

Empowering Voucher Holders: HCVP Guide to Rhode Island Communities

Rhode Island Housing
Special Achievement

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Helping Voucher Holders Make Rhode Island Their Home

HCV program vouchers are a lifeline for families across our country. In times of increasingly high rental costs, vouchers help families find homes they can afford.

RIHousing administers Housing Choice Vouchers in a jurisdiction of 20 municipalities in Rhode Island. These communities tend to be more rural/suburban in nature and lack a large inventory of rental units. Many of RIHousing's **voucher recipients have lived in urban areas within the state and are less familiar with the 20 towns they must lease up in during their first year with a RIHousing voucher**. Even in a small state like Rhode Island, voucher holders may not be familiar with them and may have pre-conceived notions about what it's like to live in these communities. In addition to being less familiar with these communities, finding a rental unit, along with a landlord who will rent to a tenant with a voucher, can be challenging, and often discouraging for tenants.

We wanted to **ensure that tenants receiving a voucher through RIHousing were aware of the communities within our jurisdiction and provide valuable information on each municipality to help them determine which towns would meet their needs and where to focus their search.**

People wait years to receive a voucher, and when it happens it can be akin to winning the lottery for many households. But then reality sets in on how difficult it can be to find a unit. With a lease up rate of 14%, it was **important that we help voucher holders expand their searches into all eligible communities while also providing information to help them feel more comfortable in those communities.**

To empower voucher holders in their searches, we created a centralized, up-to-date community guide to help tenants with vouchers search for a rental home. The effort helps expand tenants' awareness of and understanding of the unique amenities each community has to offer.

Making it Happen

While RIHousing has always provided tenants with detailed information on the processes and requirements around receiving a voucher, we did not provide specific information on each town within our jurisdiction. **Tenants would need to do their own research across a variety of sources to understand if a community would meet both their needs and wants.** This may have included researching public transportation access, driving distance and time to get to Providence or other urban locations, school ratings and locations, recreational opportunities, and places of worship.

As a first step, RIHousing partnered with Housing Works RI at Roger Williams University to research the content for the guide. Once gathered, RIHousing staff created both online and print versions of the *Guide* in a way that allows for easy updating and accessibility. Having the *Guide* available through our website ensures voucher holders can access the information 24/7 via a PC, tablet and/or smartphone/mobile device. Concern over having outdated hard copies of the *Guide* out in the public led to our decision to have hard copy marketing/promotional materials include trackable QR codes, which link directly to the electronic version of the resource. This means we also don't need to continuously update our promotional materials as the QR code will always direct to the most up-to-date e-version.

While the goal is to keep the *Guide* as a primarily virtual tool, we understand that some voucher holders may have barriers to accessing the internet, so we also provide hard copies of the *Guide* as needed.

The most vital feature of this resource, however, is not portability, but the information it contains.

The Guide to Rhode Island Communities

The *Guide* provides the following information on each municipality within RIHousing's jurisdiction:

- Name and narrative on each town, including major districts and/or neighborhoods
- Link to a Google Map with the city pinpointed for easy access to directions
- Maximum rent limits from single-room occupancy to 5-bedroom units
- Public transit lines and driving distance and time to major cities
- Locations of major services and amenities in each municipality such as post offices, police departments and town halls
 - Locations of community centers
 - Nearest retail and grocery shopping areas
 - Information on day cares and their ratings
 - Information on schools, both public and private, with performance information
 - Nearby banks and financial institutions
 - Places of worship
 - Nearest medical centers
 - Recreation areas such as outdoor attractions and local art programs

Voucher holders can access the *Guide* via our website: <https://www.rihousing.com/guide-to-ri-communities/> and click on each jurisdiction for more details.

The *Guide* provides a snapshot of the amenities a town provides, how long the drive may be to visit one's family or get to work, if public transportation is accessible, and other aspects that may be important in one's housing search.

Why it's Award-Worthy

Innovative: It can take years to receive a voucher, and when it does, we want to remove any barriers for voucher holders in accessing safe, healthy homes that meet their needs and help their families to thrive. Voucher holders' unfamiliarity with a community shouldn't be a barrier or prevent them from considering available units. The *Guide* provides snapshots and deep dives on information all in one place, in an easy-to-use platform. Information such as fair market rents or school ratings can be updated and made live within minutes, ensuring tenants have the most up-to-date resources and information.

