

Chapter 5
BRIEFINGS AND VOUCHER ISSUANCE

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the briefing and voucher issuance process. When a family is determined to be eligible for the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, the GRHC will ensure that the family fully understands the way the program operates and the family's obligations under the program. This is accomplished through both an oral briefing and provision of a briefing packet containing the HUD-required documents and other information the family needs to know in order to lease a unit under the program. Once the family is fully informed of the program's requirements, the GRHC issues the family a voucher. The voucher includes the unit size for which the family qualifies based on the GRHC's subsidy standards, as well as the issue and expiration date of the voucher. The voucher is the document that authorizes the family to begin its search for a unit, and limits the amount of time the family has to successfully locate an acceptable unit.

This chapter describes HUD regulations and GRHC policies related to these topics in two parts:

Part I: Briefings and Family Obligations. This part details the program's requirements for briefing families orally, and for providing written materials describing the program and its requirements. It includes a particular focus on the family's obligations under the program.

Part II: Subsidy Standards and Voucher Issuance. This part discusses the GRHC's standards for determining how many bedrooms a family of a given composition qualifies for, which in turn affects the amount of subsidy the family can receive. It also discusses the policies that dictate how vouchers are issued, and how long families have to locate a unit.

PART I: BRIEFINGS AND FAMILY OBLIGATIONS

5-I.A. OVERVIEW

HUD regulations require the GRHC to conduct mandatory briefings for applicant families who qualify for a voucher. The briefing provides a broad description of owner and family responsibilities, explains the GRHC's procedures, and includes instructions on how to lease a unit. This part describes how oral briefings will be conducted, specifies what written information will be provided to families, and lists the family's obligations under the program.

5-I.B. BRIEFING [24 CFR 982.301]

Notification of Briefing

Prior to issuance of a voucher, Families will be notified of their eligibility for assistance at the time they are invited to a briefing. The notice will be sent by mail and will also be sent by email if the family has provided a valid email address to the GRHC.

The notice will advise the family of the type of briefing, who is required to be present at the briefing, and the date and time of the briefing. The notice will also inform the family of any additional requirements for in-person or remote briefings as addressed in relevant policy elsewhere in this section.

If the notice is returned by the post office with no forwarding address, the GRHC will attempt to reach the applicant by phone, if no response, the applicant will be denied, and their name will not be placed back on the waiting list. If the notice is returned by the post office with a forwarding address, the notice will be sent to the address indicated.

In-Person Briefings

In-person briefings will generally be conducted in group meetings. At the family's written request, the GRHC may provide an individual briefing.

Generally, all adult members of the family are required to attend the briefing. If the head of household is unable to attend, the GRHC will reschedule the briefing.

Families that attend group briefings and still need individual assistance will be referred to an appropriate GRHC staff person.

Briefings will be conducted in English. For limited English proficient (LEP) applicants, the GRHC will provide interpretation services in accordance with the PHA's LEP plan (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) (See Chapter 2).

Attendance

Applicants who fail to attend a scheduled in-person briefing will be scheduled for another briefing automatically. The GRHC will notify the family of the date and time of the second scheduled briefing. Applicants who fail to attend two scheduled briefings, without prior GRHC approval, will be denied assistance (see Chapter 3).

Remote Briefings [Notice PIH 2020-32]

The GRHC has the sole discretion to require that briefings be conducted remotely in case of local, state, or national physical distancing orders, and in cases of inclement weather or natural disaster. If the GRHC schedules a remote briefing, the GRHC will conduct a face-to-face

briefing upon request of the applicant as a reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability if safety and health concerns can be reasonably addressed.

In addition, the GRHC will conduct a briefing remotely upon request of the applicant as a reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability, if an applicant does not have child care or transportation that would enable them to attend the briefing, or if the applicant believes an in-person briefing would create an undue health risk. The GRHC will consider other reasonable requests for a remote briefing on a case-by-case basis.

Accessibility Requirements for Persons with Disabilities and LEP Individuals

Conducting Remote Briefings

At least 15 calendar days prior to scheduling the remote briefing, the GRHC will provide written notification via first class mail and/or email to families participating in the briefing to advise of technological requirements and to request the family notify the GRHC of any known barriers. If any family does not respond within seven (7) calendar days, or if the written notification is returned by the post office or the email is rejected, the GRHC will contact the family by telephone to identify potential technological barriers and to determine which technology resources are accessible to the family. The GRHC will resolve any barriers using the guidance in Section 6 of Notice PIH 2020-32, including offering the family the opportunity to attend an in-person briefing or have a one-on-one briefing over the phone, as appropriate.

