

Fellowship of the Rent

Alaska Housing Finance Corporation

Rental Housing: Supporting Property Management and Renter Needs

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A Long-Expected Party

“I was impressed, once again, with the trust our landlords have placed in us. The relationships we have established are key to our being able to place many of our clients.”

-Kim Byrwa, Valley Charities Inc.

In small communities, especially ones as isolated as many in Alaska, relationships and trust are worth more than gold. Like the rest of the nation, Alaska is facing an affordable housing crisis. There simply are not enough units to fulfill demand. Couple that with the short building season and logistical nightmare of remote communities that need them the most, and it is easy to recognize that more housing isn't going to appear overnight. The housing that does exist is aging (most built during the pipeline boom in the 70s), spoken for, or being used as a short-term vacation rental. So, what is an HFA to do? Put their reputation on the line and create a fellowship with those most responsible for keeping people housed: Landlords.

Alaska is the largest state in the nation (sorry, Texas) but it boasts one of the smallest populations with fewer than 800,000 residents; however, there is a severe lack of affordable housing. The logistical challenges and costs of building more housing mean many of these towns and villages are left only with existing housing stock. However, not all of that housing is as unattainable as it may seem. Through creative thinking, technological innovation, and a lot of relationship building, Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC) was able to unlock access to affordable housing where none seemed available.

The Shadow of the Past

“Deeds will not be less valiant because they are unpraised.” – Aragorn, King of Gondor

Landlords are not often spoken of with acclaim or admiration for the service they provide, but they are absolutely essential to expanding access to affordable housing. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, housing was a huge insecurity for the majority of the population. For many, it may have been the first time they ever came face-to-face with the possibility of losing their homes. Though the Eviction Moratorium and massive Emergency Rental Assistance program mitigated much of that housing unease, it took time and trust for it to work. In Alaska we moved fast and were one of the first in the nation to get Rent Relief to those who needed it. Even so, we received thousands of calls from tenants and landlords alike verifying they would receive relief, requesting help applying or registering, and voicing their worries to our call center.

These were not the calls of large, corporate landlords, but just people who rented out their starter home or retirees who downsized. Individuals who were now experiencing the same economic hardships as those they rented to. The AHFC team worked extensively with both these anxious landlords and their tenants to help navigate the process of applying and submitting all necessary documents, and often going above and beyond average work-day requirements by walking less tech-savvy Alaskans through each individual step. The outcome of this effort was over 25,000

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households receiving aid, and AHFC registering and interacting with over 10,000 landlords. Those landlords had to trust AHFC. Trust that we would process their payments in a timely manner, trust that we would keep their data secure, and trust we would be reachable and responsive to their needs. And they did. So, AHFC took it a step further.

Many Meetings

“It's the job that's never started as takes longest to finish.” – Samwise Gamgee

After helping all eligible renters who applied, there were significant resources left over and moreover; a whole new infrastructure built around providing fast, secure rent relief to Alaskans across the state; including communities in which, up to now, AHFC lacked a meaningful presence. Rather than return funds to Treasury, AHFC looked elsewhere to utilize these resources and infrastructure in an effort to continue to benefit vulnerable Alaskan communities. Thus, the Stabilization Program was created, benefiting from the trust instilled in landlords from Rent Relief.

The Stabilization Program focuses on Alaskans experiencing homelessness, escaping domestic violence and/or trafficking, and refugees. These vulnerable populations can experience barriers to housing, even when it is available, due to stigma, or landlords who have been burned in the past. Despite these challenges, the Stabilization Program has been extremely successful in housing these Alaskans in communities across the state, with over 2,800 households moved into long-term housing so far. The reason for this: trust in AHFC's reputation. Roughly half of the landlords participating in Stabilization were also in Rent Relief.

The Council of Elrond

AHFC empowered its partners to make a simple promise to landlords: AHFC would cover any damages caused by Stabilization tenants. This was a risk but demonstrated the faith AHFC had in its partners to match clients with landlords with whom they were a good fit. What made this all work was follow through. Not every tenant was as respectful of the housing as a landlord might wish; some did cause damage, and AHFC paid for the repairs.