Responds to an important state need: Almost 10 years ago we rolled out our "Rental Resource Guide," which is available in hard copy and PDF format and includes lists and contact information for PHAs, CDCs and affordable housing developments. While a herculean task at the time, the Rental Guide was limited in scope, not easily updated, and did not include community information or resources specific to our jurisdiction. A few years ago, we launched our "Hello Landlords!" campaign to recruit landlords to the HCV program. The creation of our new *HCVP Guide to Rhode Island Communities*, provides a complement to these prior efforts with a focus on helping tenants become successful in finding a unit that meets their needs, in a town that meets their needs.

Achieves intended results: Within two clicks, our voucher holders now have the ability to make informed decisions about where they or their families may choose to look for a rental unit. And the *Guide* is available to them even after they lease up, to meet their growing needs as they settle into their chosen community. To date, we've had positive responses and interest in the *Guide* as shown by website analytics and site traffic.

Provides benefits that outweigh costs: Designed using in-house resources and available via our agency website means we were able to launch the effort without the need for additional funds to support the work. Our partner, HousingWorks RI plays an important data and research role in our state. We work closely with them throughout the year on a variety of efforts and were able to tap into their knowledge and resources to develop the content for the *Guide*. Importantly, the *Guide* is also a resource for HCV Program staff. Staff who are not familiar with a community within our jurisdiction can walk families through each town's amenities with confidence using the centralized, up-to-date guide.

Meeting Voucher Holders' Needs

While the *Guide* launched less than a year ago, our hope is that it will become the **first step to empower RIHousing voucher holders in finding a community that meets their needs**. Every advancement in empowering renters and maximizing opportunities, no matter how incremental, is vital. In 2021, our state passed the Rhode Island Fair Housing Practices Act, which protects voucher holders from source of income discrimination. While this new law prevents landlords from discriminating from voucher holders, any support we can offer to voucher holders in finding a safe and healthy rental home in a community that allows them to thrive is critical to their (and our) success.

Feedback and Next Steps

Since the launch of the *Guide* in December 2021, we have distributed the link via a welcome email to new voucher holders, a briefing package that overviews the HCV Program and hard copy palm cards with a QR code at meetings and events.

To date, we have seen over 850 page views on our website. Heat map data indicates that the majority of visits to the *Guide* view the jurisdiction map followed by information on specific communities.

But perhaps more importantly is what our voucher holders are saying. The feedback couldn't be more positive, and our Leased Housing staff love it too as it adds a depth to their job they didn't have before.

A few comments received:

- *I think it's a good resource and very user friendly.*
- *I have found it pretty easy to refer tenants to this website instead of giving individual prices out. So far good feedback on my end. They have a chance to see all the cities we cover and check prices.*

As we move through the remainder of this year and beyond, we will be using available data and analytics to measure and identify the number of voucher holders accessing the *Guide*, the content and information they find most helpful, and any increases in lease-ups for voucher holders in our jurisdictions.

Accessing the Guide Online

Voucher holders have multiple methods to access the Guide to Rhode Island Communities that including digital and hard copy materials.

RIHousing's HCVP Website


Do I qualify?
In most cases, Rhode Islanders in this program can earn no more than 50% of HUD's median family income. The income restrictions vary by household size and the community in which the apartment is located.

[View RI Income Limits \(PDF\) ↓](#)

Fair Market Rents
Fair Market Rents (FMRs) are set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and used to determine the maximum rent a landlord can charge in their specific location.

[View Payment Standards \(PDF\) ↓](#)

RIHousing HCV Program Jurisdiction
Housing Choice Vouchers are administered locally by the Public Housing Authority in each community. RIHousing serves as the authority in 20 Rhode Island communities across the state.



Want to learn more?
We have created a HCVP Community Guide that provides an overview of living in any of those communities to help you choose which communities you may want to apply for housing.

Guide to Rhode Island Communities

Buyers Owners Renters Partners About Us Mortgage Login

Guide to Rhode Island Communities

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

How and where we live are two of the most important factors behind many of life's outcomes. Research shows that access to a healthy, affordable home significantly impacts economic stability, employment, overall health, and educational achievement. Wherever we are in life, a place to call home is paramount to our well-being and often the source of lifelong memories. From childhood celebrations to the thrill of our first apartment or home to empty-nesting and beyond, home is a part of who we are.

As a RIHousing Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) holder, you have the ability to choose a rental home in one of 20 Rhode Island communities. We have created this guide to provide you with an overview of living in any of those communities. With a Housing Choice Voucher, you are required to pay 30-40% of your income towards rent. RIHousing will pay the balance of the rental payment directly to your landlord.