The GRHC will conduct remote briefings via a video conferencing platform when available. If applicants are unable to adequately access the video conferencing platform, the briefing will be conducted by telephone conferencing call-in. If the family is unable to adequately access the telephone conferencing call-in, the remote briefing will be postponed, and an in-person alternative or one-on-one briefing over the phone will be provided.

The GRHC will provide login information and/or conferencing call-in information and an electronic copy of the briefing packet via email at least seven (7) calendar days before the briefing. The GRHC will provide a paper copy of the briefing packet upon family request, and may reschedule the briefing to allow adequate time for the family to receive the physical briefing packet.

The GRHC will ensure that all electronic information stored or transmitted as part of the briefing meets the requirements for accessibility for persons with disabilities and persons with LEP, and is secure, including ensuring personally identifiable information (PII) is protected.

The GRHC will ensure that families who participate in remote briefings have the opportunity to ask questions as part of the briefing.

If families lose connectivity during any remote briefing or otherwise feel they were unable to access information presented during the briefing, the family may request a one-on-one briefing over the phone or in person with the GRHC.

Oral Briefing [24 CFR 982.301(a)]

Each briefing will provide information on the following subjects:

- How the Housing Choice Voucher program works;
- Family and owner responsibilities;

- Where the family can lease a unit, including renting a unit inside or outside the GRHC's jurisdiction;
- An explanation of how portability works. The GRHC will not discourage the family from choosing to live anywhere in the GRHC jurisdiction or outside the GRHC jurisdiction under portability, unless otherwise expressly authorized by statute, regulation, PIH Notice, or court order;
- The GRHC will inform the family of how portability may affect the family's assistance through screening, subsidy standards, payment standards, and any other elements of the portability process which may affect the family's assistance;
- The advantages of areas that do not have a high concentration of low-income families; and

Briefing Packet [24 CFR 982.301(b)]

Documents and information provided in the briefing packet must include the following:

- The term of the voucher, voucher suspensions, and the GRHC's policies on any extensions of the term. The packet will explain how the family can request an extension.
- A description of the method used to calculate the housing assistance payment for a family, including how the GRHC determines the payment standard for a family, how the GRHC determines total tenant payment for a family, and information on the payment standard and utility allowance schedule.
- An explanation of how the GRHC determines the maximum allowable rent for an assisted unit.
- Where the family may lease a unit and an explanation of how portability works, including information on how portability may affect the family's assistance through screening, subsidy standards, payment standards, and any other elements of the portability process that may affect the family's assistance.
- The HUD-required tenancy addendum, which must be included in the lease.
- The form the family must use to request approval of tenancy, and a description of the procedure for requesting approval for a tenancy.
- A statement of the GRHC policy on providing information about families to prospective owners.
- The GRHC subsidy standards including when and how exceptions are made.
- Materials (e.g., brochures) on how to select a unit and any additional information on selecting a unit that HUD provides.
- Information on federal, state and local equal opportunity laws and a copy of the housing discrimination complaint form.
- A list of landlords known to the GRHC who may be willing to lease a unit to the family or other resources (e.g., newspapers, organizations, online search tools) known to the GRHC that may assist the family in locating a unit. The GRHC will ensure that the list of landlords or other resources covers areas outside of poverty or minority concentration.

- Notice that if the family includes a person with disabilities, the family may request a list of available accessible units known to the GRHC.
- The family obligations under the program, including any obligations of a welfare-to-work family.
- The grounds on which the GRHC will terminate assistance for a participant family because of family action or failure to act.
- The GRHC informal hearing procedures including when the GRHC is required to offer a participant family the opportunity for an informal hearing, and how to request the hearing.
- An explanation of the advantages of moving to an area that does not have a high concentration of low-income families.

