

## Housing Choice Voucher Program (Section 8)

### Participant Guide

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is a federally funded program administered by The Garfield County Housing Authority (GCHA). The Housing Choice Voucher Program assists eligible low-income individuals, families, the elderly, and the disabled hereon referred to as “family”, to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses, apartments and mobile homes.

The participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and is not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects.

A family that is issued a housing voucher is responsible for finding a suitable housing unit of the family’s choice where the owner agrees to rent under the program. This unit may include the family’s present residence. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by the Housing Authority.

A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the Housing Authority on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

#### HOW TO APPLY?

An applicant needs to complete a pre-application form and return it by email, fax or in person to be placed on a waiting list. Since the demand for housing assistance often exceeds the limited resources available to HUD and the local housing agencies, long waiting periods are common. In fact, the Garfield County Housing Authority may close its waiting list when it has more families on the list than can be assisted in the near future. Please contact the Garfield County Housing Authority at 970-625-3589 to verify that the waiting list is open. Periodically, letters may be mailed out to applicants on the wait list to verify continued interest to remain on the waiting list. **IMPORTANT:** It is the applicants’ responsibility to keep their contact information and mailing address *current* as returned mail and no response to letters can result in being removed from the waiting list, requiring the applicant to reapply.

#### INITIAL ELIGIBILITY:

Eligibility for the Housing Choice Voucher Program is determined by gross annual household income and household size. Applicants’ income must be within the current Federal Income Limits for Garfield County. Garfield County Housing Authority pulls

potentially eligible families or individuals from its waiting list depending on available vouchers and federal funds. All new admissions to the Housing Choice Voucher Program must meet the eligibility requirements of income eligibility, citizenship status, and pass the criminal background requirements. You will also be required to sign a Release of Information Form and authorization to conduct a criminal background check form.

When you are notified that you have been pulled from the waiting list, you must furnish birth certificates and social security cards for all family members and ID/Colorado Driver Licenses for all family members 18 years of age or older.

You will also be asked to sign a Declaration of Section 214 status form. The content of this form may restrict or limit assistance to non-eligible immigrants. Also, Applicants must prove U.S. Citizenship or proof of eligible immigration status.

You must provide written proof of all deductions, which include childcare and medical expenses for disabled or elderly families. GCHA staff will verify all information provided to the Housing Authority. A family will be deemed ineligible for the Housing Choice Voucher Program if applications are incomplete, non-responding to letters, or refusing to supply required documentation and information.

Once all eligibility criteria is met and you have been approved you will be scheduled to meet with a Housing Specialist at a group briefing. This briefing will include full disclosure of all program rules and regulations, policies, and procedures. The briefing will also include an explanation of your responsibilities, and a description of suitable units.

At that time, you will receive a Housing Choice Voucher. This voucher is valid for 60 days from the date issued. Extensions may be granted. Extension requirements will be provided during the briefing.

### **REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION:**

Persons with disabilities may request a reasonable accommodation in order to fully utilize this program. Reasonable Accommodation is a modification or change GCHA can make to its policies or procedures that will assist an otherwise eligible applicant with a disability/handicap to take advantage of GCHA's programs, provided that the change does not pose an undue financial and administrative burden to GCHA or require fundamental change in its program.

If you or any member of your household have a disability and you would like to request a Reasonable Accommodation, you may request it in writing at any time in the application process or after admission.

If you have any questions or problems concerning Reasonable Accommodations, please contact the Garfield County Housing Authority at 970-625-3589.

### **COMPUTER MATCHING:**

GCHA utilizes a variety of computer matching tools, one of which is HUD's EIV system.

Enterprise Income Verification System (EIV): This tool assists with verification of income, before or during a family's re-examination, through independent sources, that systemically and uniformly maintains income information in computerized form. This is done thru computer matching agreements with Federal, State, Local government, or private agencies.

GCHA can access data at any time, regardless of re-exam date including interim re-exams.

