

A Newsletter for Housing Owners

**METRO HRA**

Housing & Redevelopment Authority

**VIEWS**

FALL 2019



## Community Choice Program: SUCCESS AND IMPROVED STABILITY FOR FAMILIES

The Metro HRA's Community Choice Program assists families who have a federal housing voucher (through the Housing Choice Voucher program) with finding housing in areas of opportunity. The program aims to help families achieve self-sufficiency and success in their new neighborhoods.

Now a few years old, the program is making an impression on participants. Here's what a Roseville Community Choice tenant since 2018 says this about the program.



*I have never, in my whole life, experienced anything like this program*

*before. I have never had this type of help in my life. This program offers financial support and resources for my family. They helped me find housing and continue to visit me and my family in my home every three months. They helped me with resources for myself and my children related to school, employment, and financial resources. When my family moved in, we experienced our first Minnesota winter and the outreach coordinator helped my family find our first set of winter weather gear. My family loves the snow!*

*Living at my apartment complex in Roseville, I am much happier and feel safe. It is stable for my children and the schools are good. The neighborhood is a positive environment for my entire family.*

*The HRA is sent from God and I never want to move. I know that I can always depend on my outreach coordinator to help my family. I do not have family in Minnesota, I am single mother of four, but I can always depend on my outreach coordinator to help my family and support us in times of need.*

If you are an owner who is interested in working with this program, please contact Tasha Belshan at 651-602-1952 or [tasha.belshan@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:tasha.belshan@metc.state.mn.us), OR Renae Pereira-Webb at 651-602-1231 or [renae.pereira-webb@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:renae.pereira-webb@metc.state.mn.us).

## ATTEND THE NEXT OWNERS WORKSHOP

Mark your calendars for Nov. 14 at Silverwood Park in St. Anthony. Proposed agenda topics include:

- Mary Dobbins – “Successfully Navigating Issues with Tenants”
- Resident Panel – “Willing Property Owners, like you, create stable families”
- Ask an Inspector – “Get answers to your HRA inspection related questions”
- Metro HRA Initiatives – “Benefits for Property Owners, special programs, special benefits”

New this year is the Owner Awards, where we celebrate our partnership with you! Lunch will be provided, so please reserve this date to attend this very exciting workshop. Check your email for an invitation.



## FROM THE DIRECTOR

Greetings from the Metropolitan Council Housing and Redevelopment Authority (Metro HRA). Fall is here. The leaves will begin soon changing. The apples are getting ripe. Children are back to school. We can all get back into our new routines with a new season. I am thankful my routine includes a safe place to sleep at night.



Terri Smith

According to the 2019 Point-in-Time homeless count, there were 7,977 people experiencing homelessness on a given night in January; 43% are families with children, 56% are single adults, and 297 are veterans. The fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness are those that are unsheltered, meaning those that are sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, such as outside.

Two programs operated by the Metro HRA serve people experiencing homelessness:

### **Veteran's Affairs Supportive Housing Program (VASH):**

VASH works in partnership with the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs to provide federal housing assistance to veteran's experiencing homelessness. The VA provides supportive services to assist with success in independent living and the Metro HRA provides the rent assistance. The program has achieved great success. The Metro HRA has 30 homeless veterans looking for an available housing unit.

**Mainstream Voucher Program:** The Metro HRA was awarded 89 new federal housing vouchers to provide rent assistance to people experiencing homelessness and utilizing the transit system as temporary shelter. People sleeping on transit vehicles are part of the growing group of people who are unsheltered. The Metro HRA has successfully housed 45 families under this program and has another 45 referrals in process.

Both programs work with supportive service pieces to assist with success and housing stability. If you are interested in working with people experiencing homelessness under either program, please reach out to Abdiaziz Ibrahim, Metro HRA Outreach Coordinator, at 651-602-1596 or [abdiaziz.ibrahim@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:abdiaziz.ibrahim@metc.state.mn.us).

We appreciate your partnership in providing provide safe, stable housing to Twin Cities families.

Terri Smith  
Director, Metro HRA

## THANK YOU!

A huge thank you to the attendees of the landlord focus group meetings! We appreciate you taking the time to provide feedback. The service you provide is essential to help improve our policies and processes to better serve you and our tenants.

This year, your feedback on move-in processes resulted in updates to expedite inspections and reduce the need for lease amendments! Please consider attending Metro HRA's landlord focus group meetings in 2020.

### **Select comments from landlords**

*'It's always nice to put a face to a name and meet with peers to discuss ways to better serve our residents.'* – Cassie, Legends at Silver Lake

*"I have learned that the Metro HRA is committed to working with its tenants and landlords. I believe that these focus group meetings are important to have so that the HRA can best know how to serve the population it works with, be it the landlords or our tenants. I believe that through the focus group meetings, I have a different outlook on how Metro HRA works, and I like that they are including us in their policy-making decisions. I will definitely recommend other managers and landlords alike to attend these meetings so that they can convey the issues they are dealing with to the HRA so that solutions can be found. And a lot times, other landlords and managers are probably wanting these same answers. I will like to see more focus groups meetings in the future."* - Abas Mohamed, Property Solutions & Services Inc.

