

## **FAMILIES: OUTREACH, SELECTION, AND CONTINUED PARTICIPATION**

This session explores issues related to family outreach, selection, and continued participation in the Section 8 Welfare-to-Work Voucher Program. The program is structured to allow PHAs with **maximum flexibility** toward developing selection and participation criteria. The program's success will be driven by comprehensive collaborations among the housing agency, its program partners, and the community it serves.

### **Outreach to Families**

Strategies for promoting the program to eligible families should go beyond the current PHA waiting list. While the TANF requirements target a ready population, they do not remove the need for extensive family outreach. Your program partners should be consulted to help you develop a comprehensive outreach and marketing approach to reach the maximum number of eligible families.

The following methods of outreach can help you to identify eligible families:

#### *Media Announcements*

- Newspapers (Daily, Community and Special Interest)
- Radio
- Television (including community access cable)

#### *Brochures and Posters*

- Literacy centers
- Libraries
- Health centers
- One-stop centers
- Family centers
- Schools
- Job training programs

#### *Websites*

- Public Housing Authority/Housing Agency
- Local Government
- Community Agencies

### *Fairs*

- Housing
- Job
- Community

### *Newsletters and Mailings*

- Public school parents
- Head Start parents
- TANF recipients
- Homeless agencies
- Transitional housing programs
- Social Service agencies
- Churches and faith-based organizations

### *Individual and Group Meetings*

- Public and private community partners
- Human resource departments of large employers
- City Council members or government representatives

#### **FAMILY OUTREACH CONSIDERATIONS**

What is your family outreach plan?

Is it a joint effort between the PHA and your program partners?

What outreach practice works best in your community?

How will you provide outreach to hard to reach populations?

### **Selection Criteria**

HUD has identified the basic requirements to determine a family's eligibility for the Section 8 Welfare-to-Work Voucher Program. Beyond these basic requirements, there is the expectation that the PHA will determine its selection criteria and related procedures based on local need. As the PHA defines its selection criteria, it will want to target individuals who have the ability to benefit from the Welfare-to-Work Voucher Program and achieve the goal of work and, therefore, economic and social stability.

### *Basic Section 8 Welfare to Work Voucher Program Eligibility Requirements*

Families must meet the following basic requirements to be eligible to participate in the program:

- The family must meet all normal Section 8 program requirements.
- The family must not already be receiving Section 8 assistance.
- The family must be on the Section 8 Waiting List.

The PHA has the flexibility to designate families in one or all of the following categories:

- Individuals *eligible to receive assistance* or services funded under the TANF program.
- Individuals *currently receiving assistance* or services funded under the TANF program.
- Individual *having received assistance or services* funded under the TANF program within the preceding two years.

HUD also requires that it must be determined that housing assistance is *critical* to a family's ability to successfully obtain or retain employment.

***Determining that the housing assistance is critical to a family's ability to successfully obtain or retain employment is a factor that cannot be overlooked. It will require a collaborative philosophy and approach to reaching the program's housing and employment goals.***

### *Income Targeting Requirements*

To comply with the new QWHRA regulations, at least 75 percent of the applicants admitted to the Section 8 program during each fiscal year must be considered Extremely Low-Income Households, with incomes below 30 percent of the area median.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program final rule, dated October 21, 1999, allows PHAs to disregard the admission of a portion of Section 8 Welfare to Work voucher families who are not extremely low-income when complying with income targeting requirements. PHAs must receive HUD approval to do this. HUD will grant approval only if and to the extent that the PHA demonstrates that compliance with income targeting obligations for these welfare-to-work families interferes with the objectives of the Section 8 Welfare to Work Voucher Program. HUD expects this authority to be needed only in exceptional circumstances.

### *PHA Section 8 Administrative Plan*

The PHA's Administrative Plan must be updated to include a policy for the selection and termination of eligible families for the Welfare-to-Work Voucher Program.

#### *Needs Assessment*

In addition to determining that housing assistance is critical to a family's ability to obtain and retain employment, other barriers to achieving economic and social stability may be identified during the selection process. These barriers may include:

- Transportation
- Child Care
- Job readiness skills and training
- Life skills
- Mobility
- Lack of affordable housing
- Health issues including inadequate nutrition
- Adult illiteracy
- Sub-standard or overcrowded housing
- Safety and Security
- Substance abuse
- Learning disabilities
- Physical disabilities
- ESL or limited English-speaking skills
- Education
- Risk of homelessness
- Domestic violence

The ability to work with program partners to address barriers to self-sufficiency will be critical to the program's success.