[SEE ALL RIHOUSING JURISDICTION](#)


RIHousing Jurisdiction Map

Barrington	Bristol	Charlestown	Exeter
Foster	Glocester	Hopkinton	Jamestown
Little Compton	Middletown	Narragansett	New Shoreham
Newport	North Kingstown	North Smithfield	Portsmouth
Richmond	Scituate	South Kingstown	West Greenwich

HCV Program Welcome Guide

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

RIHousing Jurisdiction



A GUIDE TO RHODE ISLAND COMMUNITIES
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www.RIHousing.com/Guide-to-RI-Communities

* Shared Jurisdiction: Bristol, Narragansett, Newport, South Kingstown

Palm Cards With QR Codes

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

What are my options?



Guide to Rhode Island Communities

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[SCAN ME](#)

RIHousing.com/Guide-to-RI-Communities

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

¿Cuáles son mis opciones?



Guía a Rhode Island Comunidades

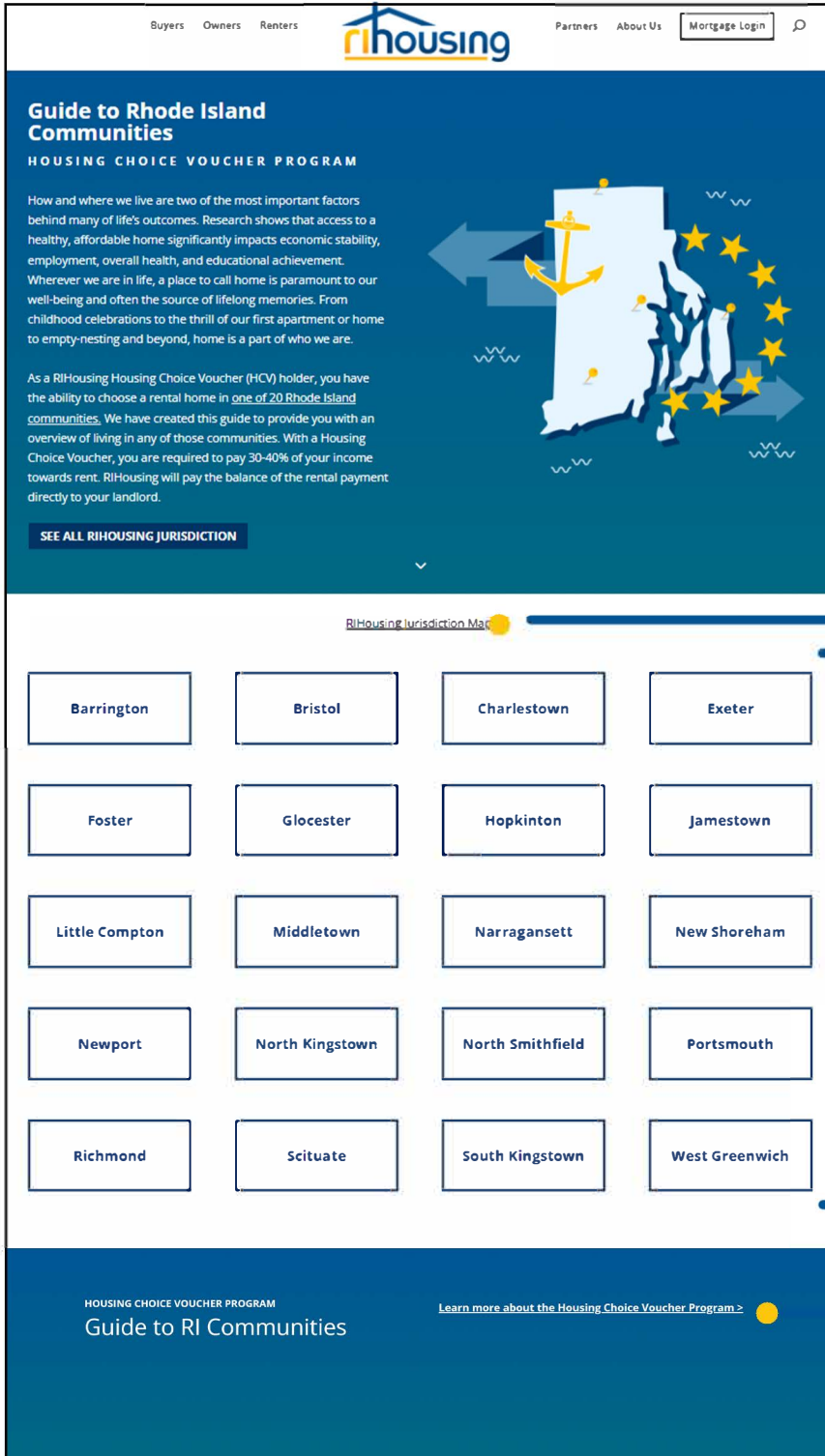
Como titular de un Voucher de Elección de Vivienda (HCV), usted tiene la capacidad de elegir un hogar de alquiler en una de las 20 comunidades de Rhode Island. Hemos creado una guía que ofrece un resumen de vivir en cualquiera de esas comunidades para ayudarlo a elegir la comunidad que desea aplicar para vivienda.