Additional Items to Be Included in the Briefing Packet

The GRHC will provide the following additional materials in the briefing packet:

- The HUD pamphlet on lead-based paint entitled *Protect Your Family from Lead in Your Home*
- Information on how to fill out and file a housing discrimination complaint form
- The form HUD-5380 domestic violence certification form and the form HUD-5382 notice of occupancy rights, which contains information on VAWA protections for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking
- “Is Fraud Worth It?” (form HUD-1141-OIG), which explains the types of actions a family must avoid and the penalties for program abuse
- “What You Should Know about EIV,” a guide to the Enterprise Income Verification (EIV) system published by HUD as an attachment to Notice PIH 2017-12

5-I.C. FAMILY OBLIGATIONS

Obligations of the family are described in the housing choice voucher (HCV) regulations and on the voucher itself. These obligations include responsibilities the family is required to fulfill, as well as prohibited actions. The GRHC will inform families of these obligations during the oral briefing, and the same information must be included in the briefing packet. When the family’s unit is approved and the HAP contract is executed, the family must meet those obligations in order to continue participating in the program. Violation of any family obligation may result in termination of assistance, as described in Chapter 12.

Time Frames for Reporting Changes Required by Family Obligations

Unless otherwise noted below, when family obligations require the family to respond to a request or notify the GRHC of a change, notifying the GRHC of the request or change within 15 calendar days is considered prompt notice.

When a family is required to provide notice to the GRHC, the notice must be in writing.

Family Obligations [24 CFR 982.551]

The family obligations of the voucher are listed as follows:

- The family must supply any information that the GRHC or HUD determines to be necessary, including submission of required evidence of citizenship or eligible immigration status.
- The family must supply any information requested by the GRHC or HUD for use in a regularly scheduled reexamination or interim reexamination of family income and composition.
- The family must disclose and verify social security numbers and sign and submit consent forms for obtaining information
- Any information supplied by the family must be true and complete.
- The family is responsible for any deficiencies under the National Standards for the Physical Inspection of Real Estate (NSPIRE) Housing Quality Standards (HQS) breach by the family caused by failure to pay tenant-provided utilities or appliances, or damages to the dwelling unit or premises beyond ordinary normal wear and tear caused by any member of the household or guest. Damages beyond ordinary wear and tear will be considered to be damages which could be assessed against the security deposit under state law or in court practice.
- The family must allow the GRHC to inspect the unit at reasonable times and after reasonable notice, as described in Chapter 8 of this plan.
- The family must not commit any serious or repeated violation of the lease.
 - The GRHC will determine if a family has committed serious or repeated violations of the lease based on available evidence, including but not limited to, a court-ordered eviction or an owner's notice to evict, police reports, and affidavits from the owner, neighbors, or other credible parties with direct knowledge.
 - *Serious and repeated lease violations* will include, but not be limited to, nonpayment of rent, disturbance of neighbors, destruction of property, living or housekeeping habits that cause damage to the unit or premises, and criminal activity. Generally, the criterion to be used will be whether or not the reason for the eviction was the fault of the tenant or guests. Any incidents of, criminal activity related to, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking will not be construed as serious or repeated lease violations by the victim [see 24 CFR 5.2005(c)(1)].
- The family must notify the GRHC and the owner before moving out of the unit or terminating the lease.
 - The family must comply with lease requirements regarding written notice to the owner.
 - The family must provide written notice to the GRHC at the same time the owner is notified.
- The family must promptly give the GRHC a copy of any owner eviction notice.
- The family must use the assisted unit for residence by the family. The unit must be the family's only residence.
- The composition of the assisted family residing in the unit must be approved by the GRHC. The family must promptly notify the GRHC in writing of the birth, adoption, or court-

awarded custody of a child. The family must request GRHC approval to add any other family member as an occupant of the unit.