This arrangement turned out to be much less expensive than expected, and even resulted in some agencies repairing soured relationships with previous landlords. Since the start of the program in 2022, there have been 71 reported incidences of damages for a total of approximately \$70,000.00. AHFC's approach is not only far less expensive than anticipated, but actually worked through buy-in and building long-term relationships with landlords.

The Forging of the Fellowship

Noting the disparate community issues and efforts across Alaska, AHFC helped bring housing partners from all over the state, most of whom were involved with the Stabilization program, together with the Alaska Mental Health Trust at a two-day convention to facilitate in-person conversations. The sharing of ideas, contacts, and resources at that convention have had incalculable benefits for all Alaskans. For example, an Anchorage partner has increased their

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portfolio of landlords to such a degree that they are now holding landlord luncheons to discuss experiences and ideas for improvements. The agency has used these luncheons to gather feedback, utilizing surveys to identify areas for improvement. One such survey showed almost 75% of landlords rated the behavior and conduct of Supportive Housing tenants as “Excellent” (35%) or “Good” (39%) with the rest as “Fair” (26%). It is worth noting that none of the landlords selected “Poor.” This is actionable data our partners now have access to as a result of these landlord relationships. Data that can be shared with AHFC and its other housing partners.

It is impossible to overstate how important word-of-mouth can be in Alaska. Bringing landlords together has allowed them to meet others working in the same programs and learn how to optimize their experiences. This has the same benefits as AHFC bringing housing partners together. Landlords are able to discuss their knowledge and solutions to common problems within these programs. This has led to them spreading the information to other landlords they know who are not in the group. Essentially, AHFC has kickstarted a community that has begun to grow and evolve on its own, with agencies connecting with each other outside of AHFC programs. As a direct result of the Rent Relief and Stabilization programs, more and more landlords became interested in joining AHFC funded programs.

There and Back Again

AHFC leveraged its reputation in conjunction with once-in-a-lifetime Federal funding to create a vast network of landlords willing to house the most vulnerable Alaskans. The trust and relationships built on the back of these funds will last long after the money has expired. Where other states returned funds, and others agencies use more costly cash incentives, AHFC has been connecting a community of landlords and housing agencies to the people who need them. Promises kept, open and honest communication, and a willingness to put our reputation behind our partners, rather than just throwing money around, has allowed AHFC to address Alaska’s affordable housing crisis in a new and innovative way.

This success will not end with the Emergency Rental Assistance expiration. AHFC has already set up programs in the mold of Stabilization utilizing a mix of state dollars and legacy federal dollars. These new programs address the same populations and utilize similar systems. They will fill the gaps where legacy resources are lacking. The relationships with housing partners and the trust built with landlords play a crucial role in these programs and AHFC meeting its mission to provide Alaskans access to safe, quality, affordable housing.