Prior to admission GCHA will verify any duplication of assistance through any federally subsidized program utilizing this tool.

The data is used to validate family reported income and supplement family provided documents. GCHA will also use this information to verify any income discrepancies.

Data Sources:

- ❖ National Directory of New Hires
  - ✓ Monthly new hire
  - ✓ Quarterly wage information
  - ✓ Employment information
  - ✓ Quarterly unemployment benefit information
  - ✓ Work Number
- ❖ Social Security Administration (SSA)
  - ✓ Monthly SS/SSI Dual Entitlement benefit information
  - ✓ Medicare premium payment information

### **OCCUPANCY STANDARDS:**

GCHA will assign one bedroom for each two persons within the household, except in the following circumstances:

Persons of the opposite sex (other than spouses, and children under age 11) will be allocated separate bedrooms.

Live-in aides will be allocated a separate bedroom.

Single person families will be allocated one bedroom.

A single parent household with a child will be allocated separate bedrooms if the child is age 11 or older.

### **UNIT SELECTION:**

The applicant family is advised of the unit size based on family composition. However, if the applicant family finds a larger sized unit which is equal to or less than their eligible voucher's size they may rent the larger unit as long as the larger unit does not exceed the maximum rent burden for the family. The applicant family is encouraged to consider several housing choices to secure the best housing for the family needs.

The housing unit selected by the family must meet an acceptable level of health and safety before the Housing Authority can approve the unit. When the voucher holder finds a unit that it wishes to occupy and reaches an agreement with the landlord regarding tenancy, GCHA must inspect the dwelling for Housing Quality Standards (HQS) and determines the rent requested is reasonable. **NOTE: DO NOT** sign a lease until unit has passed an HQS inspection and has been approved by the Housing Authority.

The initial lease term must be for 12 months.

GCHA has a list of Interested Landlords for Garfield County. Other resources for locating housing are: local newspapers, the internet and for rent signs.

### **HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS:**

Housing Quality Standards (HQS). This is a term used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to describe the minimum requirements that HUD has determined will provide decent, safe and sanitary housing for participants in the Voucher Program.

A qualified staff member must inspect the unit you select to insure it meets the minimum requirements. The inspector is checking on general site condition, electrical outlets, plumbing, furnace, hot water heater, painted surfaces and overall security. Existing conditions of the unit will also be documented.

Most commonly failed conditions are:

- Nonfunctional smoke detectors
- Missing or cracked electrical outlet covers or plates
- No railings where required

- Severely Cracked or broken window panes
- Leaking faucets or plumbing
- No temperature/pressure-relief valve or discharge line on the water heaters

### **SECURITY DEPOSIT:**

The applicant is responsible for any security deposit that is required. The Housing Authority **DOES NOT** assist with paying the Security Deposit or last month's rent if required by landlord. You are 100% responsible for this expense.

### **RENT SUBSIDY:**

The participant's portion of rent is calculated on 30% of adjusted gross annual income but no more than 40% of adjusted gross income. The total contract rent to the landlord will include the estimated cost of utilities for the tenant. Housing Specialists will counsel you on what you will pay based on your income, the unit you choose and what is rent reasonable. GCHA will not approve a lease until we determine the initial rent to the owner is reasonable rent. Participants will pay their portion of rent directly to the landlord.

### **PORTABILITY (TRANSFERRING ASSISTANCE)**

Portability is defined as the ability for a Housing Choice Voucher holder to move from the jurisdiction of its current housing agency to the jurisdiction of another housing agency operating a Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Under the voucher program, new voucher-holders may choose a unit anywhere in the United States if the family lived in the jurisdiction of the Housing Authority issuing the voucher when the applicant applied for assistance. Those new voucher-holders not living in the jurisdiction of the Housing Authority at the time the applicant applied for housing assistance must initially lease a unit within that jurisdiction for the first twelve months of assistance. A participant (family) that wishes to move to another Housing Authority's jurisdiction must consult with the Housing Authority that currently administers its housing assistance to verify the procedures for moving.