- The request to add a family member must be submitted in writing and approved prior to the person moving into the unit. The GRHC will determine eligibility of the new member in accordance with the policies in Chapter 3.
- The family must promptly notify the GRHC in writing if any family member no longer lives in the unit.
- If the GRHC has given approval, a foster child or a live-in aide may reside in the unit. For policies related to the request and approval/disapproval of foster children, foster adults, and live-in aides, see Chapter 3 (sections I.K and I.M), and Chapter 11 (section II.B).
- The family must not sublease the unit, assign the lease, or transfer the unit.
 - Subleasing includes receiving payment to cover rent and utility costs by a person living in the unit who is not listed as a family member.
- The family must supply any information requested by the GRHC to verify that the family is living in the unit or information related to family absence from the unit.
- The family must promptly notify the GRHC when the family is absent from the unit.
 - Notice is required only when all family members will be absent from the unit for an extended period. An extended period is defined as any period greater than 30 calendar days. Written notice must be provided to the GRHC at the start of the extended absence.
- The family must pay utility bills and provide and maintain any appliances that the owner is not required to provide under the lease [Form HUD-52646, Voucher].
- The family must not own or have any interest in the unit, (other than in a cooperative and owners of a manufactured home leasing a manufactured home space).
- Family members must not commit fraud, bribery, or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with the program. (See Chapter 14, Program Integrity for additional information).
- Family members must 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. See Chapter 12 for HUD and GRHC policies related to drug-related and violent criminal activity.
- Members of the household must not engage in abuse of alcohol in a way that threatens the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the other residents and persons residing in the immediate vicinity of the premises. See Chapter 12 for a discussion of HUD and GRHC policies related to alcohol abuse.
- An assisted family or member of the family must not receive HCV program assistance while receiving another housing subsidy, for the same unit or a different unit under any other federal, state or local housing assistance program.
- A family must not receive HCV program assistance while residing in a unit owned by a parent, child, grandparent, grandchild, sister or brother of any member of the family, unless

the PHA has determined (and has notified the owner and the family of such determination) that approving rental of the unit, notwithstanding such relationship, would provide reasonable accommodation for a family member who is a person with disabilities. [Form HUD-52646, Voucher]

PART II: SUBSIDY STANDARDS AND VOUCHER ISSUANCE

5-II.A. OVERVIEW

The GRHC will establish subsidy standards that determine the number of bedrooms needed for families of different sizes and compositions. This part presents the policies that will be used to determine the family unit size (also known as the voucher size) a particular family should receive, and the policies that govern making exceptions to those standards. The GRHC will also establish policies related to the issuance of the voucher, to the voucher term, and to any extensions of the voucher term.

5-II.B. DETERMINING FAMILY UNIT (VOUCHER) SIZE [24 CFR 982.402]

For each family, the GRHC determines the appropriate number of bedrooms under the GRHC subsidy standards and enters the family unit size on the voucher that is issued to the family. The family unit size does not dictate the size of unit the family must actually lease, nor does it determine who within a household will share a bedroom/sleeping room.

The following requirements apply when the GRHC determines family unit size:

- The subsidy standards must provide for the smallest number of bedrooms needed to house a family without overcrowding.
- The subsidy standards must be consistent with space requirements under the housing quality standards.
- The subsidy standards must be applied consistently for all families of like size and composition.
- A child who is temporarily away from the home because of placement in foster care is considered a member of the family in determining the family unit size.
- A family that consists of a pregnant woman (with no other persons) must be treated as a two-person family.
- Any live-in aide (approved by the GRHC to reside in the unit to care for a family member who is disabled or is at least 50 years of age) must be counted in determining the family unit size.

Unless a live-in-aide resides with a family, the family unit size for any family consisting of a single person must be either a zero- or one-bedroom unit, as determined under the GRHC subsidy standards.

The GRHC will assign one bedroom for each two persons within the household, except in the following circumstances:

- Persons of the opposite sex (other than spouses) will be allocated separate bedrooms.
- Parent(s) will be allocated a separate bedroom from their children.
- Live-in aides will be allocated a separate bedroom.
- Single-person families will be allocated one bedroom.

The GRHC will reference the following chart in determining the appropriate voucher size for a family:

Voucher Size	Persons in Household (Minimum – Maximum)
1 Bedroom	1 – 2
2 Bedrooms	2 – 4
3 Bedrooms	3 – 6
4 Bedrooms	4 – 8
5 Bedrooms	6 – 10

5-II.C. EXCEPTIONS TO SUBSIDY STANDARDS

In determining family unit size for a particular family, the GRHC will grant an exception to its established subsidy standards if the GRHC determines that the exception is justified by the age, sex, health, handicap, or relationship of family members or other personal circumstances [24 CFR 982.402(b)(8)]. Reasons may include, but are not limited to:

- A need for an additional bedroom for medical equipment
- A need for a separate bedroom for reasons related to a family member’s disability, medical or health condition.

For a single person who is not elderly, disabled, or a remaining family member, an exception cannot override the regulatory limit of a zero or one bedroom [24 CFR 982.402(b)(8)].

