

Hello Landlords!

Rhode Island Housing

Communications: Integrated Campaign

HFA Staff Contact

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As any Public Housing Authority (PHA) can attest, the success of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program depends on the participation of private-market landlords. For RIHousing, with jurisdiction in 19 municipalities, a lack of participating landlords was severely hindering our ability to assist voucher holders in leasing up apartments and effectively administering the HCV program. Voucher holders struggled to find available apartments and we struggled to attract a sufficient number of landlords to effectively run this critical rental assistance program.

LANDLORDS: OUR TARGET AUDIENCE

Landlord participation not only determines the number of units available for HCV participants, but also where those units are located, a PHA's success in making units available in high-opportunity neighborhoods and alleviating high concentrations of voucher holders in very low-income neighborhoods. Because the success of the HCV program depends on the availability of units in the private market, *landlords play a pivotal role.*

Our struggle to attract and retain landlords to the program was not new. It had never been easy, but as rental vacancies went down and landlords could get higher rents on the open market, it was becoming critical that we ramp up efforts to attract new landlords.

SIGNALING CHANGE

While RIHousing staff had made numerous changes to the HCV program over the last few years, we were having difficulty getting this information across to landlords. We needed them to 'prick up their ears' and pay attention to these changes while also viewing us through a different lens. We had reduced the bureaucratic burdens of the program, assigned additional staffing to support landlords and we were committed to helping landlords and tenants succeed. While we had made an extensive overhaul to our program, landlords were unaware of the changes.

RIHousing had little success in previous landlord recruitment efforts. At the start of 2019, we made a decision to commit agency resources to greatly expand landlord participation by bringing together members from our Leased Housing, Policy and Communications teams to create a new outreach and engagement effort to tackle the issue. Additionally, we expanded staffing in our Leased Housing department to more fully support and engage the landlord community.

We created an internal working group who spent months researching and communicating with other PHAs and HFAs to understand what was working elsewhere and how we might be able to apply it to Rhode Island. The working group developed a comprehensive, multi-channel communications and engagement effort that was flexible enough to pivot and develop as other needs or ideas might arise.

LANDLORDS: GETTING FEEDBACK TO GET FOCUSED

RIHousing made the commitment to dig deeper and hold landlord focus groups, with participants representing both landlords that had worked with RIHousing and those that had not. This helped us gauge both real and perceived realities from landlords about the program. Landlords with properties in our jurisdictions were invited to participate and provide feedback. We took their feedback to further develop out marketing and outreach approach and implementation methods.

Through a series of Landlord Focus Groups and the development of a Landlord Survey we were able to learn a lot about landlords in our state, what they thought about us, about other PHAs, the HCV program, what resonated with them, as well as their preferred means of communication.

NEW LOOK, NEW MESSAGE

Armed with this insight, we were able to develop our new *“Hello Landlord!”* campaign, a multi-channel and pronged effort to increase landlord participation. New marketing materials were designed under the “umbrella” of “Hello Landlords!” branding, which made use of bold visuals/colors, consumer-friendly messaging and a welcoming and supportive tone. Listening to feedback from the focus groups and surveys, we developed materials that could be shared in multiple ways, including print, direct mail, e-newsletters, video, social media and via a series of in-person events and trainings.

OVERARCHING GOALS

The committee developed a series of goals for the outreach effort:

- Increase landlord participation in the HCV Program
- Add additional units available for lease-up by HCVP voucher holders, especially in communities of choice
- Change the way landlords think about us, about the HCVP program and HCVP tenants
- Position RIHousing as an innovative and flexible PHA

The outreach effort would highlight several key features of the HCV program for landlords:

- Guaranteed rent
- Support for landlords and tenants
- Dispelling Myths

PLAN AND ROLL OUT

We developed a comprehensive outreach plan supported by a series of marketing and informational pieces that included the following components:

