

Ensuring NAHMA Members Receive the Latest News and Analysis of Breaking Issues in Affordable Housing

National Affordable Housing Management Association – 400 N. Columbus Street, Suite 203 - Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone 703-683-8630 - Fax 703-683-8634 - www.nahma.org



October 15, 2004

NAHMAanalysis 2004-1015

Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Member Survey Results

Background

Over the past couple of years, federal policy makers in the Administration and in Congress have expressed concerns about the increasing costs of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. This program provides tenant-based rental assistance to millions of Americans nationwide. It is the largest federal rental subsidy program.

Various measures have been offered to control the program's costs. The Administration twice proposed converting the program to a block grant. Although Congress rejected each of the block grant measures, it did convert the voucher program back to a "budget-based" program in which PHAs would receive a fixed level of funding rather than be reimbursed based on costs.

Based on statements made from key members of Congress who oversee the program, NAHMA anticipates there will be serious discussion about reforming the tenant-based Section 8 voucher program in the next Congress. In this context, NAHMA surveyed members to assess their opinions about what is working in the program, what aspects should be improved, and how members feel about the various proposals to reform the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Summary

NAHMA launched the survey on October 5. NAHMA members of all levels—Executive, Associate, Affiliate and Subscribers were invited to respond. The survey was closed on October 13. Sixty-two members completed the questionnaire. Although the response period was relatively short, the survey produced some very interesting findings.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the feedback we received in the survey.

1. Most members agree that the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is a successful public-private partnership.

2. More than half of the respondents do not believe the program “is working fine as currently structured.”
3. Nearly two-thirds of respondents believe “federal policy makers should seek to control costs in the Section 8 voucher program.” Individual follow-up notes stressed that cost control should not be equated with funding cuts.
4. Members were asked to share their thoughts about how the current voucher program is working. Most members believe it is helping tenants find safe, decent affordable housing. While most agree owners and agents understand the rules and requirements, most disagreed there are adequate incentives for owner participation. They also disagreed that the program is user friendly for owners. Although 29% were neutral on the question of whether PHAs are doing a good job managing/administering the program, 42% did not believe this to be the case. Members split their opinions on the timeliness of unit inspections; 36% said they are timely, 37% said they are not, and 23% were neutral. Likewise, 40% said voucher payments are prompt and reliable, 40% said they are not, and 16% expressed neutrality. Half of those who responded said payment standards did not appropriately reflect market conditions, while 24% were neutral. Members also split on the user-friendliness of the program for tenants and whether the tenants understand the rules and requirements. It is reasonable to conclude that members based their responses on their own local experiences with particular PHAs and local market conditions.
5. Nearly three quarters believe “federal policy makers should place a high priority on improving the Section 8 voucher program,” with 39% indicating they strongly agree with that statement.
6. Members were asked to share their opinions about statements issued from various policy makers about the program. In their responses, members were skeptical that the program could be improved by converting it to a block to either states or PHAs. Respondents generally disagreed that “Section 8 voucher costs are spiraling out of control,” but 43% felt the program requires “major reform.” Members split on the question of whether PHAs should have more flexibility in administering tenant-based assistance, with 39% in agreement, 33% in disagreement, and 23% neutral on the question.
7. Members identified federal funding of the voucher program as the most important component in promoting safe, decent, affordable housing. In fact, 68% considered it “very important,” 21% listed it as “important” and 10% considered it “somewhat important.” Allowing the tenant to choose their own housing was also considered “very important” by 44% of respondents.
8. Measures most favored for inclusion in any legislation designed to control costs in the voucher program were administrative simplification (77%), improved income verification options (73%, with 47% strongly agreeing) and, by a lesser margin, allowing tenants to pay more than 30 percent of income in rent (69%) as well as allowing participation by higher income tenants (56%). Cuts in federal funding and reduced subsidies to owners were overwhelmingly rejected.

9. Members generally don't believe that a federal tenant based rental assistance block grant is workable. However, they believe a block grant could provide effective rental assistance if it were sufficiently funded. The preference, however, would be to treat a block grant as a reversible experiment rather than a permanent change in policy.
10. In question #10, members were asked to share any additional thoughts about how the Section 8 voucher program is working and/or ideas for improving the system. Of the 11 individual open ended responses submitted, a number expressed frustration with abuse in the program. Respondents urged greater oversight to address fraud and noncompliance. They also advocated better training on income verification.

NAHMA's position

NAHMA wishes to thank members who took the time out of their schedules to complete this survey.