The family must request any exception to the subsidy standards in writing. The request must explain the need or justification for a larger family unit size and must include appropriate documentation. Requests based on health-related reasons must be verified by a knowledgeable professional source (e.g., doctor or health professional), unless the disability and the disability-related need for accommodation is readily apparent or otherwise known. The family’s continued need for an additional bedroom due to special medical equipment must be re-verified at annual reexamination.

The GRHC will notify the family of its determination within 15 calendar days of receiving the family’s request. If a participant family’s request is denied, the notice will inform the family of their right to request an informal hearing.

5-II.D. VOUCHER ISSUANCE [24 CFR 982.302]

When a family is selected from the waiting list (or as a special admission as described in Chapter 4), or when a participant family wants to move to another unit, the GRHC issues a Housing Choice Voucher, form HUD-52646. This chapter deals only with voucher issuance for applicants. For voucher issuance associated with moves of program participants, please refer to Chapter 10.

The voucher is the family’s authorization to search for housing. It specifies the unit size for which the family qualifies, and includes both the date of voucher issuance and date of expiration. It contains a brief description of how the program works and explains the family obligations under the program. The voucher is evidence that the GRHC has determined the family to be

eligible for the program, and that the GRHC expects to have money available to subsidize the family if the family finds an approvable unit. However, the GRHC does not have any liability to any party by the issuance of the voucher, and the voucher does not give the family any right to participate in the GRHC's housing choice voucher program [Voucher, form HUD-52646]

A voucher can be issued to an applicant family only after the GRHC has determined that the family is eligible for the program based on verification of information received within the 60 calendar days prior to issuance [24 CFR 982.201(e)] and after the family has attended an oral briefing [HCV 8-1].

If the GRHC determines that there is insufficient funding after a voucher has been issued, the GRHC will rescind the voucher and place the affected family back on the waiting list.

5-II.E. VOUCHER TERM AND EXTENSIONS

Voucher Term [24 CFR 982.303]

The initial voucher term will be 120 calendar days. The family must submit a Request for Tenancy Approval and proposed lease within the 120 calendar day period unless the GRHC grants an extension.

Extensions of Voucher Term [24 CFR 982.303(b)]

The GRHC has the authority to grant extensions of search time, to specify the length of an extension, and to determine the circumstances under which extensions will be granted. The GRHC will limit voucher periods to not be greater than 180 calendar days, unless a reasonable accommodation is requested and approved.

The GRHC will approve additional search time if needed as a reasonable accommodation to make the program accessible to and usable by a person with disabilities. The extension period must be reasonable for the purpose.

The family will be notified in writing of the GRHC's decision to approve or deny an extension. The GRHC's decision to deny a request for an extension of the voucher term is not subject to informal review [24 CFR 982.554(c)(4)].

The GRHC will approve extensions only in the following circumstances:

- It is necessary as reasonable accommodation for a person with disabilities.
- It is necessary due to reasons beyond the family's control, as determined by the GRHC. The following is a list of extenuating circumstances that the GRHC may consider in making its decision. The presence of these circumstances does not guarantee that an extension will be granted:
 - Serious illness or death in the family
 - Local Market Conditions
 - Other family emergency
 - Obstacles due to employment
 - Whether the family has already submitted requests for tenancy approval that were not approved by the GRHC

- Whether family size or other special circumstances make it difficult to find a suitable unit
- Other, as determined by the GRHC on a case-by-case basis

Any request for an extension must include the reason(s) an additional extension is necessary. The GRHC may require the family to provide documentation to support the request or obtain verification from a qualified third party.

All requests for extensions to the voucher term must be made in writing and submitted to the GRHC prior to the expiration date of the voucher (or extended term of the voucher).

The GRHC will decide whether to approve or deny an extension request within 15 calendar days of the date the request is approved or denied, and will immediately provide the family written notice of its decision.

Suspensions of Voucher Term [24 CFR 982.303(c)]

The GRHC must provide for suspension of the initial or any extended term of the voucher from the date the family submits a request for GRHC approval of the tenancy until the date the GRHC notifies the family in writing whether the request has been approved or denied.

Expiration of Voucher Term

If an applicant family's voucher term or extension expires before the GRHC has approved a tenancy, the GRHC will require the family to reapply for assistance.

Within 15 calendar days after the expiration of the voucher term or any extension, the GRHC will notify the family in writing that the voucher term has expired and that the family must reapply when the waiting list is open in order to be placed on the waiting list.