[SCAN ME](#)

RIHousing.com/Guide-to-RI-Communities

An Overview of the Guide

The guide is maintained digitally and accessible in as little as two clicks.



Description and overview of the guide.

Link to a map of jurisdictions

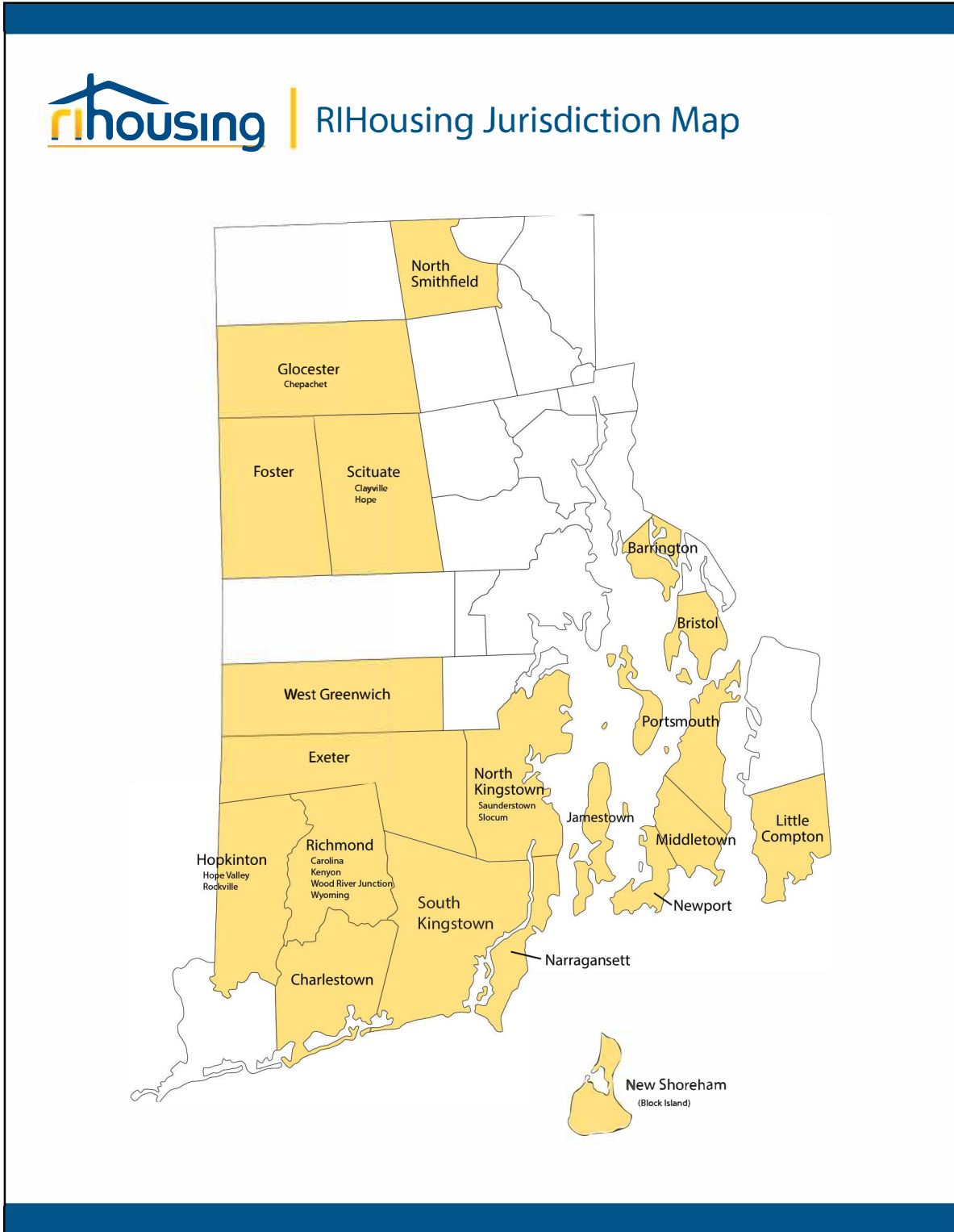
Buttons link to all 20 communities within our jurisdiction

Interested viewers can learn more about the HCV Program



Jurisdiction Map

Participants can access this map from the main page to see where communities are located.



