralized Wait List with the participation of 18 public housing authorities, which is nearly 70% of the state's housing authorities. This collaboration allows potential applicants to access one application for thirty-five (35) project-based voucher wait lists and the housing choice voucher program wait list for 18 housing authorities-all from one online portal. This innovation in shared administration and applicant access continues to function efficiently. Additionally, RIHousing spearheaded a competitive bidding process with a cohort of nine (9) public housing authorities to improve the quality and value of the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) process. A successful firm was identified and the participating PHAs are in the process of contract execution.

RIHousing continues to manage the Centralized Wait List for 18 public housing authorities and has hired a full time specialist to respond to inquiries and provide assistance with the application process. RIHousing also provides training to service providers in the community to help them navigate the public housing waitlists for their clients. In 2023, a training was provided to street outreach workers from various service providers.

2. Maximize state, federal and private funds to provide residents with a more holistic system of support to address social determinants of health in housing.

UPDATE: In 2020, RIHousing applied for Tenant Protection Vouchers through the Foster Youth Initiative. This Initiative requires the cooperation of the public child welfare agency, the housing authority and a service provider. RIHousing partnered with the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) and Foster Forward, a leading foster youth service provider to implement the Initiative. Foster Forward committed private funds to provide case management and housing stabilization services to maximize the public funding deployed by DCYF and RIHousing to provide holistic, wrap around services in stable housing to extremely vulnerable youth. To date, RIHousing has successfully leased up 9 FYI households within our jurisdiction, 8 households leased up in another jurisdiction and 16 in the process of locating apartments.

In 2021, RIHousing was awarded 117 Emergency Housing Vouchers and through our collaboration with the RI Continuum of Care and the RI Coalition to End Homelessness all vouchers have been issued and nearly 96% have been leased up.

In 2023, RIHousing was awarded 28 Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers. To implement this program RIHousing continues its partnership with Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), Foster Forward and expanded to partner with Family Service of Rhode Island. 108 Emergency Housing Vouchers have leased within jurisdiction and 2 are in the process of identifying an apartment and 10 were ported out of jurisdiction. 4 fyi vouchers remain leased within jurisdiction.

In 2024, RIHousing was awarded 25 Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers and has partnered with the Department of Veteran Affairs to implement this program.

3. Regenerate the wait list using updated preferences to ensure maximum utilization of the voucher program.

UPDATE: RIHousing is the housing authority for the balance of state and serves smaller cities and towns that do not have their own housing authority. RIHousing was also serving the city of Providence alongside the Providence Housing Authority (PHA) until 2017 when that agreement was terminated by PHA. Over the last four years the PHA has elected to not make any selections from their waiting list, but absorb nearly 300 of the households currently leased under the RIHousing HCV program. This alone has resulted in a net loss of 300 vouchers that were previously administered by RIHousing.

Similar to many other states, Rhode Island is experiencing an unusually low vacancy rate in the rental housing market. As you know, a healthy market has a vacancy rate of approximately 5-6%, over the past 18 months, the vacancy rate in Rhode Island has been between 1-2%. In response to this, RIHousing has taken significant actions to address the leasing potential in the Housing Choice Voucher program.

These steps include: an award-winning on-going marketing campaign, “Hello, Landlords” which received national attention in 2020, and is accompanied by a generous landlord incentive program, as well on-going landlord engagement events; project-basing housing choice vouchers up to the limit allowed by HUD in an effort to preserve affordable housing and stably house additional families; the hiring of a full-time real estate professional to identify and cultivate new landlord participation, and increased waitlist selections.

To mitigate the impact of the aforementioned contributing factors, RIHousing will continue the landlord incentive and engagement events, as well as retain the Housing Navigator position. In addition, the following actions will be taken:

1. RIHousing will increase staffing capacity to process a selection of 100 HCV waitlist applicants each month, beginning in July, 2022.
2. Review Project-based Voucher (PBV) contracts to ensure rent increases have been processed where eligible.
3. RIHousing staff met with the leadership of public housing to identify opportunities with other housing authorities throughout the state. .
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In 2023, RIHousing selected 519 applicants from the waitlist and leased 78 within jurisdiction. RIHousing also made changes to how its waitlist preferences for unstable housing, residency preference, homeless families and individuals, victims of domestic violence and Rhode Island residency were weighted in order to target areas of greatest need within jurisdiction. RIHousing also awarded 13 vouchers to a project based property. In an effort to reduce turnover timeframes for project based properties, RIHousing developed a project based team with a senior staff person responsible for managing partnerships with project based properties and serving as the primary point of contact.

