

NCSHA 2016 Annual Awards Entry Form

(Complete one form for each entry)

Deadline: Wednesday, June 15, 2016

Visit ncsha.org/awards to view the Annual Awards Call for Entries.

Instructions: Type entry information into the form and save it as a PDF. Do not write on or scan the form. If you have any questions contact awards@ncsha.org or 202-624-7710.

Fill out the entry name *exactly* as you want it listed in the program.

Entry Name: _____

HFA: _____

Submission Contact: (Must be HFA Staff Member) _____ **Email:** _____

Please provide a 15-word (maximum) description of your nomination to appear on the NCSHA website.

Use this header on the upper right corner of each page:

HFA: _____

Entry Name: _____

Select the appropriate subcategory of your entry and indicate if you are providing visual aids.

Communications	Homeownership	Legislative Advocacy	Management Innovation
Annual Report	Empowering New Buyers	Federal Advocacy	Financial
Creative Media	Encouraging New Production	State Advocacy	Human Resources
Promotional Materials and Newsletters	Home Improvement and Rehabilitation		Operations
			Technology
Rental Housing	Special Needs Housing	Special Achievement	Are you providing visual aids?
Encouraging New Production	Combating Homelessness	Special Achievement	Yes
Multifamily Management	Housing for Persons with Special Needs		No
Preservation and Rehabilitation			

Rhode Island Housing
**Opening the Section 8 Wait List
Management Innovation: Operations**

Opening the Doors to our State's Homeless Population

In 2015, after 11 years of gradually winnowing the wait list for its Housing Choice Voucher Program ("Section 8"), Rhode Island Housing put together a plan to reopen the list with a minimum of disruption to clients, partner organizations and the agency's own internal operations while most effectively meeting the state's housing needs. Rhode Island Housing knew that vouchers allowing families to lease an apartment or home they otherwise couldn't afford would be in high demand.

The **strategic objective was to get housing to the people who needed it most** without the kind of chaos that sometimes occurs when organizations announce Section 8 wait list openings. No one wanted applicants camping out on the sidewalk overnight.

Working collaboratively with municipal housing authorities around the state and nonprofit organizations that work with people experiencing homelessness, the agency developed appropriate eligibility criteria, devised an online lottery system, and enabled individuals to sign up at locations convenient for them. As Rhode Island Housing's Vanessa Galarza notes, "Our partner organizations volunteered their sites so that people could get help filling out the required online applications, at the same time establishing connections to case managers." Building those relationships upfront would mean efficiencies down the road.

By developing a thoughtful application process together with community partners we were able to achieve the following goals:

- **Target those with the highest need** to meet the **strategic objective of reducing homelessness in Rhode Island (including veteran homelessness) consistent with the state's *Opening Doors RI plan to end homelessness* and participation in the *national Zero 2016 campaign***
- **Ensure that applicants had the help they needed** when submitting applications and beyond
- **Reduce administrative burdens associated with waiting list openings** for Rhode Island Housing
- **Eliminate lines and long waits for applicants** and congestion at our main office

Preparation Is Key

We began reaching out to community partners more than three months before the opening of the wait list to get their feedback on how to best target the homeless population, ensure that applicants had the assistance they needed to apply and access housing, and develop a process that would eliminate long lines and ensure that no one organization was overburdened. We met with homeless providers and other nonprofits that work with the homeless and established an email list of over 100 people that we communicated with regularly as the process for opening the waitlist was developed. With their input we refined the list of eligible applicants to include formerly homeless people living in permanent supportive housing who no longer needed supportive services. This allowed us to assist those best suited to the Section 8 program while freeing up resources for individuals needing the higher level of service and supports permanent supportive housing provides. They also helped us refine the process for ensuring applicants met the eligibility criteria and entering them into the state's homeless management information system.

We worked with this group of providers to solicit volunteers and identify sites across the state where the homeless could receive assistance completing and submitting the on-line application. While we followed all program requirements for advertising the opening of the wait list, notices were very clear that only the

homeless were eligible to apply. Most of our outreach was done directly through homeless providers, ensuring that those in the homeless system knew about the opportunity and were being encouraged to take advantage of it. We also provided training to providers on what the application looked like, what information applicants would need to provide, and what the eligibility criteria were so that they would be prepared to provide assistance and could prepare ahead of time to ensure that their clients would be ready.