Results of this questionnaire suggest that members believe the program is working well, but it could work better. Members generally like the current voucher program. They identified federal funding, allowing the tenant to choose their housing, and subsidizing the difference between 30% of the tenant's income and the actual rent as the top three "very important" aspects of the program in promoting safe, decent, affordable housing. There is a feeling that greater cost controls are necessary. Such controls should include improved income verification tools, training to address fraud and noncompliance, and administrative simplification in the program. Members absolutely oppose cuts to this important program. They were also very skeptical of block grant proposals. All things considered, members would like to improve upon the current structure of Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

These results will be considered at our fall meeting, which will take place October 17 – 19. NAHMA intends to use the feedback from this survey as the basis for a white paper on principles for reform of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. The white paper will then be considered through our public policy approval process, which will require approval of the Executive members and the Board of Directors.

The survey and actual responses follow.

Survey Results (Included Responses)

Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program

The results of your survey are displayed below. If your survey includes text responses, click the "View" button to read individual results. To exclude a particular response, click the Included Responses button. You can then view the set of individual responses that are currently included and select those you wish to exclude. Results below contain only Included responses

EXCLUDE BLANK RESPONSES

Launch Date	10/05/2004 - 1:07 PM
Modified Date	
Close Date	10/13/2004 - 10:13 AM
Email Invites	0
Visits	182
Partials	6
Completes	62

Go to Individual Responses:

Show respondent's emails.

INCLUDED RESPONSES

EXCLUDED RESPONSES

62

Included Respondents:

0

Excluded Respondents:

Cross Tabulate

Cross-reference two different questions

Results via Email

Receive results in spreadsheet format

1. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program (i.e. tenant-based Section 8) is a successful public-private partnership.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / No opinion
1.	27% 17	32% 20	10% 6	23% 14	8% 5	0% 0

VIEW 14 Responses

2. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is working fine as currently structured.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / No opinion
1.	11% 7	26% 16	11% 7	35% 22	16% 10	0% 0

VIEW 11 Responses

3. Federal policy makers should seek to control costs in the Section 8 voucher program.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / no answer
1.	6% 4	60% 37	24% 15	3% 2	6% 4	0% 0

[VIEW](#) 8 Responses

4. Please share your thoughts on the workings of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / No answer
1. There are adequate incentives for owner participation.	10% 6	21% 13	19% 12	32% 20	16% 10	2% 1
2. The program is user-friendly for owners.	6% 4	19% 12	26% 16	29% 18	16% 10	3% 2
3. Owners/agents understand the rules and requirements of the program.	10% 6	35% 22	23% 14	23% 14	10% 6	0% 0
4. Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) are doing a good job managing / administering the program.	6% 4	18% 11	29% 18	24% 15	18% 11	5% 3
5. PHAs conduct unit inspections in a timely, fair manner.	10% 6	26% 16	23% 14	21% 13	16% 10	5% 3
6. Voucher payments to owners are prompt and reliable.	13% 8	27% 17	16% 10	32% 20	8% 5	3% 2
7. The PHAs' payment standards appropriately reflect market conditions.	6% 4	13% 8	24% 15	27% 17	23% 14	6% 4
8. The program is user-friendly for tenants.	8% 5	24% 15	29% 18	24% 15	10% 6	5% 3
9. The program is helping tenants find safe, decent affordable housing.	21% 13	39% 24	6% 4	23% 14	10% 6	2% 1
10. Tenants understand the rules and requirements of the program.	10% 6	27% 17	21% 13	24% 15	15% 9	3% 2

[VIEW](#) 24 Responses

5. Federal policy makers should place a high priority on improving the Section 8 voucher program.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / no answer
1.	39% 24	34% 21	16% 10	10% 6	2% 1	0% 0

Please share your opinions regarding the following statements from policy makers about the
6. Section 8 voucher program.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / No opinion
1. The Section 8 voucher program is the "linchpin" of federal housing assistance.	11% 7	29% 18	32% 20	15% 9	6% 4	6% 4
2. Section 8 voucher costs are "spiraling out of control."	6% 4	19% 12	29% 18	29% 18	11% 7	5% 3
3. The Section 8 voucher program requires major reform.	11% 7	32% 20	24% 15	19% 12	11% 7	2% 1
4. Public housing agencies should have greater flexibility in administering tenant-based assistance.	8% 5	31% 19	23% 14	27% 17	6% 4	5% 3
5. The Section 8 voucher program could be improved by block granting funds to state housing agencies.	6% 4	23% 14	21% 13	8% 5	34% 21	8% 5
6. The Section 8 voucher program could be improved by block granting funds to PHAs.	2% 1	18% 11	19% 12	15% 9	37% 23	10% 6

[VIEW](#) 18 Responses

In your opinion, how important are the following aspects of the Section 8 voucher program to
7. promoting safe, decent, affordable housing?