#### **ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY**

What are the critical barriers to self-sufficiency in your community?

Do your program partners identify the same critical barriers?

What factors differ?

Will a joint policy to address these critical barriers be developed prior to issuing the Welfare-to-Work vouchers?

The following tools will provide you with a population profile of your community and usually will correlate income to housing opportunities or homelessness.

- City Consolidated Plan
- Local workforce agency assessment
- Area human services needs assessments
- Local strategies for welfare reform

### Termination Criteria

HUD has identified “willful and persistent abuse” of the program as grounds for termination; however, HUD is allowing PHAs the discretion to set their own termination policy with their own definition of “willful and persistent abuse”.

#### TERMINATION POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Have you established a termination policy for the Welfare to Work Voucher Program?

How is this policy communicated to the participating families?

Is your termination policy counterproductive to the goals of the program?

What assistance will be provided to families to help prevent termination from the program?

The Welfare-to-Work Voucher Program is not meant to be an FSS program; however, you may choose to develop a Contract of Participation (similar to those used in FSS). A flexible model should be developed with the option for modifications.

The Contract of Participation cannot include time limits for assistance. The Welfare to Work Voucher Program is not a program where the participant graduates or loses assistance after a period of time. It is a program that is meant to assist with housing needs as long as an eligible family works toward stability.

Understanding the *Welfare Cycle* or the *Cycle Toward Stability* is helpful in developing a fair and reasonable termination policy. Leaving welfare is a process that takes various routes. Ten Characteristic Routes were identified from Project Match data and have been described in an article by Toby Herr and Robert Halpern, Changing What Counts: Re-Thinking the Journey Out of Welfare.<sup>1</sup> The data is based on 225 participants in a three-year program. Although this data was developed before the initiation of the federal TANF welfare reform program, the Characteristic Routes are consistent with preliminary TANF findings. With the time limits and work requirements imposed by TANF, it is important for housing agencies to facilitate assistance for families who are

making limited progress in their transition off of welfare. The Ten Characteristic Routes are:

### *Steady Progress Routes*

- *Steady Progress Through Employment:* Beginning at entry level and advancing jobs, these participants had no more than three jobs during a three or more year period, gaps between jobs tended to be short (three months).
- *Steady Progress Boosted Through Education:* These participants went to school after working full-time for awhile. All worked at least a year before deciding they needed more education.
- *Steady Progress But Plateaued at Low Wage:* These participants remained regularly employed over time, however, they made less progress toward higher wage jobs.
- *Steady Progress Through Vocational Training into Employment:* These participants found work in a job related to the training within one month of completing the training. They were not necessarily steady workers before entering the training program.
- *Steady Progress Through College and Part-Time Employment:* These participants spent at least two of the three years enrolled in college, working part-time.
- *Volunteer Into Employment:* These participants entered the work force (part or full-time) after a volunteer placement in the community.

### *Unsteady Progress Routes*

- *Lack of Progress, then Progress:* These participants initially looked as though they would make no gains, but with time they did make progress. They held no job or training longer than three months during their first year. For some this pattern continued for the second year. Eventually they begin to stay in education and training programs and keep jobs.
- *Unsteady Progress Through Employment:* These participants worked intermittently throughout a three-year period, holding anywhere from a few to as many as ten jobs. They experienced long spells of unemployment between jobs. All have held jobs for three months or longer, but few were able to hold a job for a year.
- *Progress Early On, Then Slipping Back:* These participants appeared to be steady workers initially. All worked full-time at one or more jobs for at least eight months and were off welfare for a minimum of 12 months. However, by the end of the third year they were receiving AFDC again. Many continued to stay involved in an educational or volunteer activity.

*Lack of Progress Route*

- *No Measurable Progress:* These participants did little during the three-year period. Most were unable to hold any placement (education, training or job) for longer than three months.

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- 1 High Job Turnover Among the Urban Poor: The Project Match Experience, July 1990  
Lynn Olson, Linnea Berg and Aimee Conrad  
Changing What Counts: re-Thinking the Journey Out of Welfare, April 1991  
Tobby Herr, Robert Halpern with Aimee Conrad