We developed maps and information on the sites where the homeless could receive assistance submitting applications (available in English and Spanish). We dedicated sections of our website to information on the opening of the list, resources available and eligibility criteria.

How it worked

The wait list was open from February 4- February 10, 2015. Only online applications were accepted unless an applicant needed an accommodation. Twelve provider organizations volunteered to help homeless families and individuals complete the online applications. Among the providers were the Providence Veterans Administration and Operation Stand Down RI, which provided assistance to homeless veterans. Staff from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless helped input the necessary data into the state's Homeless Management Information System. Since selection from the wait list was by lottery, the applications were submitted online, and providers and clients were prepared for the opening, we did not experience any lines of clients trying to submit applications or any disruption to our services due to the opening.

As many as **5,109 applications were received**. In comparison, the annual count of homeless in Rhode Island in 2014 was just over 4,000. Of those applicants, 1,085 were approved as meeting the eligibility criteria. Jean Johnson, executive director of a community development corporation in Warwick, marveled, "House of Hope received nearly 200 applications from individuals and families for the HCVP wait list." She expressed gratitude for the cooperation on the shared goal of helping people experiencing homelessness access housing within their financial reach.

A win for homeless families, partner organizations and us

The new process for opening the wait list was both innovative and replicable. It met the challenge of getting the people into homes with as little disruption as possible to clients, Rhode Island Housing or partner organizations. **It achieved visible improvements in our operations—for example, by getting the nearly 5,000 applicants into a statewide database that could enable working with them in the future.** The benefits were greater than the costs. No additional staff was needed as we used college interns and volunteers who helped to man satellite sites that had limited manpower. We had limited printing cost for the informational material. We convened six internal and external planning meetings, which made all aspects of the opening process much easier.

We had very few calls and almost no walk-in traffic in our main office because we were able to prepare ourselves, our intended audience and our partners in such a way that everyone able to apply and no one felt overwhelmed. At the same time, the application process connected this difficult to serve population with homeless providers and counselors who were often listed as an alternate contact on the application. This helped our staff connect to the applicants and provided a resource to help applicants find appropriate housing once they received their voucher.

To ensure this population could find and rent up apartments, **Rhode Island Housing also applied for and received a \$100,000 grant from the state to provide security deposit assistance to homeless applicants who could not afford those costs.** This has been a **critical resource to help** this extremely low income population address the upfront costs of leasing an apartment.

2015

ANNUAL REPORT

Opening the waiting list

In early 2015, for the first time in more than 10 years, Rhode Island Housing opened the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) wait list. The HCVP, commonly known as the Section 8 Voucher Program, is the federal government's major program to help very low-income families, the elderly and the disabled afford safe, stable housing in the private market. Rhode Island Housing administers this \$14 million program on behalf of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Reopened to the population most in need – families and individuals who are homeless – the effort relied on the support of a strong coalition of partners, including more than a dozen social service providers, the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless (RICH), Operation Stand Down RI, the Veterans Administration and the United Way of Rhode Island.

"We formed a team of homeless providers around the state months ahead of the opening," said Vanessa Galarza, Rhode Island Housing HCVP supervisor. "Our partner organizations volunteered their sites so that people could get help filling out the required online applications, at the same time establishing connections to case managers."



Having learned from challenges faced by housing authorities around the country, the agency prepared well in advance so the greatest number of people could be registered in a coordinated and comprehensive manner.

With almost 5,000 applicants, the high demand for HCVP vouchers demonstrates the strong need. To date, the agency has provided vouchers to 200 applicants and is on track to reach 600 more in 2016 – stabilizing families and reducing disruptions to education and jobs.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 20, 2015

Contact: Mary Kate Harrington, 401-450-1356 or mharrington@rhodeislandhousing.org
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Nearly 5,000 Apply for Rhode Island Housing's Affordable Housing Waitlist

Organization nears end of existing waitlist after decade of matching families with rental assistance vouchers

PROVIDENCE, RI – Rhode Island Housing has completed a week-long process of reopening its waiting list for rental assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) to homeless families and individuals, drawing 4,893 applications for the program. The waitlist was reopened on Wednesday, February 4, 2015 for the first time in more than 10 years.

“After many years of connecting Rhode Island families with safe, affordable housing, we were pleased to reopen the waitlist for the Voucher Program,” said Barbara Fields, acting executive director of Rhode Island Housing. “This will help many of our most vulnerable residents find homes and much-needed stability. Reopening our list for the first time in 10 years helps Rhode Island move forward in our efforts to end homelessness by 2016.”