- **Creation of “Hello Landlords!” brand:**
 - Outreach materials under one brand focused on attracting landlords/ Strong brand identity, bright, appealing
 - Less bureaucratic, more engaging and supportive
 - RIHousing and HCVP are ‘not what you think’
- **Outreach/Marketing Materials (both hard copy and e-versions):**
 - FAQs
 - Landlord Participation Guide
 - Powerpoint: overview of the program from landlord perspective
 - Informational video
 - Social Media graphics and messaging
- **Trainings & Events:**
 - Statewide: local libraries, community centers, spaces easily accessible to landlord population
 - Special events and trainings for landlords (new and prospective) as well as participation at industry events (IREM, local realtor boards, etc); community events, etc.
 - Face-to-face meetings and events: allow us to dispel myths, gather in-person feedback, build relationships
 - Well-received “Calling All Landlords” event in November 2019: Open House-style event to introduce Leased Housing staff to current and prospective landlords. Casual style of event to allow for networking and conversation/engagement vs formal event typically given with PPT presentation and handouts. We received rave reviews for this event and it helped us showcase the program and our keen interest in partnering and supporting landlords.
- **Website:**
 - Creation of webpage specific to landlords
 - Overview of the HCV program
 - Answers to frequently asked questions

- Guides and resources for landlords
- Promotion of programs and resources helpful to landlords: LeadSafe Homes program, Landlord Mitigation Program, HousingSearchRI to promote available units
- **E-blasts and e-newsletters:**
 - Series of ongoing landlord e-news with information relevant to landlords
 - Special e-blasts promoting the program, impact of COVID-19, etc.
- **Surveys:**
 - Feedback loop: gather feedback to improve program, identify preferred outreach channels
 - Gather info on landlords. What compels them to participate in HCV program? What makes them wary? What do they want/need from RIHousing? to inform future outreach efforts
- **Partnership Outreach:**
 - Partnering with other local and statewide organizations to expand outreach
 - Inclusion of partners at “Calling All Landlords” event
 - Promotion of partner programs via e-news and participation at their events
- **Live Chat**
 - In lieu of in-person events/trainings, currently planning a series of “live” chats, trainings and “fun” events for landlords

IMPACT OF COVID-19

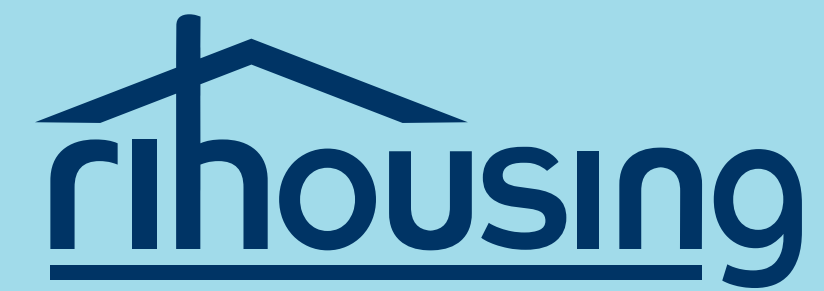
A series of in-person outreach events had to be canceled due to the COVID-19 health crisis. Fortunately, the *Hello Landlords!* effort doesn't rely on just one means of outreach and communications. We have been able to continue with ongoing e-newsletters, mailings, updates to our website and staff is currently planning a series of online events and engagement activities. In April we were able to hold our first-ever “Live” Online event for Landlords, providing an opportunity for landlords to get answers to their questions in real time.

OUTCOMES

We've received high marks for the creativity of the new design and messaging from both partner groups and landlords. The number of landlords who have attended our trainings, events and followed up on our outreach has necessitated our team developing some “automated” messaging and supporting Leased Housing team members more fully in their responses. With new landlords (and current landlords who have been re-engaged) we have been able **to increase the number of available units 130 units (or 8.4%) since January 2019. In a state the size of Rhode Island, this increase is impressive and impactful!**

WHY IT'S AWARD-WORTHY

- *Replicable:* utilized existing communications and outreach channels and partner engagement opportunities can be accomplished by other HFAs
- *Engage targeted audiences:* feedback loop and opportunities to “hear” from landlords provided a focus to the design and outreach efforts to effectively target landlords
- *Achieve measurable results:* increase both in number of participating landlords and the number of available units have already had measurable results and an impact on the HCV program
- *Provide benefits that outweigh costs:* with jurisdiction in 19 municipalities, it's critical that our voucher holders can find and access affordable rental units; this has been a relatively low-cost way of achieving our objectives
- *Demonstrate effective use of resources:* utilized existing outreach and communications channels (e-blasts, social and website posts and survey tools) as well as in-house staff to develop the campaign
- *Achieve strategic objectives:* more landlords, more units, and creation of outreach materials to continue to inform and engage



Hello Landlords!