“All’s well that ends better.” – J.R.R. Tolkien



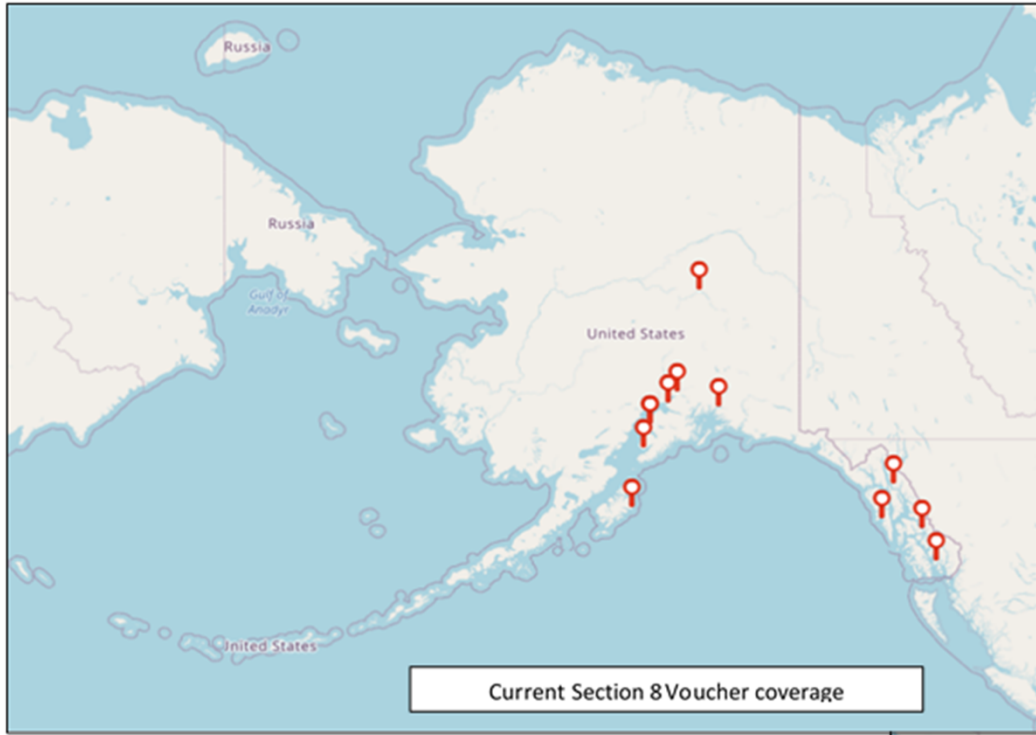
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Visual Aids