Over the past several decades, Rhode Island Housing has helped hundreds of individuals and families find safe, affordable housing through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) HCVP, also known as Section 8 rental assistance. After considering 800 applicants from the HCVP waitlist for affordable housing vouchers in 2014, Rhode Island Housing is nearing the end of its existing waiting list.

The HCVP waiting list was reopened only to the population most in need – families and individuals who are homeless. Vouchers distributed through the program will provide homes for many individuals and families currently residing in shelters and will free up space within the housing assistance system for those in need of more intensive support and services.

Applicants will be selected for rental assistance from the waiting list by lottery.

Improving voucher utilization and other rental assistance for Rhode Islanders without permanent homes is key to Rhode Island Housing's mission and to Opening Doors RI, the state's plan to end homelessness.

“This is a good step towards ending homelessness in our state,” said Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo.

“Working to end homelessness not only makes our neighborhoods stronger, but helps us to improve our economy for everyone.”

Reopening the HCVP waiting list also makes progress toward the goals of Zero: 2016, a national campaign aiming to end veteran homelessness by the end of this year and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016.

The recent sign up period marked the culmination of months of preparation by Rhode Island Housing and its partner organizations that serve the homeless population to help eligible individuals learn about the program and enrollment process. Providers across the state worked with the homeless families and individuals they serve to help ensure that those who were eligible applied for assistance.

Twelve homeless provider organizations volunteered to help homeless families and individuals complete online

applications. These providers included the Providence VA, in partnership with Operation Stand Down RI, which provided assistance to homeless veterans. Staff from the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless helped input data regarding homeless applicants into the state's Homeless Management Information System. The United Way of Rhode Island also donated the use of the organization's 2-1-1 van to help reach potential applicants without computer access.

"House of Hope received nearly 200 applications from individuals and families for the HCVP waitlist with more than half coming from Harrington Hall alone," said Jean Johnson, executive director of House of Hope. "We are pleased to continue our partnership with Rhode Island Housing to achieve our shared goal of helping the homeless access affordable housing."

Rhode Island Housing is partnering with the Providence Housing Authority to coordinate a joint opening of the organizations' HCVP waiting lists to a broader population by the end of this year.

"The high volume of applicants for HCVP vouchers demonstrates the strong need for affordable housing in Rhode Island," said Fields. "In the months and years ahead, Rhode Island Housing is dedicated to working with our partners to end homelessness and continue to make affordable housing available for Rhode Islanders in need."

About Rhode Island Housing

Together with its partners, Rhode Island Housing works to ensure that all people who live and work in Rhode Island can afford a healthy, attractive home that meets their needs. Rhode Island Housing uses all of its resources to provide low-interest loans, grants, education and assistance to help Rhode Islanders find, rent, buy, build and keep a good home. Created by the General Assembly in 1973, Rhode Island Housing is a privately funded public purpose corporation.

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Opening of Rhode Island Housing's Housing Choice Voucher Program Waitlist to the Homeless

Rhode Island Housing is pleased to announce the limited opening of our Waiting List for housing assistance under the Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8 rental assistance) **for homeless families and individuals.**

HOW? **Applications will only be accepted online.** Applications must be completed and submitted electronically on our website at **www.rhodeislandhousing.org**. Rhode Island Housing **WILL NOT** accept or process any application that is faxed, e-mailed or hand delivered to the agency.

Selection from the Waiting List will be by lottery. Date and time of application will not be considered.

WHEN? Applications can be submitted online through our website starting on **February 4, 2015 at 12:01 AM through 11:59 PM on February 10, 2015.** Applications will only be accepted during this time period. You will not be able to submit an electronic application after 11:59 PM on February 10, 2015.

WHO? Only applicants that meet the Rhode Island Housing Authority's definition of homeless and fall within the program income limits are eligible to apply. That definition and the income limits is attached.

Applying for Assistance

If you meet the eligibility criteria and are interested in applying for housing assistance you must complete and submit an application online through the Rhode Island Housing website at www.rhodeislandhousing.org. When the waiting list opens, you will be able to click on a link (*see below*) which will take you to a page with additional information and a link to the application. **This link will not be available until the waitlist opens at 12:01 AM on February 4, 2015.**

Web link:

Section 8 HCVP
Application

If you need assistance submitting an application, you can go to any of the sites identified on the reverse side of this sheet during the hours shown and homeless assistance providers will be available to assist you.