Guide Example Barrington, Rhode Island

The guide gives an overview and rent limits in a community. Each section then expands to share more information.

Guide to Rhode Island Communities
HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

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[SEE ALL RIHOUSING JURISDICTION](#)

Barrington (East Bay)

Barrington is a coastal town with its own beach and several distinct neighborhoods: Primrose Hill/West Barrington/Alfred Drown/Bay Springs (north and west), Sowams/Hampden Meadows (east), and Nayatt/Rumstick (south). It has an active community that takes pride in its historic homes and walkable town center located across the street from the Town Hall and Library.

LIVING IN BARRINGTON:
Barrington has a large majority of owner-occupied, single family homes. HCV holders may also find rentals among some of the town's modest single-family homes located primarily in the western neighborhoods.

TO USE YOUR VOUCHER HERE, THE TOTAL RENT CANNOT EXCEED:

Zip Code/Place Name	SRO	0 BR	1 BR	2 BR	3 BR	4 BR	5 BR
02806/Barrington	\$1,023	\$1,364	\$1,540	\$1,848	\$2,288	\$2,794	\$3,213

GETTING AROUND

DAILY NEEDS + COMMUNITY CENTERS

FOOD + SHOPPING

EDUCATION

BANKS **PLACES OF WORSHIP**

MEDICAL SERVICES **RECREATION**

Available public transportation and driving times to major cities

GETTING AROUND

RIPTA:

- Route 60 Express Service to both Providence and Newport
- Route 61X Express Service to other East Bay locations, including Tiverton, and to Providence
- Stops at Park & Ride at White Church, 416 County Road

Driving times by car (average):

- Providence (10 miles)—15 minutes
- Warwick (20 miles)—30 minutes
- Newport (20 miles)—40 minutes

Amenities and closest community support programs

DAILY NEEDS + COMMUNITY CENTERS

Town Hall	283 County Rd. (401) 247-1900
Library	281 County Rd.
Post Office	200 Middle Rd.
Police Department	100 Federal Rd.
Recycling Center	84 Upland Way

COMMUNITY CENTERS

Bay Spring Community Center	170 Bay Spring Ave.
East Bay Community Action Program-John Digits Facility - Wide array of services including medical/dental, educational, social services	2 Old County Rd. 401-246-1195
Peck Center for Adult Enrichment - Recreational and educational programming for seniors	281 County Rd.
YMCA - Bayside	70 West St.
DHS & SNAP Offices	206 Elmwood Ave., Providence

Nearest food locations and major retailers for home supplies

FOOD + SHOPPING

FOOD

Barrington Shopping Center (includes Shaw's and CVS)	186 County Rd.
Barrington Farmers Market (mid June to mid October)	Park Ave. and Cook St.
TAPIN Food Pantry	281 County Rd.

SHOPPING

Nearest Home Depot	95 Highland Ave., Seekonk, MA
Nearest Target	79 Commerce Way, Seekonk, MA 579 GAR Hwy., Swansea, MA
Nearest Walmart	1180 Fall River Ave., Seekonk, MA
Nearest Walmart Supercenter	54 Cousineau Dr., Swansea, MA

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GETTING AROUND

DAILY NEEDS + COMMUNITY CENTERS

FOOD + SHOPPING

EDUCATION

BANKS

PLACES OF WORSHIP

MEDICAL SERVICES

RECREATION

Education opportunities are important for families in deciding where to live.

EDUCATION			
DAYCARES, PRESCHOOLS AND AFTER SCHOOL CARE			
Infant Care Programs	Toddler Care Programs	Preschool Programs	After School Care Programs
2	2	5	4

For a full list of care providers, visit www.brightstars.org.

