

COVID-19 Housing Stability Task Force Working Groups

August 27
2020



LISC
HOUSTON

Rental Assistance: Working Group

How do we intend to work?

- Build common knowledge around local Rental Assistance programming and its results
- Provide evidence based recommendations to influence local programming for rental assistance during the COVID-19 crisis
- Develop program models of rent assistance based on our 10 Principles to influence local rental assistance ecosystem
- Work with evaluation methods to determine effectiveness of all programs

*All WG's will consider policy or program recommendations, public engagement, and system navigation.

Rental Assistance: Working Group

Initiatives:

- Drafted a set of 10 Rent Assistance Program Principles which were approved by the Housing Stability Task Force members and forwarded to our Co-Chairs
- Used the Principles to evaluate the proposed program to distribute \$60M of Harris County and City of Houston Rental Assistance funds
- How did tenants and landlords benefitted from these efforts?
 - improved tenant and landlord experience by bringing two separate programs closer together
 - Harris County raised its rental assistance cap from \$1,200 to \$1900
 - Harris County increased rental assistance funding by \$15m to its allocation to assist a similar amount of applicants
 - Harris County modified its requirements of Landlord Agreement to include a payment plan and align with CoH's program grace period extends to all tenants in a building where one tenant receives assistance

Rental Assistance: Working Group

Knowledge Building of the Working Group:

- Open sessions with presenters who share current local programming, program results to support our work in developing a local standard of practice:
 - Lessons Learned from Past Crises in Houston - Elena White, Executive Director, Connective
 - GHCF COVID-19 Funding Results - Diana Zarzuelo, Senior Director of Community Philanthropy at GHCF
 - Baker Ripley City of Houston Funding Results - Rene Solis, Chief Program Officer, Baker Ripley
 - Learnings from Focus Groups of Landlords and Tenants post Harris County Direct Assistance
 - Elena White, Executive Director, Connective
 - Fahad Punjwanit, Creative Director SUCH

Working Group Goal:

- Create Model of Optimal Program Design for Rental Assistance for our Region with potential for Pilot Projects

Rental Assistance: Working Group

Working Group Members:

- Maria Verdeja
- Mark Thiele
- Tom McCasland
- Diana Zarzuelo
- Zoe Middleton
- Celeste Arredondo
- John Boriack
- Mary Lawler
- Chrishelle Palay
- Howard Bookstaff
- Claudia Aguirre
- Cynthia Colbert
- Jeff Reichman
- Ana Raush
- Sharon Zachary (ACAM)
- Sonja Gee (MAM)

Working Group Facilitator:

- Martha Macris

Access to Justice: Working Group

How do we intend to work?

- Find creative and sustainable ways to help both landlord and tenant to avoid the entry into a formal eviction process.
- Create models where information and assistance occurs before a Notice to Vacate is delivered to the tenant by the landlord. We believe it is in everyone's best interest to try to keep a dispute out of the formal legal system.
- Provide accurate, concise, and user-friendly information as a foundational step in assisting both tenants and landlords.
- LISC, as backbone organization, will provide the support for HSTF initiatives. We will work with partners for implementation.

*All WG's will consider policy or program recommendations, public engagement, and system navigation.

Access to Justice: Working Group

Initiatives/Goal:

- Develop a Web Portal that contains comprehensive information about the eviction process in Harris County and surrounding counties. The intention is that this program will spin off to a local partner.
 - Phase 1: Focus on self-help and information
 - Phase 2: User-Specific referral information
- Develop Tenant-Landlord Mediation Program Recommendations/Model with potential pilot proposal

Access to Justice: Working Group

Working Group Members:

- Curtis Davis
- Dana Karni
- Diana Zarzuelo
- Guadalupe Fernandez
- Jay Malone
- Howard Bookstaff
- Marcia Johnson
- Margaret Oser
- Zoe Middleton
- Ann Chandler
- Nick Hall
- Pending Invitation to Houston in Action

Working Group Facilitator:

- Jeff Stys

Aligning Rent Assistance and Legal Services

Opportunity to Provide Facilitation Services based on Landlord/Tenant Focus Groups

- Facilitation is intended to occur outside of the formal eviction process or early enough to make a significant difference. It is to supplement options available to landlords and tenants. It is not meant to replace formal mediation or legal representation.

Levels under Consideration

- Level 1 (Coaching): Helping the tenant prepare for a conversation with the landlord around their specific circumstances.
- Level 2 (Facilitation): Involvement in a direct conversation between the tenant and the landlord.
- Level 3 (Negotiation): Speaking with each party separately and working to get agreement between both parties

Working in a continuum for Facilitated Tenant/Landlord Conversations, Mediation and Representation

- Currently Working with ACAM, Dispute Resolution Center and HVL.
- Focus on providing support prior to Notice to Vacate with the goal of reducing the amount of tenants going through the Eviction Legal process. A training of staff and volunteers at Assistance Ministries is scheduled for September 10th.
- ACAM has modified its Eviction Prevention Program to qualify tenants at 14 days prior to Vacate Date. This allows for time for Facilitation or Mediation.