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Very Important	2 Important	3 Somewhat Important	4 Not Important	5 Very unimportant	6 Don't know / no answer
1. Federal funding of the program	68% 42	21% 13	10% 6	2% 1	0% 0	0% 0
2. Federal oversight of the program	18% 11	31% 19	39% 24	10% 6	3% 2	0% 0
3. Federal administration of the program	16% 10	24% 15	31% 19	18% 11	10% 6	2% 1
4. Public housing agency administration of the program	11% 7	37% 23	21% 13	11% 7	19% 12	0% 0
5. Targeting 75% of vouchers to families at or below 30 percent of area median income	16% 10	35% 22	18% 11	16% 10	13% 8	2% 1
6. Allowing tenants to use their vouchers in different PHA jurisdictions than where the vouchers were issued	23% 14	32% 20	16% 10	16% 10	11% 7	2% 1
7. Having a homeownership component to the voucher program	21% 13	19% 12	27% 17	10% 6	19% 12	3% 2
8. Subsidizing the difference between 30% of the tenant's income and the actual rent	37% 23	35% 22	15% 9	6% 4	6% 4	0% 0
9. Providing enhanced vouchers in the cases of owner opt-outs/prepayment	26% 16	35% 22	24% 15	6% 4	2% 1	6% 4
10. Allowing PHAs to use 20% of the Housing Choice Vouchers for project-based assistance	35% 22	21% 13	18% 11	11% 7	10% 6	5% 3
11. Allowing PHAs to set payment standards at 110% of Fair Market Rent	35% 22	26% 16	19% 12	11% 7	3% 2	5% 3
12. Allowing the tenant to choose their housing	44% 27	35% 22	6% 4	10% 6	3% 2	2% 1

[VIEW](#) 15 Responses

8. Federal policy makers have expressed concerns about increasing costs in the voucher program. If legislation were introduced in Congress, how should policy makers seek to control costs?

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / no answer
1. Block grant the voucher program & allow the receiving entity to design their own program with fixed funds	10% 6	10% 6	26% 16	19% 12	31% 19	5% 3
2. Though a fixed dollar, or "budget-based" funding system that operates through current program requirements	3% 2	35% 22	27% 17	15% 9	15% 9	5% 3
3. Reimburse PHAs based on actual costs of the voucher program	15% 9	34% 21	29% 18	15% 9	5% 3	3% 2
4. Lower the payment standard for vouchers	6% 4	8% 5	31% 19	21% 13	27% 17	6% 4
5. Reducing subsidies to owners	8% 5	3% 2	11% 7	27% 17	44% 27	6% 4
6. Allow more participation by higher income tenants	27% 17	29% 18	15% 9	19% 12	8% 5	2% 1
7. Allow tenants to pay more than 30% of their income for rent	24% 15	45% 28	11% 7	13% 8	6% 4	0% 0
8. Simplify administrative requirements in the program	42% 26	35% 22	15% 9	5% 3	3% 2	0% 0
9. Improve income verification options	47% 29	26% 16	21% 13	5% 3	2% 1	0% 0
10. Cutting total funding (federal appropriations) for the program	0% 0	5% 3	8% 5	21% 13	53% 33	13% 8
11. Cut PHA administrative fees	11% 7	21% 13	31% 19	11% 7	23% 14	3% 2

[VIEW](#) 17 Responses

9. The idea of block granting the Section 8 voucher program has been circulating for a couple of years. In a block grant structure, a program receives a set amount of funding which is distributed to recipients through an allocation formula. The recipients may design their own programs based on local needs. Minimum federal requirements vary in block grants. Please share your thoughts on the following statements.

The top percentage indicates total respondent ratio; the bottom number represents actual number of respondents selecting the option

	1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly Disagree	6 Don't know / No opinion
1. A federal tenant-based assistance block grant is unworkable.	23% 14	24% 15	23% 14	16% 10	11% 7	3% 2
2. A block grant could provide effective rental assistance if it were sufficiently funded.	11% 7	29% 18	24% 15	18% 11	16% 10	2% 1
3. Any federal block grant should be treated as a reversible experiment.	39% 24	21% 13	19% 12	3% 2	8% 5	10% 6
4. A block grant should be tried as a pilot program with a specific sample size (i.e. 20% of vouchers administered).	18% 11	37% 23	16% 10	10% 6	16% 10	3% 2

[VIEW](#) 12 Responses

10. Please feel free to share any additional thoughts you may have about the effectiveness of the Section 8 voucher program and/or ideas for improving the current program.

[VIEW](#) 11 Responses

Copyright ©1999-2004 [MarketTools, Inc.](#) All Rights Reserved.

No portion of this site may be copied without the express written consent of MarketTools, Inc. [Trademark Notice](#)