A Landlord's Guide to The Sonoma County Housing Choice Voucher Program

For more information, contact us:
(707) 565-1259 • TDD: (707) 565-7555 • LandlordLine@sonoma-county.org

Welcome to the Sonoma County Housing Choice Voucher Program

To Sonoma County property owners, managers and landlords,

Thank you for your interest in the Sonoma County Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCV Program). Because of participating owners and managers, we are able to provide families, seniors, veterans, and the disabled a rental subsidy, making it possible for them to afford to live in Sonoma County.

This guide will walk you through the important facets of the Housing Choice Voucher Program. It will provide you with a basic understanding of how the program operates, and what you as a landlord can expect when you choose to offer housing to participating families.

Upon finishing this guide, you may still have questions about the program. We stand ready to answer all of your questions and make the process of renting to our participating families as easy as possible for you.

Sincerely,

Margaret Van Vliet
Executive Director
Sonoma County Community Development Commission
Sonoma County Housing Authority

About the HCV Program

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program is a national rental assistance program funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

HUD governs the program according to federal law and agency regulations and the Sonoma County Housing Authority operates the HCV Program in Sonoma County according to our local administrative policies.

The HCV Program provides rental assistance to low-income households by providing a subsidy to help families afford housing in the private rental market. This subsidy is calculated based on the household's income. Once leased, tenants pay approximately one third of their income toward rent in accordance with the terms of the rental agreement. The program pays the rest directly to your bank account.

The HCV Programs allows low-income families to rent quality housing in the private market.

Our Mission

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission is dedicated to promoting decent and affordable housing, revitalizing communities, and supporting public services that increase economic stability for county residents.

Landlord Benefits

Reduced marketing and advertising costs. Finding tenants to fill your vacant units is easy. The HCV Program offers free property listings, which are widely distributed to families searching for housing. There are always families who are looking for quality housing. The HCV Program works with new applicants and current participants who are looking for a change in housing.

An additional pool of applicants. Tenant selection is entirely up to you. Landlords are expected to screen and make their own decisions about applicant suitability. You have the right to reject any applicant who does not meet your established screening criteria. The HCV Program will even provide contact information for families' current landlords, if available. In addition, we offer educational materials and seminars to families to help them be great tenants. Families who participate in this training are ready to "rent smart."

Once you select a family, you retain the right to charge your normal security deposit and you may use your own form of rental agreement. Families must comply with the terms of the rental agreement, including payment of rent and proper care of the unit.

Find out more.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is part of a successful residential rental property strategy for tens of thousands of landlords across the country. For more information on Sonoma County's HCV Program, call (707) 565-1259 or TDD: (707) 565-7555.

Landlord Benefits

Predictable cash flow. Most participants and landlords are protected should the family ever experience a decrease in income. In such cases, the Housing Authority will generally increase the portion of the rent it pays to the landlord. When a private market renter loses his/her job, what recourse do landlords have if the tenant can't pay the rent? Slow pay, repayment arrangements, and eviction may follow in this type of situation. Given the HCV Program's unique ability to increase the Housing Authority's portion of rent, both parties are afforded peace of mind during times of tenant hardship.

Landlords receive payments from the program via direct deposit.

Important Points to Remember

- √ You maintain the right to screen prospective residents according to your company's policies.
- √ If you select one family from the HCV Program, you are not automatically required to lease all of your units to participants of the program.
- √ Just like when you rent to families without rental assistance, you are still required to comply with Fair Housing laws in your selection process.
- √ The rental agreement term is up to you. You are not required to enter into a long-term rental agreement.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Sonoma County Housing Authority (SCHA)

SCHA receives and reviews applications for the Housing Choice Voucher Program from families and conducts an annual recertification for continued eligibility. To ensure that participating families are living in safe and decent homes, SCHA inspects units prior to and at least biennially (every other year) during occupancy to ensure the home meets the federal Housing Quality Standards. SCHA determines the amount of housing assistance each family qualifies for, and makes assistance payments directly to the property owner/manager. SCHA is responsible to ensure the program, tenants, and landlords operate in compliance with federal, state, and local rules and regulations.