Communications: Integrated Campaign

Fresh Design and User-Friendly Format and Tone

We developed a series of outreach tools and information pieces all using a new design with messaging and tone that is welcoming and supportive with less technical jargon.

Hello Landlords!

Under the umbrella of “Hello Landlords!” all materials have a strong brand identity, are attention getting, fresh, and bright.





Palm Cards highlight aspects of the program that are important to landlords: such as guaranteed rent. From Proxy emails and vanity URLs, everything signals this information is for Landlords and we are ready to help.

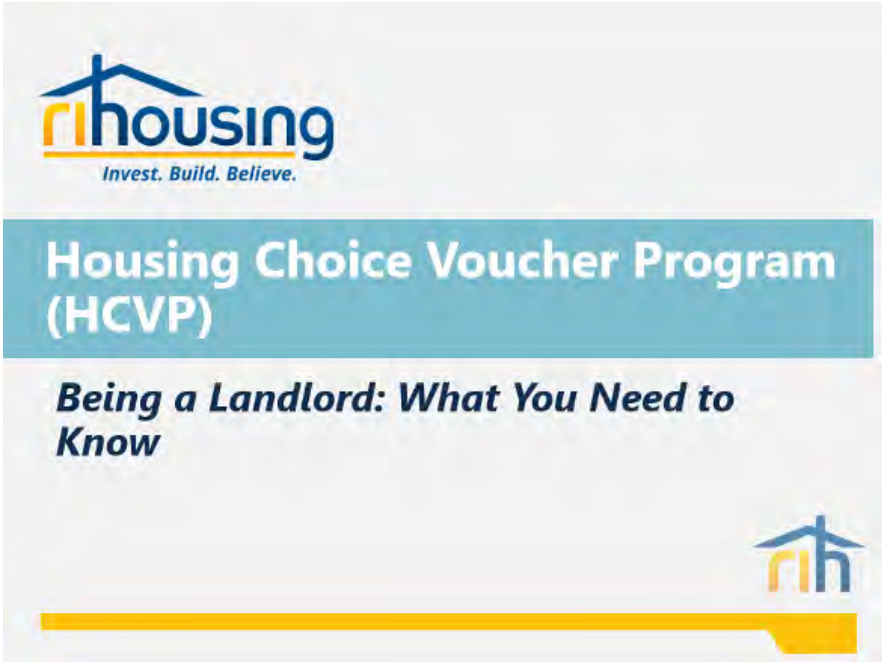
New Owner/Landlord Participation Guide

Walks landlords through the process in a helpful and engaging way



New Materials are Easy-to-Digest and Less Bureaucratic

Designed materials highlight incentives and important aspects of the program and provide important information in an easy-to-digest manner.



Powerpoint Presentations



Dispelling Myths



Video

New, fun, lively and animated video showcases the highlights of the program and can be shared via email, social media, website, and at events.