Homeless Assistance Provider List

Organization	Address	Times Available to Assist
Blackstone Valley Community Action Program (BVCAP)	32 Goff Avenue, Pawtucket	February 5 and 10 9 AM – 3 PM
Community Care Alliance	176 Sayles Street, Woonsocket	February 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 1 PM – 4:30 PM
Crossroads RI	160 Broad Street, Providence	February 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 9 AM – 4 PM
East Bay Community Action Program (EBCAP)	100 Bullocks Point Avenue, East Providence	February 4: 1 PM – 4 PM February 10: 9 AM – 11 AM
Harrington Hall	30 Howard Avenue, Cranston	February 4, 5: 9 AM – 7 PM Feb. 6, 9 and 10: 1 PM – 7 PM
Housing First Rhode Island	50 Washington Square, Newport	February 4, 5, 9, 10 11 AM – 5 PM
Kingstown Crossings	11 Merrill Lane, North Kingstown	February 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 9 AM – 4 PM
New Hope for Families Emergency Shelter	4 Branch Street, Pawtucket	February 4, 5 and 10 1 PM – 4 PM
Newport County Community Mental Health Center	65 Valley Road, Middletown	February 5 Noon – 3 PM
PICA	15 Hayes Street, Providence	February 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 11 AM – 2 PM
WARM Center	56 Spruce Street, Westerly	February 4, 5, 6, 9 and 10 8 AM – 4 PM
West Bay Community Action Program (WBCAP)	205 Buttonwoods Avenue, Warwick	February 5 and 10 9 AM – 4 PM

Homeless Veterans seeking assistance can go to the Providence Veterans Administration Medical Center Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (HPACT) at 830 Chalkstone Avenue in Providence, Trailer 37, on February 5, 6, 9 and 10 from 8:30 – 11:30 AM or call 401-273-7100 ext. 4178

Homeless Victims of Domestic Violence can call the statewide toll-free HelpLine at 1-800-494-8100 for help submitting an application.

Definition of Homeless Eligible to Apply for Rhode Island Housing PHA Housing Choice Voucher Program Waitlist

Homeless families and individuals as defined below.

1. An individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning:
 - a. An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;
 - b. An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or
 - c. An individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

In order to confirm that individuals/families qualify under this definition, individuals must have been assessed using the VI-SPDAT and both families and individuals must be entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by the time the application period closes.

2. Previously homeless families and individuals who are living in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) but who no longer require supportive services and who have been entered into the state's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by the time the application period closes.
 - a. To be eligible, both the applicant and the PSH provider must sign a certification that the applicant no longer requires supportive services.
 - b. A list of approved PSH is available upon request.
3. Victims of Domestic Violence that meet the definition of homeless families or individuals under sections 1 or 2 above that can verify homelessness by:
 - a. Rhode Island Housing will require a written certification by an approved public or private facility providing domestic violence shelter/services that the applicant meets

the above definition of homelessness. The list of approved public and private facilities is available upon request.

All applicants must also meet the eligibility criteria for the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Income Limits for Housing Choice Voucher Program

Number of Persons in Household	Income Limit
1	\$31,500
2	\$36,000
3	\$40,500
4	\$45,000
5	\$48,600
6	\$52,200

Questions and Answers

About Rhode Island Housing's Limited Opening of the Housing Choice Voucher Program Waitlist for the Homeless

- 1. What is the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP)?** The Housing Choice Voucher Program, more commonly known as the Section 8 Voucher Program, is the federal government's major program for assisting very low-income families, the elderly, and the disabled to afford decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market. Families are free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and are not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects. A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the Public Housing Authority (PHA) on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.
- 2. Can I submit an application for the HCVP program at Rhode Island Housing?** No, applications for the HCVP program can only be submitted on-line through Rhode Island Housing's website (www.rhodeislandhousing.org) between 12:01AM on February 4 – 11:59 PM on February 10. Applications can not be picked up or submitted at Rhode Island Housing's offices.
- 3. I need help filling out the on-line application. Where can I go for assistance?** The information sheet posted on Rhode Island Housing's website includes a list of homeless providers who have offered to assist homeless applicants in submitting the on-line application. You can also ask your current provider for assistance if you are staying at a shelter or living in transitional or permanent supportive housing, or receiving case management services from an organization serving the homeless.
- 4. Why is Rhode Island Housing limiting the opening of the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) waitlist to the homeless?** Rhode Island Housing has reached the end of its waitlist for the HCVP program. We are working with the Providence Housing Authority on a planned joint opening of our waitlists later this year, but in the meantime, we are opening our waitlist on a limited basis to the most needy Rhode Islanders- those who are homeless. This will allow us to help the state achieve its goal of ending homelessness by providing eligible homeless Rhode Islanders with rental assistance, until we are ready to open the list to the general public later this year.
- 5. What if I am not homeless? Will I have another opportunity to be placed on the waitlist for rental assistance?** Yes. As described above, Rhode Island Housing is working with the Providence Housing Authority on a joint opening of our HCVP waitlists which