The following providers accept the RI Child Care Assistance Program subsidy:

- Headstart Programs (available through East Bay CAP)

PUBLIC SCHOOLS
District Report Card from RI Department of Education

School Name	Address	RIDE Rating
Primrose Hill School (Grades PK-3)	60 Middle Hwy.	*****
Nayatt School (Grades K-3)	400 Nayatt Rd.	*****
Sowams Elementary School (Grades K-3)	364 Sowams Rd.	*****
Hampden Meadows School (Grades 4-5)	297 New Meadow Rd.	*****
Barrington Middle School (Grades 6-8)	261 Middle Hwy	*****

Voucher holders can locate financial institutions in each community

BANKS	
Bank of America	257 County Rd.
BankNewport	330 County Rd.
Citizens Bank	184 & 965 County Rd
Santander Bank	186 County Rd.
TD Bank	231 County Rd.
Webster Bank	262 County Rd

Find their local places of worship and connect to others

PLACES OF WORSHIP	
Protestant Church	5
Catholic + Episcopal Church	4
Jewish Synagogue	1
Muslim Mosque	(2) Providence

MEDICAL SERVICES	
East Bay Community Action Program - John Digits Facility	2 Old County Rd.
Nearest hospital: Rhode Island Hospital	2 Dudley St., Providence (10 mi - 20 minute drive)

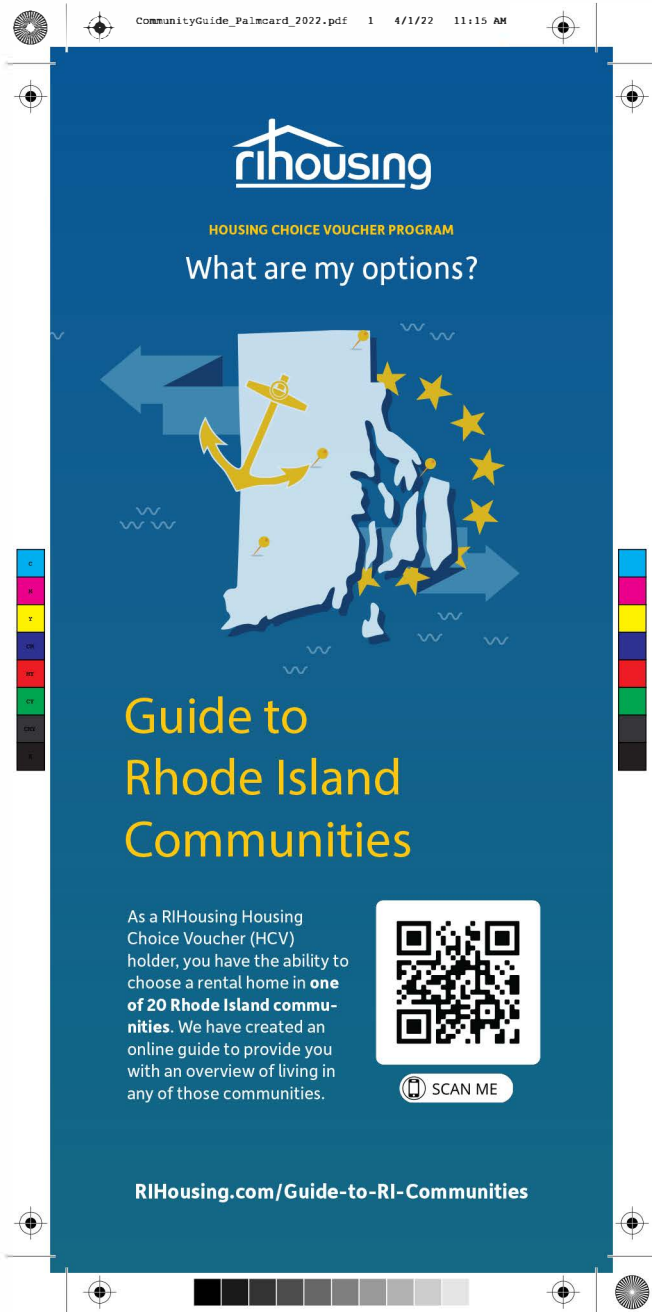
Important information regarding medical centers and where local recreational opportunities are

RECREATION	
<u>Barrington Parks and Recreation Department</u> 401-247-1926	
OUTDOOR SPACES	
Barrington Town Beach	
Barrington Library Playground	
East Bay Bike Path	
Haines Memorial State Park (runs through Barrington)	
Hampden Meadows Greenbelt Walking Path	
Veterans Memorial Park	
ARTS + OTHER PROGRAMS	
Bay Spring Community Centers - Provides arts, music, cultural, and community programming	170 Narragansett Ave.
Barrington Recreation Dept - provides programming for all ages and summer camps for youths	283 County Rd. 401-247-1900 x9
YMCA - Bayside - offers gym, pool, pick-up sports and programs for all ages.	70 West St.