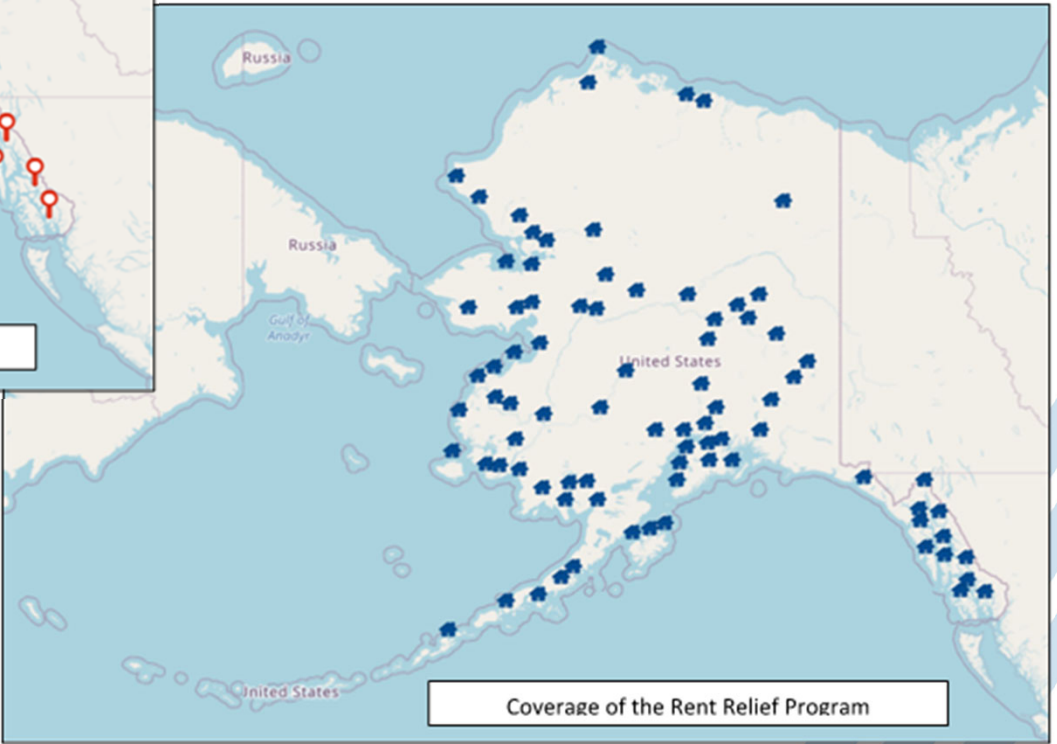


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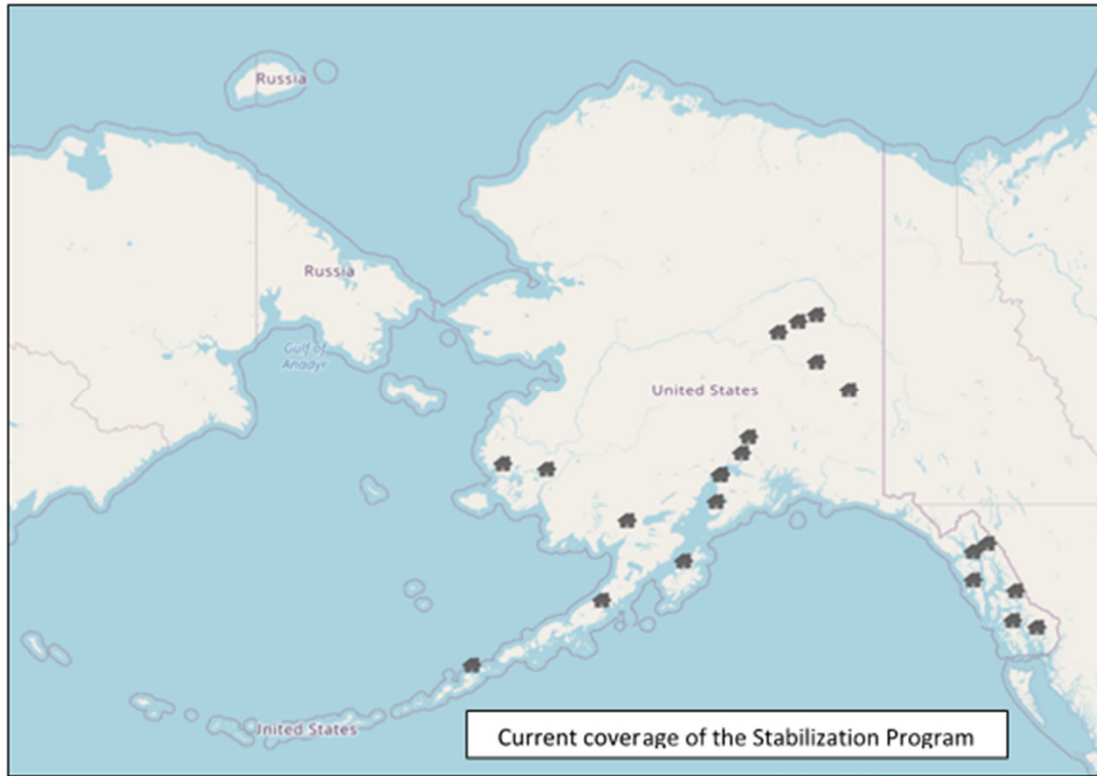