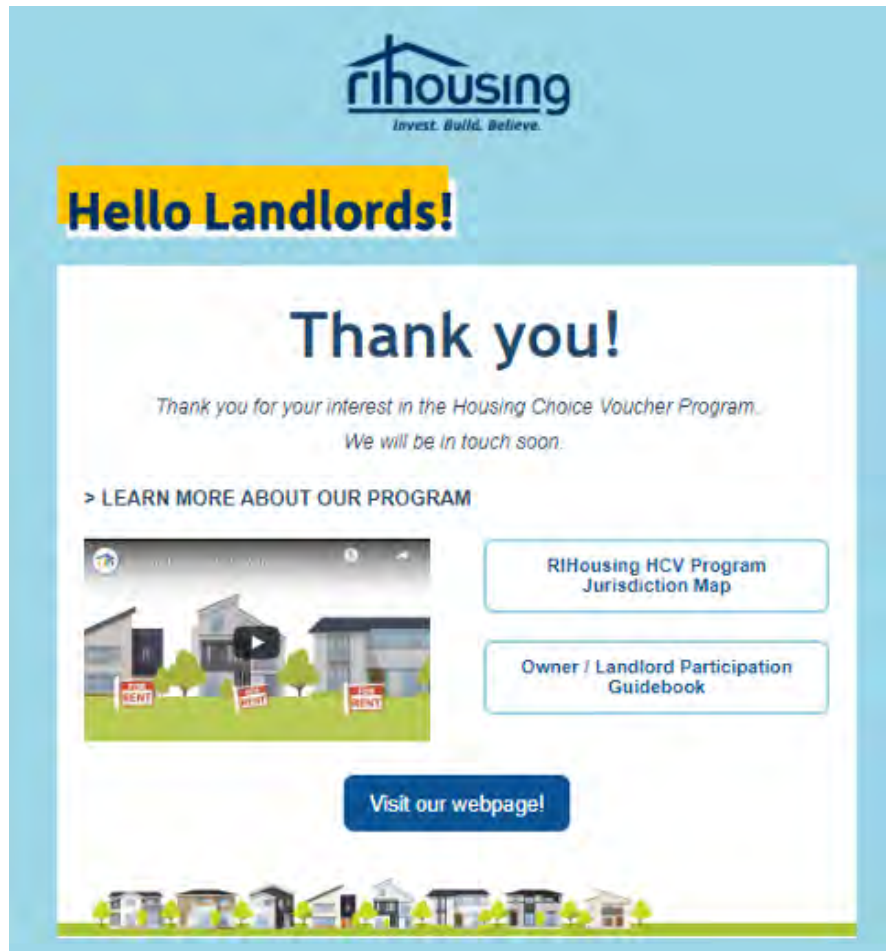
WATCH VIDEO

Housing Choice Voucher Program

Landlord Webpage

Answers to frequently asked questions and landlord resources all in one place,

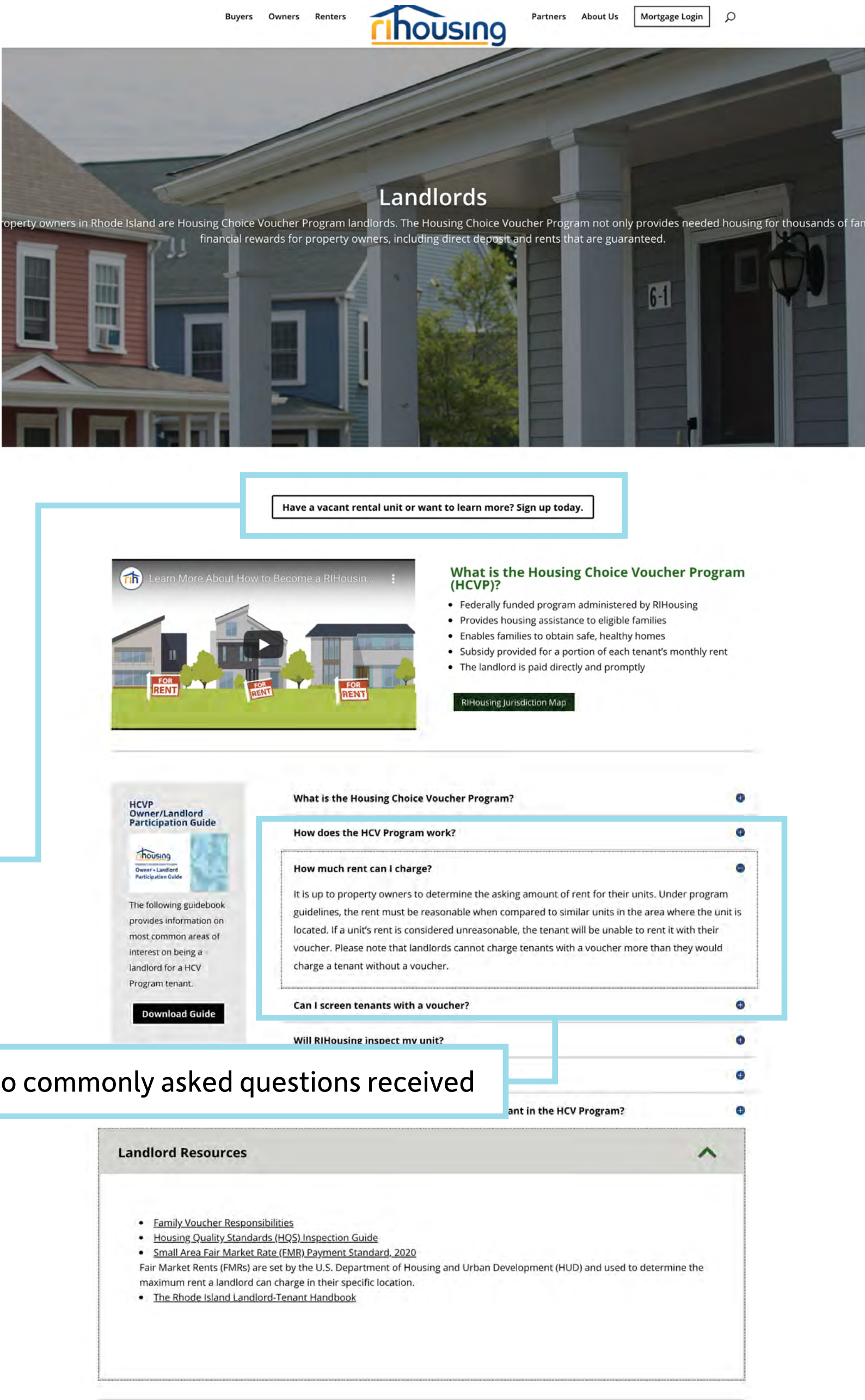
VISIT PAGE



Use of automated emails improves our customer service and responsiveness to the landlord community

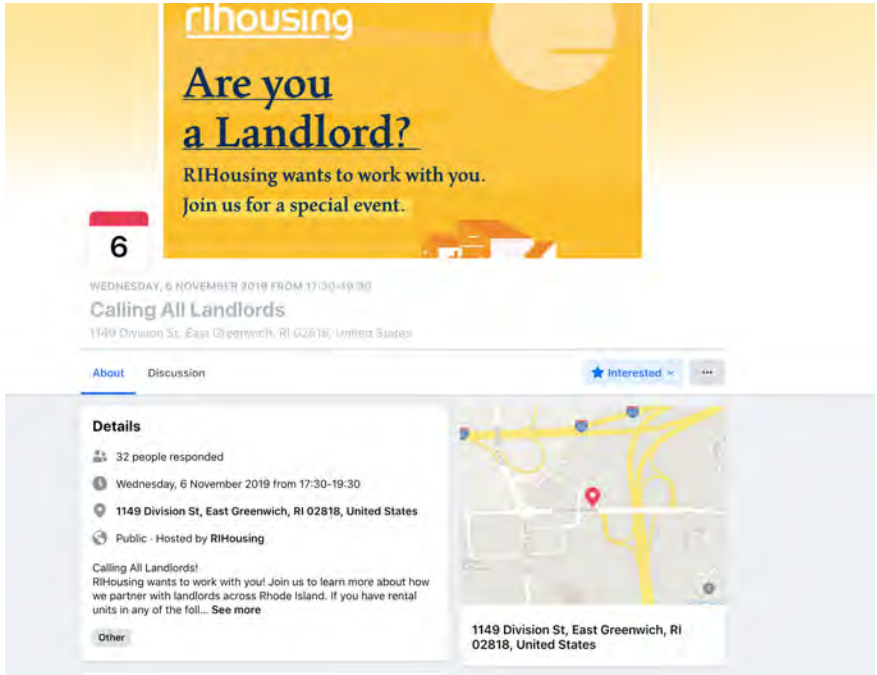
First name*
Last name*
Email*
Phone number*
Address of vacant unit, if applicable
Street address
City
Zip Code
By submitting this form, I acknowledge that I am in compliance with RIhousing's requirement that no rental vacancy to be filed through the HCVF Program can have arisen during the COVID-19 emergency through a self-help eviction (e.g., changing locks or removing tenant belongings outside of a court process) or other legal process.
Message
Submit

Webpage includes ability to enter in vacant/available units and request more information



Calling All Landlords

Special event for both existing and prospective landlords in our jurisdictions



Vibrant and engaging invitations and posters (both hard copy and e-versions) as well as social media posts.



All event materials reinforced and supported the branding and messaging

Landlord Engagement

Hello Landlords!

A Quarterly e-News for Property Owners - January 2020

As we begin 2020, we're excited to share this inaugural e-newsletter for property owners with you! We hope you find it informative and helpful in your role as a landlord. Please share any thoughts, suggestions for future topics, or questions you'd like answered as we plan for future editions.

HCV Program Overview

RIHousing serves nearly 1,430 families through the [Housing Choice Voucher Program \(HCV\)](#) across the state of Rhode Island.

Housing Choice Vouchers are provided to qualifying families who can then choose and lease affordable, privately-owned rental housing.

RIHousing seeks property owners to partner and make their rental properties available to HCV participants.