4. **Partner with affordable housing non-profits to create a tenant education program that will help tenants succeed in subsidized housing.**

UPDATE: RIHousing surveyed existing HCVP tenants and recruited ten (10) voucher holders

to participate in an enhanced Resident Advisory Board. The Advisory Board will address tenant education more holistically and inform the development of a curriculum that is more closely aligned with the needs of program participants. RIHousing's Community Development grants funded a tenant education program that was delivered by Community Development Corporations.

In 2023, the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) was asked to participate in a focus group to provide feedback on how to be an optimal tenant. The focus group will be led by Highland Planning in 2024 and will also include feedback from a group of landlords that participate in the Housing Choice Voucher program through RIHousing.

5. Promote the use of project-based vouchers to address family homelessness, preserve affordable housing, protect at risk families and full utilization of Housing Choice Voucher program.

UPDATE: RIHousing issued a second Request for Proposals in 2023 to recruit project based voucher (PBV) opportunities that would target vulnerable households including those who are experiencing homelessness, families who require supportive services and families who are disabled and/or elderly. Currently, RIHousing has reached the capacity for project-based voucher contracts allowed by HUD. This translates into 75% of RIHousing's PBV contracts exclusively serving Rhode Island families with a history of homelessness or a risk of homelessness.

In 2023, RIHousing awarded 13 vouchers to a project based property that provides supportive services to its residents to serve this target population.

6. Obtain the status of a High Performer housing authority.

UPDATE: RIHousing has implemented quality control activities to ensure a return to the status of "High Performer" that include a revised approach to Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections and improved utilization in the voucher program. RIHousing engaged McCreight and Associates, known for their commitment to excellence in HQS inspections. This relationship will augment the internal full-time HQS inspector, as well as serve a quality control function. In addition, RIHousing allocated a corporate-wide internal quality control resource to analyze the existing process of quality management and make improvements where applicable. This internal quality control function will monitor the process of carrying out and conducting quality control analysis in the HCV program.

Additionally, RIHousing has engaged a consultant to provide a quality control review of files to ensure that activities are carried out efficiently and in compliance of all regulations.

In 2023, RIHousing achieved High Performer on the HUD Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP) score.

7. Increase owner outreach and provide relevant landlord materials to promote participation.

UPDATE: Building on the work of the Housing Stabilization team in 2019, the PHA partnered with RIHousing's Marketing team to implement an even more aggressive landlord recruitment effort. A recipient of the National Council of State Housing Agencies' Annual Award for Excellence, the "Hello, Landlords!" campaign includes an on-going landlord newsletter; a Landlord Appreciation event, held virtually last year; a redesigned and more robust landlord webpage on the www.rihousing.com website; and incentives for new landlords to participate.

Among the incentives included are an opportunity to post available units in a forum that is exclusively for voucher holders, a courtesy “pre” HQS inspection, and the availability of lead remediation funds. Further, RIHousing recently hired a real estate professional to cultivate relationships with new landlords and pursue opportunities to improve the participation of multi-family property owners in the state. Since joining the team, the Housing Navigator has identified over 160 units and 58 of those have been leased by a Housing Choice Voucher holder.

In 2023, the Housing Navigator successfully helped 43 families in the Housing Choice Voucher program find and move into a new unit.

RIHousing relaunched the HousingSearchRI.org website for landlords to advertise their properties in June, which includes a new search feature that connects families to low- and moderate-income units.

In 2024, the Housing Navigator plans to expand outreach door to door to reach landlords in the community. In addition, the Housing Navigator will work closely with RIHousing’s development and performance based contract administration (PBCA) team to identify properties with new open waitlists for units. The landlord event in 2024 will be held in person at a central location to build the Housing Navigator’s presence in the area.