Housing Trust Fund and Bridges Rental Assistance Updates

As you continue receiving guidance and staying informed about COVID-19, here are the latest program updates, including program requirement changes and helpful resources.

Income to Include and Exclude

One-time stimulus payments are excluded as income when calculating rental assistance amounts, as they qualify as temporary, nonrecurring or sporadic income. However, the additional $600/week of federal unemployment income funded from the CARES Act is included as income when calculating rental assistance amounts.

Initial Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Inspections

We previously informed you that <u>annual</u> HQS inspections required by Minnesota Housing could be suspended until recommendations by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) allowed for unit inspections to resume. Based on the evolving public health crisis and in order to expedite households' access to housing and safeguard those involved, we are now also considering exceptions to the <u>initial</u> HQS requirement, provided Minnesota Housing has adequate assurances that the unit satisfies HQS requirements or the applicable local standard. This exception must be approved in writing by Minnesota Housing. If approved, this exception should be documented in the participant's file.

In the event that you cannot complete the inspection prior to the household moving in to the unit, you can:

- Submit an exception request to Minnesota Housing staff via email demonstrating a hardship that prevents completion of the initial HQS inspection prior to the household moving into the unit.
- Obtain affirmative acknowledgement from the landlord that the unit is required to meet the local maintenance code or HUD HQS standards (e.g., letter or email from the landlord).
- Submit documentation that provides Minnesota Housing adequate assurances that the unit currently meets the local housing maintenance code or HUD HQS standards.
- Agree to complete a physical inspection within 30 days after the peace time emergency ends. Owners will have 30 days from the time of inspection to cure violations, if needed. If the unit does not meet all requirements at that time, rental assistance may be terminated.

Payments to Grantees

Payments to grantees will continue as scheduled as Minnesota Housing staff is working remotely. We encourage grantees to expedite payments to their subgrantees, if applicable.

Housing Trust Fund Administrators ONLY

At the beginning of the grant term, temporary policy changes were extended to increase access to housing and prevent future episodes of homelessness. These changes include payment of double security deposits, payment of application fees and backgrounds checks, and payment of past due utilities. These policy changes may be a valuable resource for households during this time. Administrators should evaluate how these expenses fit within their budgets, and use them only when appropriate.

COVID-19 and Minnesota Housing

Minnesota Housing has a COVID-19 webpage on our website that includes previous eNews publications sent to our partners as well as other useful information. You will also find additional information about Executive Order 20-14 Suspending Evictions and Writs of Recovery During the COVID-19 Peacetime Emergency.

If you have more questions as you navigate COVID-19 with participants and assess program requirements, please reach out to Ellie Miller or Merideth Mayrand.

Prioritizing the health and safety of staff and participants and maintaining housing stability, are very important to Minnesota Housing. Thank you for all you are doing to provide continued services and rental assistance to participants during this challenging time.

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