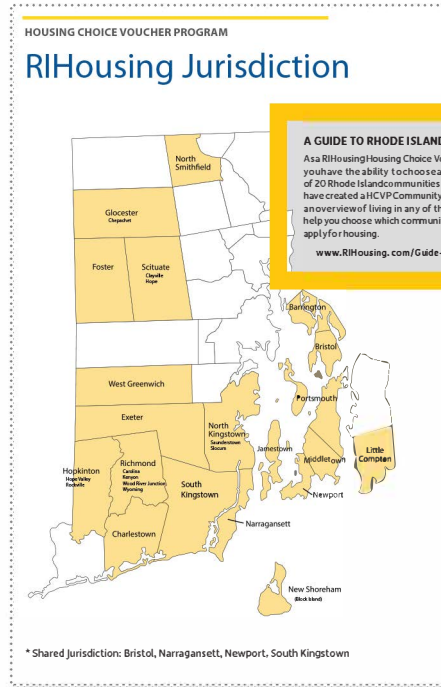
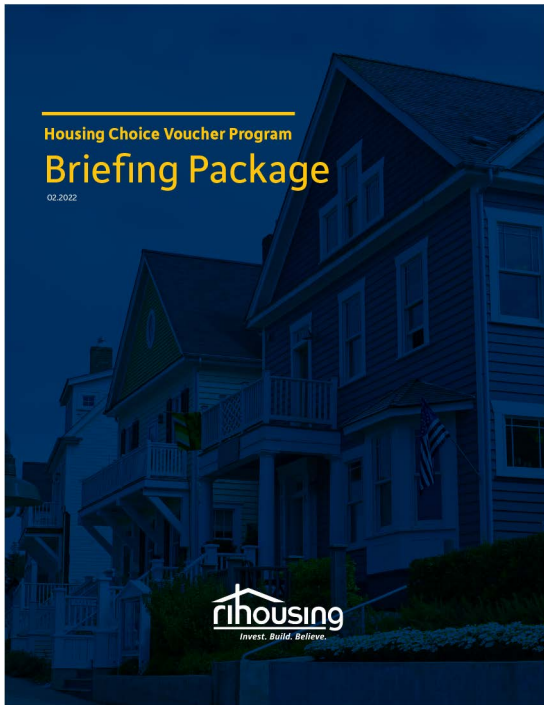
Outreach and Marketing

We have been distributing palmcards containing a QR code at community events. They are available in both English and Spanish.



Outreach and Marketing

Each voucher holder receives a welcome email and briefing package, both of which link to the Guide to Rhode Island Communities.



Located on Page 12
of the Briefing Package

Excerpt from emails to HCVP voucher holders linking to the Guide

Congratulations! I have completed your eligibility review, and management has now issued you a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV). I have attached your Voucher to this email for you to sign and date. Once signed and emailed back to me, the Voucher becomes valid and you can start the search for a new home.

The first step you must take after signing your Voucher is to watch our HCVP Briefing video (click here to view the video). It is very important you make time to watch this video as it explains how the Voucher works, as well as provides an overview of your responsibilities as a recipient of an HCV. It will also answer many questions you may have. After watching the video, you must sign and email back to me the Briefing packet receipt attached to this email.

Also attached to this email, you will find:

- A Briefing Packet that has even more in-depth information on our program and how the Voucher works. The 2021 payment standard chart which lists the municipalities that your Voucher is valid in, and how much your Voucher is worth. You will be looking at the 3BR (bedroom) column. The briefing packet and video explain how this works and why it's important to keep these figures to yourself. The briefing packet and video will give you information on any other form you will encounter during this process.

Lastly, we have created an HCVP Community Guide that provides an overview of the communities where you are able to use your RIHousing Voucher. This guide includes information on schools, food and shopping, community centers, medical services, and other amenities. **Please click here to access the guide.**

Website Statistics

Statistics since launch of the guide in December 2021.

Visitor Heat Map



Where Visitors Click

Heat map shows that most visitors click to see all jurisdictions. The data also shows the communities that have highest interest.

Click Statistics

- 102 Total clicks
- 15% RIHousing jurisdiction
- 13% Barrington, RI
- 11% Newport, RI