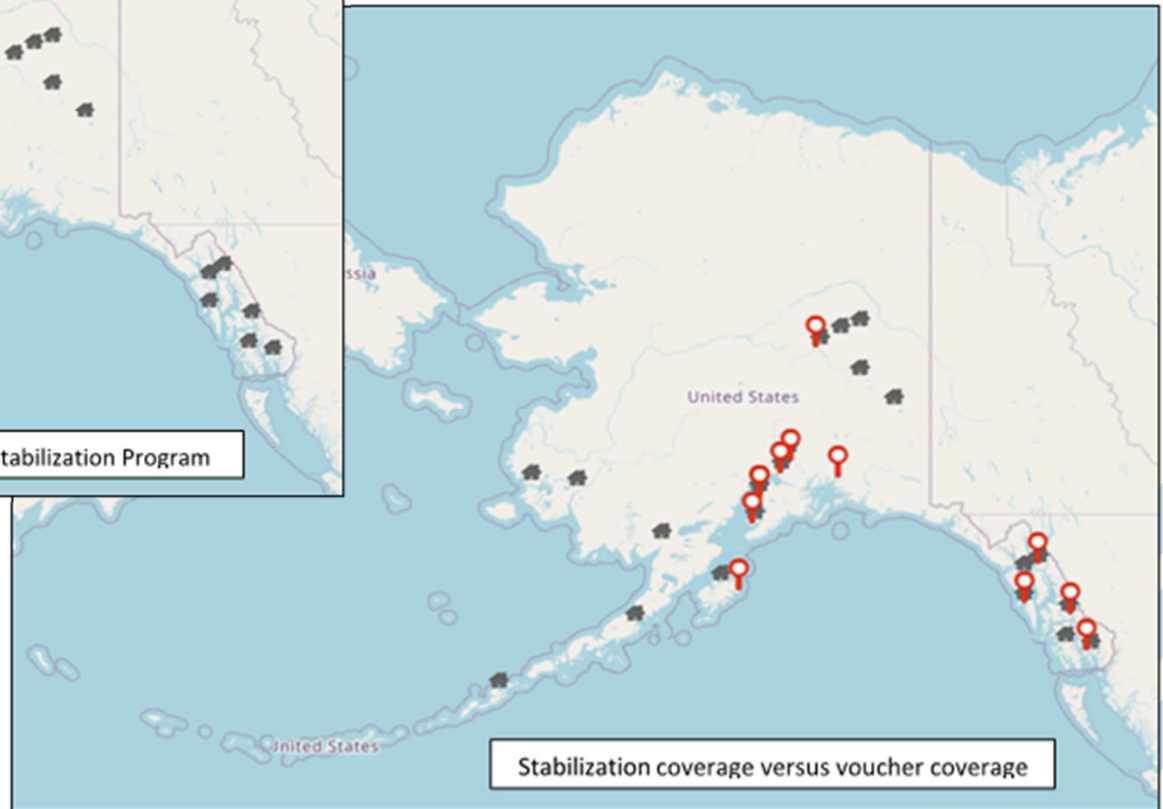
Current Section 8 Voucher coverage

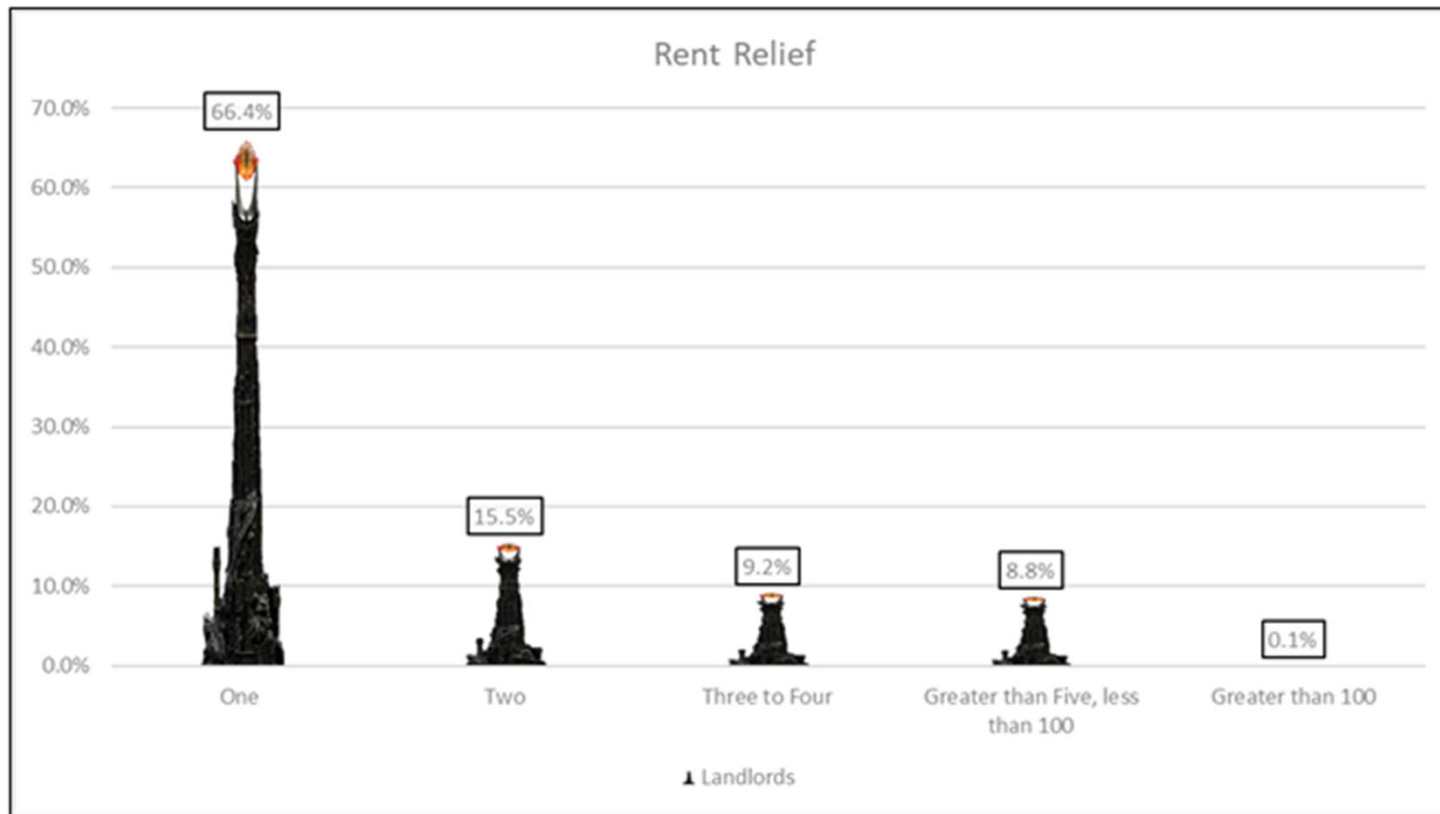


Coverage of the Rent Relief Program

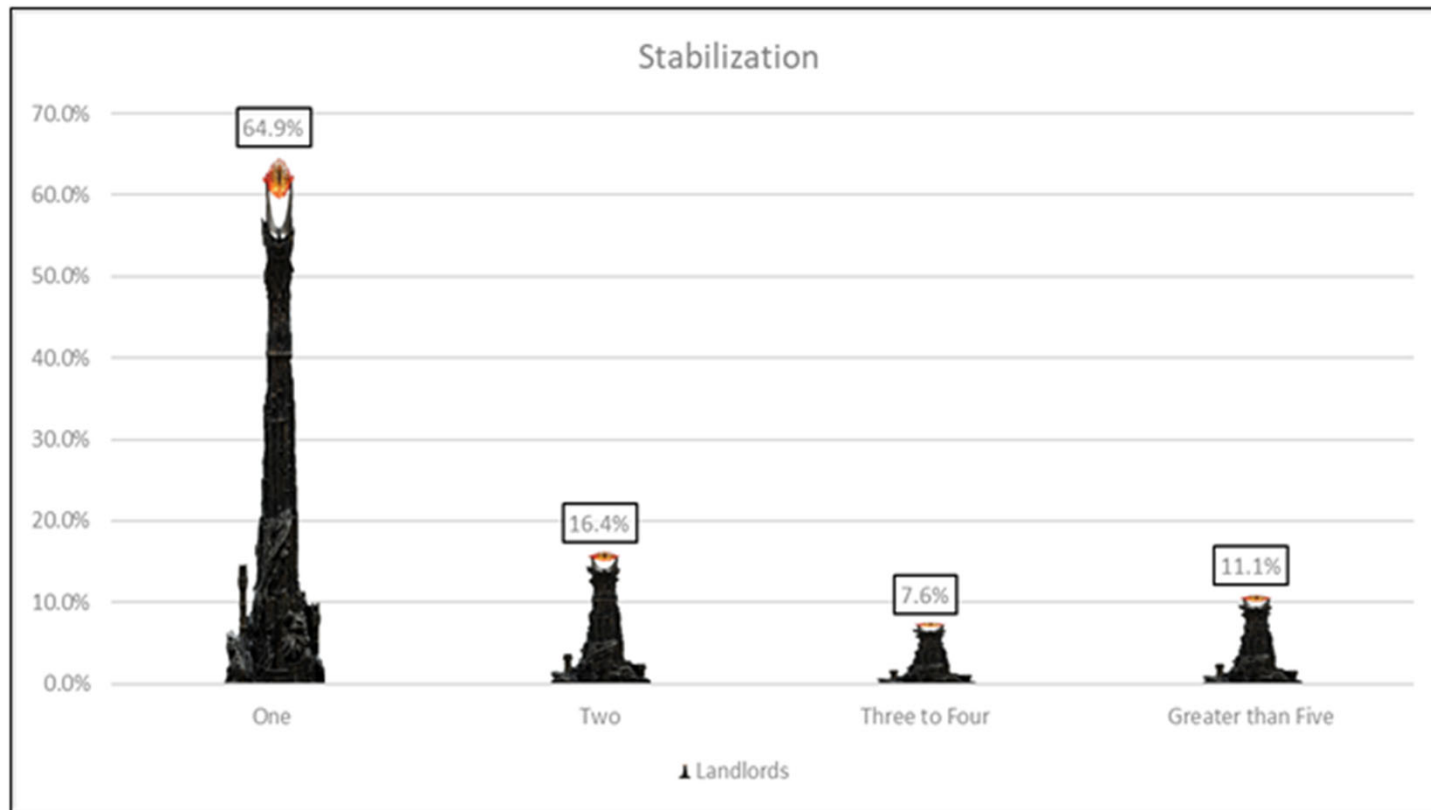


Stabilization has brought in 1,246 landlords housing 2,817 households and counting.





Percentage of landlords by number of associated tenants. The vast majority of landlords in the Rent Relief program had fewer than five tenants.