We Need You!
As the need far exceeds the supply, RIHousing is in need of property owners who would like to partner and rent their available units to HCV voucher holders.

If you have an available unit(s) or would like more information on the program, please contact Knjilia Saltsman, Housing Stabilization Coordinator at 401-277-1562 or ksaltsman@rihousing.com.

Landlord Resources

► Available Units? Get the Word Out!
Don't forget you can advertise your vacant unit(s) on [HousingSearchRI.org](#) for free! It's an online housing locator created to help tenants find housing and property owners fill vacancies.

► It's getting cold outside: Weatherizing your property
It's that time of year again. It's a season where property owners should consider weatherizing their property to prevent costly repairs in the future. Check out the [weatherization topics and resources provided by the U.S. Department of Energy](#).

Hello Landlords!

A Quarterly e-News for Property Owners - April 2020

We hope that you and your families are doing well during this health emergency. We wanted to take this opportunity to provide an update to property owners leasing apartments to tenants participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

RIHousing is working remotely with limited staff. Due to this, we are prioritizing the following efforts:

- Making rent payments to landlords, and utility payments to families. We do not anticipate a delay in any payments.
- Initial inspections for vacant units
- Special inspections, as needed, for health and safety issues
- Recertification of Income if a tenant's income has been reduced or eliminated. We are processing these requests quickly to ensure that landlords do not experience any gaps in tenant paid rents.

If you have a tenant who has experienced a reduction or loss in income, please have them contact us as soon as possible at corvid-19@rihousing.com.

New Tenant Lease Addendum

As a courtesy, we wanted to make you aware that the Rhode Island Department of Business Regulations has issued guidance for handling new tenants who are required to self-quarantine because they are coming here from out of state.

- [This letter](#) provides guidance for those coming to Rhode Island from another state, territory or outside the United States that are required to immediately self-quarantine for 14 days.
- [This addendum](#) must be included with any lease or rental agreement. It requires potential tenants or renters in Rhode Island to acknowledge at the time of signing their lease or rental agreement that they received the above letter outlining requirements for those who must immediately self-quarantine for 14 days.

Please note the above is a current state requirement for all tenants, regardless of whether or not they receive rental assistance.

Questions about the Housing Choice Voucher program?

Looking to find a tenant during this health emergency?

Would you like to learn more about HousingSearchRI?

Whatever your housing-related question is – we will be here to chat.

TUESDAY

APRIL 21, 2020

10 AM - 12 PM

Join us for our *first-ever* live web chat on Tuesday, April 21. RIHousing staff will be available to answer any questions or concerns you may have about being a Housing Choice Voucher Program landlord.

As this is a first for us, please be patient as we try and respond to as many questions as we can using this new technology.

You can access the chat on your phone, tablet, or computer at:

www.RIHousing.com/Landlords/

Live Online Event

Recognizing not all landlords can attend an event and may find it easier to connect online, we launched a “live” online event with members of our Leased Housing team available to answer questions about the program for landlords.



Prospective Landlords

*1. Name

*2. Email Address

3. How many rental units do you own/manage?

4. Rent ranges of these units

5. Location(s) (city/town)

6. Have you worked with the HCV Program (formerly Section 8) in the past 5 years?

7. Would you be interested in renting to a HCV Program participant?

8. What would you like to learn about the HCV Program?

9. Would you be interested in participating in a focus group about your experience as a landlord? (Participants will receive a \$200 gift.)

Quarterly landlord e-news keeps prospective and current landlords engaged and informed.

Feedback Loops

We share surveys via email and also at Landlord Engagement events to ensure we have an ongoing feedback loop from Landlords to better inform our program and outreach efforts.



Engage and Inform

We could keep sending emails, postcards, etc. but sometimes getting face-to-face with your audience, getting to know them, hearing their thoughts and responding to their questions is a critical component for success.

Thank you!

Thank you to those who joined us for our Landlord Engagement event at 1149 Restaurant. Whether you are a current HCVP landlord, or joined us to learn more about how we partner with landlords across the state, we appreciate you taking the time to come out!

We had a fantastic evening with lots of opportunities for networking, learning more about the programs and services we offer, and hearing your feedback.

If you were able to attend, we'd love to hear your feedback on the event! Click [here](#) to share your thoughts.

Couldn't make it to the event?
We'd still love to hear from you and get your feedback on the kinds of services and programs we can offer. Take a few minutes to respond to our survey and help us help you!