**NOTE:** Housing Authorities often have different income limits, payments standards and subsidy standards (the number of bedrooms you qualify for).

### **FAMILY RECERTIFICATION AND CONTINUED ASSISTANCE:**

You will be required to supply any information that the Garfield County Housing Authority or HUD determines to be necessary for use in a regularly scheduled reexamination or interim reexamination of family income and composition. The family

must also allow GCHA to inspect the housing unit at reasonable times and after reasonable notice.

All information the family supplies must be true and complete.

### **FRAUD:**

Fraud can result in termination of the Housing Choice Voucher Program, as well as restitution of funds, probation, or even prison. Fraud may be defined as any of the following offenses:

- ❖ Knowingly omitting or under-reporting income or assets from household income.
- ❖ Transferring assets or income to achieve eligibility.
- ❖ Falsifying or using false Social Security documents.
- ❖ Falsifying the number of members in your household.
- ❖ Getting assistance in addition to Section 8 without notifying the appropriate parties.
- ❖ Renting out or subletting all or part of the unit.

### **VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN'S ACT (VAWA):**

VAWA prohibits the eviction of, and the removal of program assistance from, certain persons living in public housing or housing choice voucher assisted housing if the cause would be an act of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking, as those terms are defined in Section 3 of the United States Housing Act of 1937 as amended by VAWA (42. U.S.C. 13925).

### **NON-DISCRIMINATION AND MY RIGHTS:**

GCHA shall not discriminate against any applicant or participant because of age, race, color, sex, national origin, familial status, religious preference, handicap or political affiliation. No preference will be shown to any applicant or participant because of political affiliation or acquaintance with any public official at the federal, state or local level.

However, if you believe that you have been discriminated against, you should call the office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity (state 303-844-4751) or the National toll-free Hot Line (800-877-7353). Colorado Legal Services (303-837-1313) may be able to assist you with legal representation if warranted.

### **COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS:**

Program participants who disagree with any decision, action or inaction taken by GCHA have the right to request an informal hearing. If assistance termination were to occur you will receive a written notification with exact reason(s) assistance is being terminated along with your right to request a hearing. If you request an informal hearing the request must be submitted in writing to your Housing Specialist within 10 days from the date of the letter of intent to terminate. You will be requested to bring any documentation or verification to support your position.

An informal hearing will be conducted by an impartial hearing officer and a final decision will be sent to you within ten days from the date of the hearing.

If you are an applicant who is denied participation you will be given the right to an informal written review. You will receive a letter stating the reason for denial as well as the opportunity to request a review within ten days of the notification.

GCHA will notify applicant within ten days of the date of review with a final decision.



**Garfield County Housing Authority is located at**

**1430 Railroad Avenue, Unit F-1,**

**Rifle, CO 81650**

**(970)625-3589 office, (970)625-0859 fax**

**Office hours are Monday thru Thursday 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m.,**

**Friday 8:00a.m.-12:00p.m.**

<b>GCHA STAFF</b>		<b>970-625-3589</b>	
Carmen Mireles	Intake Specialist	Ext. 101	<a href="mailto:carmen@garfieldhousing.com">carmen@garfieldhousing.com</a>
Kristel Langford	HQS Inspector	Ext. 104	<a href="mailto:kristel@garfieldhousing.com">kristel@garfieldhousing.com</a>
Cindy Pfalzgraff	Housing Specialist	Ext. 103	<a href="mailto:cindy@garfieldhousing.com">cindy@garfieldhousing.com</a>
Danna May	Housing Specialist	Ext. 102	<a href="mailto:danna@garfieldhousing.com">danna@garfieldhousing.com</a>
Renae Richardson	Housing Specialist	Ext. 105	<a href="mailto:renae@garfieldhousing.com">renae@garfieldhousing.com</a>
Dorothy Price	Finance Director	Ext. 107	<a href="mailto:dorothy@garfieldhousing.com">dorothy@garfieldhousing.com</a>