Participating Landlords

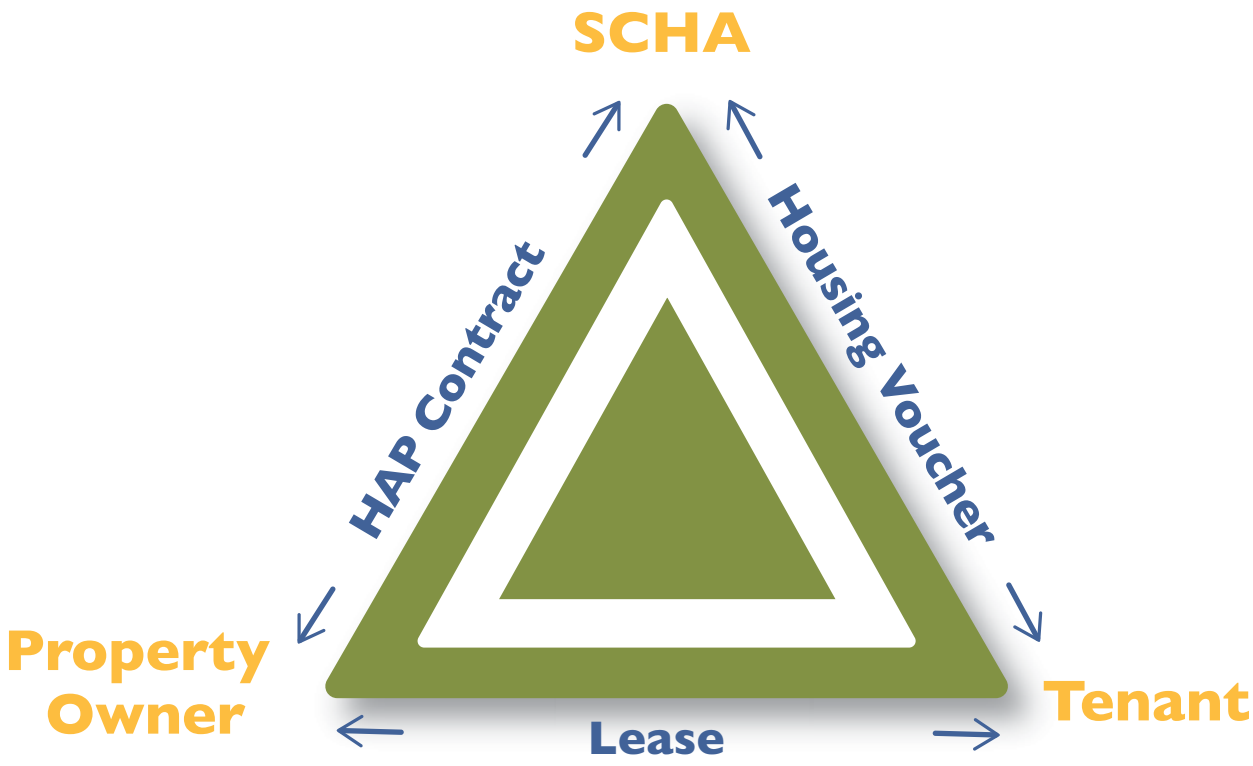
The landlord's responsibilities do not differ largely from those performed when the tenant is not receiving rental assistance. The landlord markets units, screens interested families, and offers to lease to selected families. The landlord is responsible for managing the property, including collecting the tenant's rent portion, performing maintenance, and complying with and enforcing the terms of the rental agreement. Additionally, the landlord must notify SCHA if the tenant violates the rental agreement and comply with other associated agreements such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract.

Participating Families

A family participating in the HCV Program is responsible for finding and applying for a home that meets their needs. They are also responsible for providing all required information to the SCHA on a timely basis to verify initial and continued eligibility for the HCV Program. In order to receive assistance, the family must adhere to all the requirements of the rental agreement, including paying their portion of the rent to the landlord and all other family obligations of the program.

Roles and Responsibilities
At A Glance

The U.S. Department of Housing And Urban Development (HUD) provides the Sonoma County Housing Authority (SCHA) with funding for the HCV Program, develops policy and regulations that govern the HCV Program, and monitors the Housing Authority's compliance with policies, regulations, and program administration through reviews and audits.



The Sonoma County HCV Program is a partnership between SCHA, the property owner and participating families. Each has rights and responsibilities that are outlined in the leasing and program documents.

Program Overview: Step by Step

Tenant Selection

1. List your property by contacting our office at (707) 565-1259 or submitting a Vacancy Listing form.
2. Interested families will contact you directly to view available units. Be sure to discuss your rental agreement terms, application fee, security deposit, and utilities arrangement up front.
3. Review applications consistently and in accordance with your screening policies.
4. Select an eligible family.

Landlords maintain all traditional rights and responsibilities, including screening tenants in accordance with their policy and fair housing laws.

We want to do business with you.

If you own or manage residential rental property in Sonoma County, contact us at (707) 565-1259 or via email at LandlordLine@sonoma-county.org to get started today. TDD: (707) 565-7555

Leasing

1. Complete the family's Request for Tenancy Approval form. Either you or the family submits it to SCHA.
2. Your requested rent will be approved or negotiated according to SCHA's rent reasonableness review. SCHA has to ensure the requested rent is in line with what landlords in the area are charging for similar units and that the rent that the tenant will pay is affordable for the family.
3. SCHA will arrange a date with you to inspect the unit. If any repairs are needed, the SCHA will provide you with a list of items to be completed.
4. Once the unit passes inspection, select a move-in date with the tenant and sign the rental agreement and contract documents including information required to process payments to you from SCHA.

All units must pass inspection prior to move in. The inspection process is based on the premise that all families have the right to live in safe, quality housing regardless of income.

A win-win situation.

In addition to a solid business opportunity for you, here's a chance to help families to get a new lease on life. Call (707) 565-1259 or TDD: (707) 565-7555.

Tenancy

1. The tenant and SCHA pay you monthly.
2. SCHA will inspect the unit biennially, and at other times if requested by the owner or tenant. SCHA allows owners and tenants to self-certify that minor deficiencies observed during biennial inspections have been completed, instead of requiring a re-inspection. This saves you time while still ensuring that families live in safe homes.
3. Both you and SCHA will be notified by the tenant of any proposed changes in household members. You and the SCHA must approve any new household members.
4. Notify the tenant and SCHA of any proposed rent increase 60 days in advance.
5. Notify the tenant and SCHA of any changes to management or ownership.

The tenant pays you their rent portion each month according to the terms of your rental agreement.

Be part of the solution.

The HCV Program expands the supply of affordable housing from existing stock, allowing families to live in housing that they might not otherwise be able to afford. To list available properties, contact us at (707) 565-1259 or via email at LandlordLine@sonoma-county.org. TDD: (707) 565-7555

The Sonoma County Housing Choice Voucher Program

A Solid Business Opportunity

For thousands of property owners and managers across the country, the Housing Choice Voucher Program is an integral part of a successful residential real estate management strategy.

For more information, contact:

The Sonoma County Community Development Commission

Sonoma County Housing Authority

1440 Guerneville Road • Santa Rosa, CA 95403-4107

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Translation services are available.

EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

Sonoma County Community Development Commission