we expect to take place later this year. At that time, all income-eligible Rhode Islanders that meet the program requirements will be able to apply for rental assistance.

6. How do I know if I meet the definition of homeless?

The full definition of homelessness for the purposes of Rhode Island Housing's HCVP program is included in the information sheet posted on Rhode Island Housing's website. Please review it carefully. In general, to be considered homeless, you must either be 1) currently living in a homeless shelter, transitional housing, or in a place not meant for human habitation such as outdoors or in a car; or 2) currently living in permanent supportive housing but no longer needing the services provided. To qualify, applicants must be entered in the state's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) by the time the waitlist closes on February 10. Homeless individuals must also have completed a vulnerability assessment called a VI-SPDAT by the time the waitlist closes on February 10. People who are doubled up or "couch surfing" do not meet this definition of homeless.

7. Are victims of domestic violence eligible to apply? Yes, victims of domestic violence that meet the definition of homelessness are eligible to apply for this limited opening of the waitlist. Victims of domestic violence are not required to be entered into the state's HMIS system and do not have to take the VI-SPDAT. When Rhode Island Housing staff is confirming eligibility of applicants, victims of domestic violence will be required to provide a written certification by an approved public or private facility providing domestic violence shelter/services that the applicant meets the definition of homeless.

8. Where can veterans go for assistance in submitting an application? Homeless veterans can receive assistance submitting the online application from any of the providers listed on the information sheet. They can also go to the Providence Veterans Administration Medical Center Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (HPACT) at 830 Chalkstone Avenue in Providence, Trailer 37, on February 5, 6, 9 and 10 from 8:30 – 11:30 AM or call 401-273-7100 ext. 4178.

9. What is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and how do I know if I am in the system? HMIS is the system Rhode Island uses to track the number of homeless in the state and how their housing needs are being met. If you are unsure if you have been entered into the HMIS system, please visit one of the homeless providers listed on the information sheet, or your own provider if you are currently staying at a shelter or living in transitional or permanent supportive housing, or receiving case management services from an organization serving the homeless. Most of these providers have access to the HMIS system and can let you know if you have been entered into the system. If you have not yet been entered into the system, and you meet the definition of homeless, they can enter your information into the system. You will not be eligible for this limited opening of Rhode Island Housing's HCVP waitlist if you are not in the HMIS system unless you are a victim of domestic violence who otherwise meets the definition of homeless.

10. What is the VI-SPDAT and how do I take it? VI-SPDAT stands for Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization and Decision Assistance Tool. Basically, it is an assessment survey that helps identify a homeless person's housing needs and the best type of support and housing intervention for them. All individuals entering the homeless system in Rhode Island are required to take the VI-SPDAT. Individuals who are currently homeless must have taken a VI-SPDAT by the time the wait closes on February 10 to be eligible for this limited opening of the HCVP waitlist. Homeless families, victims of domestic violence, and formerly homeless individuals and families currently living in permanent supportive housing but no longer needing the services provided are not required to take the VI-SPDAT to meet the definition of homeless. If you have never taken a VI-SPDAT or aren't sure if you have taken it, you can visit one of the homeless providers listed on the information sheet, or your own provider if you are currently staying at a shelter or living in transitional or permanent supportive housing, or receiving case management services from an organization serving the homeless. Most of these providers can give you a VI-SPDAT if you meet the definition of homeless.

11. I've had some problems in the past that have prevented me from accessing public housing. Would I even be eligible for this program? All families are encouraged to apply even if they have previously been rejected from other housing. The criteria used to determine your eligibility under the Housing Choice Voucher Program may differ from other public housing authorities. Additionally, applicants are given an opportunity to dispute any findings that may make them ineligible for assistance.