[Current HCVP Landlords](#)
[Prospective Landlords](#)

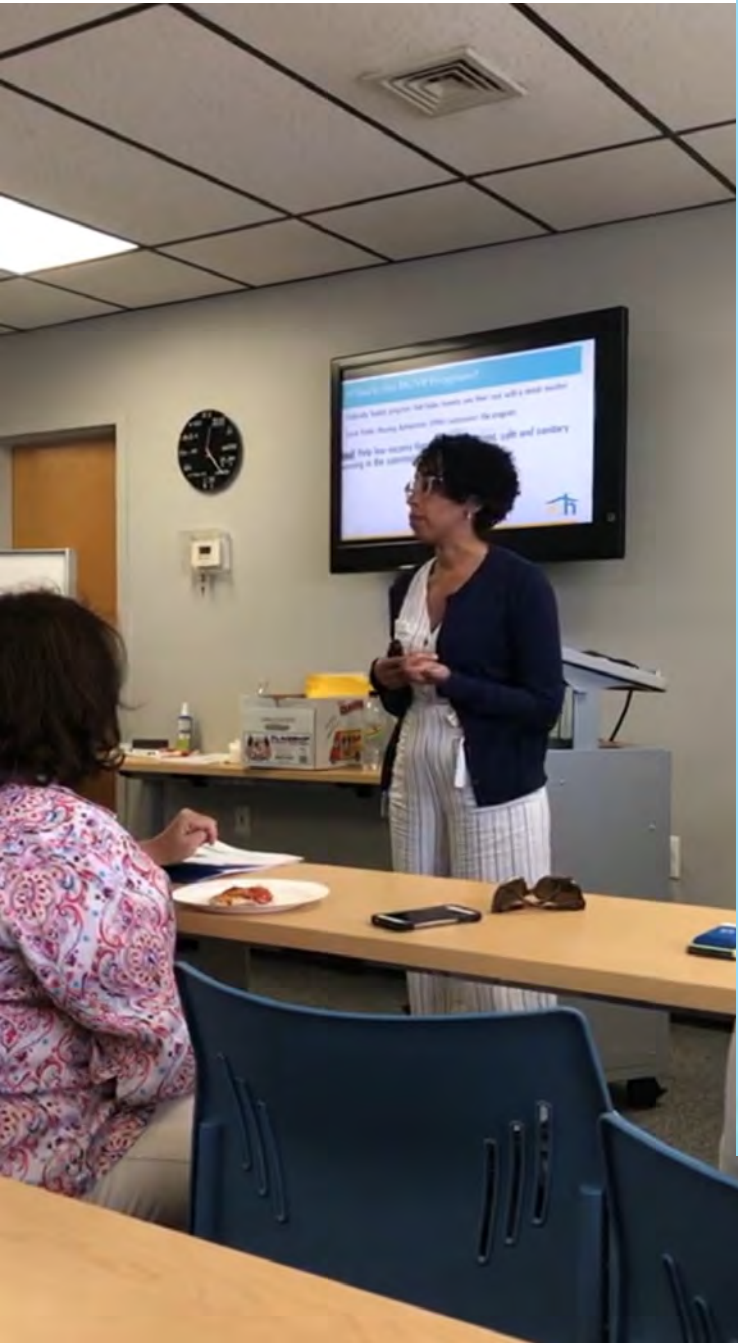
Our Thanks!

RIhousing would like to thank you for your ongoing collaboration as a landlord in our rental assistance program. Your partnership has a tremendous impact on the households we serve.

If you have any questions, concerns and/or available apartments for rent, please contact me!

With appreciation,

Knijia Sailsman
Housing Stabilization Coordinator
401-277-1562
ksailsman@rihousing.com



Landlord Information Session

Join us for an information session to learn how RIhousing partners with landlords across the state.

Come out and meet our staff and learn more!
Light refreshments served.

We'll provide an overview of:

- Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program
- Program incentives
- Answers to frequently asked questions about the program

[Watch to learn more about becoming a HCV Program Lanlord!](#)

[Learn more](#)

Thursday, March 26, 2020
5:30 pm - 6:30 pm
Buttonwoods Community Center
3027 W Shore Rd, Warwick, RI

Register Today!

Questions? Contact:
Knijia Sailsman
Housing Stabilization Coordinator
ksailsman@rihousing.com