*"When I started going to these meetings, I didn't realize how little I knew about the Section 8 process. I have been able to learn so much from going to these meetings and have been able to share that knowledge with my staff and also voucher holders. We have definitely strengthened our partnership as a result of attending these meetings. Changes have improved the processes already, thank you! I think everyone should attend at least two of these meetings. The first meeting for me was more informational and helped me prepare for the second meeting where I was able to ask questions that I wouldn't have even thought about in the first meeting."* - Amy Kovarik, Huntington Place

We have our focus group meetings quarterly. This is a great way for you to provide feedback to us and get involved. If you are interested in joining, contact Abdiaziz at 651-602-1596 or [abdiaziz.ibrahim@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:abdiaziz.ibrahim@metc.state.mn.us).

# CENSUS INFORMATION FOR PROPERTY OWNERS

Every 10 years, the U.S. Census Bureau counts everyone in the United States. The 2020 Census is a huge effort, and the Census needs to get to everyone.

## Why is the Census important?

The Census provides the basis for federal funding and priorities for government services and infrastructure investment. Every year, billions of dollars from the federal budget are distributed to communities – for education, transportation, housing and health – with amounts determined from population data.

## How does the Census work? When does it happen?

By April 1, 2020, all residential addresses will receive 2020 Census materials in the mail. Residents should fill out their Census questionnaire as soon as possible, either online or by mail. Either form of response is accepted.

The 2020 Census is not something that households can ignore. Residents who do not respond to the first mailing *will receive four additional mailings*.

Then, starting in May, Census workers will begin coming to addresses that continue to have a “non-responding” status. These follow-up visits will take place through August 2020.

Here are some other things that landlords and building managers need to know:

## What if an occupied apartment or unit does not receive any Census materials?

Landlords and building managers can assist the 2020 Census by letting residents know that census materials should arrive by April 1, 2020. If not, people can still complete the 2020 Census through a secure, online questionnaire at <https://2020census.gov>

## Who counts? Who needs to be counted in my apartment building?

Everyone counts – and the Census Bureau wants to count everyone at the right place.

The general rule is people should report themselves living at their usual place of residence.

## How can you verify that someone is a Census worker?

Landlords and building managers should always verify that census workers have a photo ID badge. The badge will have the census worker’s name, photograph, and a U.S. Department of Commerce watermark.

If you still have questions, you can call the Census Bureau at 800-923-8282.

## What might a Census worker ask of a landlord or building manager?

Mostly, Census workers will need to enter building hallways, knock on apartment doors, or buzz apartment call boxes.

Also, they will ask whether addresses on their lists were occupied or vacant on April 1, 2020.

Census workers may ask for residents’ names, phone numbers and usual hours at home. Landlords and building managers must cooperate and provide known information if census workers ask.

If census workers are unsuccessful communicating with residents, they may ask detailed questions about who lives in specific units, their names, relationships to one another, races and ages. The Census Bureau considers response by a landlord to be a last resort – but it is a valid request if contact with residents has failed.

## Is answering the Census required? Are there privacy issues to consider?

Participation in the Census is required by federal law.

Census workers are empowered by federal law to ask for any of the information listed on the Census questionnaire (13 U.S.C. § 221 and 223). They do not need a court order for this work.

Providing information to census workers is not a violation of anyone’s privacy rights. Federal law requires that landlords and building managers cooperate to the extent they are able.

Federal law further requires that landlords or building managers provide reasonable access to buildings. If a person refuses to cooperate, refuses access or otherwise impedes a census worker, the Census Bureau can take legal action. Refusal of information or impedance of a census worker is a federal offence that can lead to a fine of up to \$500.

## What do the Census Bureau and federal law consider to be reasonable access to buildings?

Landlords and building managers must allow census workers to walk through hallways, knock on apartment doors, or buzz apartment call boxes. The census workers will need time and space to conduct interviews. Census workers may have to return multiple times to secure interviews. These repeat visits must be accommodated.

## INSPECTIONS: WHO NEEDS TO BE PRESENT?

**Initial Inspections** – Metro HRA will contact the owner or property manager for all initial inspections. The tenant **will not** be contacted. If the tenant moves in prior to the inspection, please notify them of the inspection date to avoid the “surprise” visit. The unit should be move-in ready, with utilities turned on and clear of any construction debris. If you know the unit is not going to be ready, please notify us at [HRInspections@metc.state.mn.us](mailto:HRInspections@metc.state.mn.us) so we can reschedule. This will save on time for both the inspector and the owner.

New move-in inspections are prioritized. We know it can cause great stress for the tenant and the landlord.

**Annual inspections** – Metro HRA will contact the tenant directly. Owners and property managers will receive the inspection letter, as well. The tenant must be present for the inspection or have someone older than 18 at home.

The tenant can prearrange with management to allow the inspector in for an annual inspection. This must be arranged prior to the inspection and must be in writing. The inspector must either speak with the tenant directly or have written permission to enter with management staff. If the inspector arrives with manager or maintenance and a minor is home alone, we will not enter the unit. This is for everyone’s safety.

**Please remember to do a pre-inspection and make repairs so the unit can pass on the first inspection.**

- Streamlined approval and inspection process
- Participant selects a rental unit
- Participant receives approval per owner screening criteria
- Unit is submitted for approval to Metro HRA
- Metro HRA determines affordability
- Inspection scheduled based on when the unit is vacant
- Inspection passes
- Owner submits signed lease to Metro HRA
- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract is created and sent out for owners’ signature
- HAP contract is returned and executed
- Subsidy begins and the start date begins on pass date or lease date, whichever is later