Percentage of landlords by tenants in the Stabilization program.

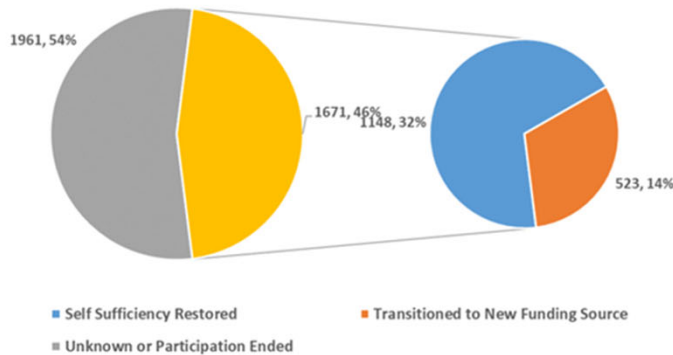


Percentages of landlords for Stabilization. 49% of landlords in Stabilization were also in the Rent Relief program. 51% were new landlords brought in by the Stabilization program.

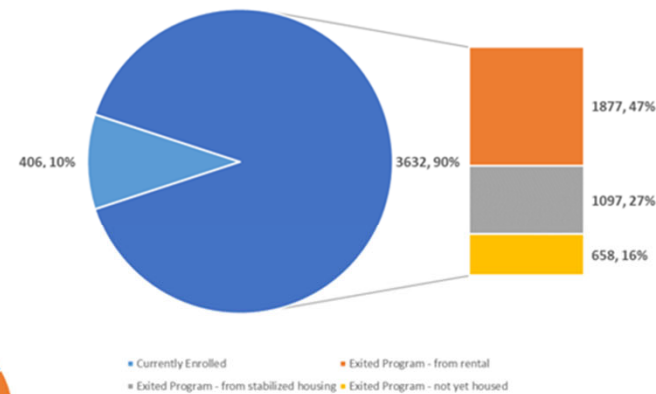
Stabilization Program Retention

Since the program start in February of 2022, the Stabilization Navigators have enrolled 4,038 households into the program.

Stabilization Program Attrition: Reason for Exiting Program



Stabilization Program Dashboard: Enrollment and Attrition



Household Enrollment Facts:

- 406 remain active in the program
- 3,632 exited the program
- 1,671 became self-sufficient or transferred to other program funds