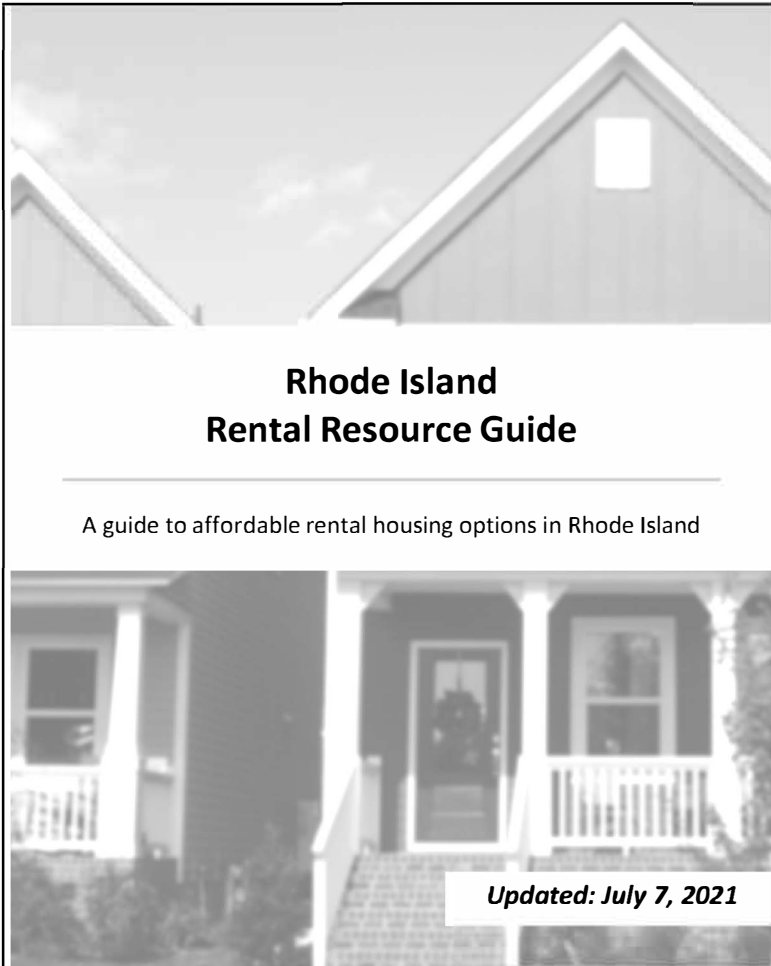
Traffic Statistics

- 866 Page views
- 525 Page visits
- 346 Unique visitors



Rental Resource Guide

Our Rental Resource Guide provides helpful information to help renters identify and contact PHAs, affordable housing developments, CDCs, etc. *But it was limited in scope and available only as a PDF.*



Time-Saving Tips

Time-Saver Tip #1: Only apply for developments you are **ELIGIBLE** for. If you are unsure, contact the property directly and ask questions.

Time-Saver Tip #2: When calling for an application, ask about **PREFERENCES**, which prioritize applicants on wait lists and will determine the approximate length of wait time. *Examples could include: In-town Resident, Veteran, Elderly*

Time-Saver Tip #3: All developments have a **TENANT SELECTION PLAN (TSP)** that details tenant eligibility criteria. Prospective applicants can request a copy of the TSP to verify eligibility before applying.

Time-Saver Tip #4: Subsidized Housing requires applicants to provide credit, criminal background, and rental history information. If you are unsure whether this information will negatively impact your application, review the property's TSP.

Time-Saver Tip #5: If you apply for subsidized housing and get a denial letter **YOU MAY REQUEST AN APPEAL**. This involves a discussion with the applicant in community to explain past credit, criminal treatment, or rental history.

Rental Assistance Programs

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program

Also known as: Section 8, Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, Mobile Voucher

The HCV Program is a federal program that provides housing assistance in the form of a "voucher" so tenants can find a home that fits their needs. Tenants are required to pay 30-40% of their gross household income in rent and utilities. This type of subsidy is tenant-based, meaning the assistance is tied to the tenant rather than the property.

Tenant-based vouchers increase affordable housing choices for very low-income families. Families with a tenant-based voucher choose and lease affordable, privately-owned rental housing. Under the HCV program, families find their own rental apartment and use the voucher to pay for all or a portion of the rent.

Centralized Waiting List

Subsidized Housing Developments

Also known as: Low-Income Housing, Public Housing, HUD Housing, Project-Based Housing, Facility-Based Housing

The following properties offer federally subsidized rental units for low-income individuals and families. Tenants are required to pay approximately 30% of their gross household income toward rent and utilities. These developments are project-based, which means that the subsidy (financial assistance) is attached to the property itself, and not the tenant.

Types of Housing/Populations Served:

E = Elderly (Must be 62 or older) D = Disabled F = Family/Individual
 H = Homeless S = Receiving Services DV = Domestic Violence/WAWA

D	Fellowship House	401-943-5817	Cranston
D	New Life Estates	401-738-9064	Cranston
D	Access Housing	401-331-3608	Cumberland
D	Cara Estates (Elmhurst House)	401-231-7555	Johnston

Without any information on the communities in our jurisdiction, voucher holders had to do their own research to learn more about these communities.