



COVID-19 Harris County Housing Stability Task Force

November 20, 2020



LISC
HOUSTON

[1] Responding to Judge Hidalgo Requests

<p>Bi-weekly Data Snapshots</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January Advisors and the Eviction Lab provide open sourced data that allow us to summarize these tracking points for the County with comparisons to other jurisdictions. We plan to also initiate a bi-weekly call with Task Force members that interact with the court system to gather qualitative data from the courts.
<p>Monthly Reports on Housing Stability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tracking Housing Stability during and beyond this economic and public crisis is essential to inform the policies and programs the County proposes and adopts. We plan to kick-off a Data Committee to determine the metrics and data needs for these reports with the hope that they outlast the TF's work and Commissioners Court stay updated on important Housing Stability metrics in the long-term.
<p>National Practices Research Recommendations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A policy feedback team will be convened on November 30th to recommend policy priorities to the TF from the National Policy Scan. This will inform the TF State and Local policy recommendations.

[2] Housing Stability TF Work Groups

[2] Work Groups Recommendations

- Work Group facilitators will gather recommendations by December 4th.
- A2J & RA will wrap-up work before December 4th and the Landlord and Property Stabilization WG will provide preliminary recommendations.

Rent Assistance [RA] Preliminary Recommendations

- **City & County Alignment should be prioritized as part of program design for any rent, utility and direct assistance.** The City and the County should work together to define target populations, create a single application portal, mix funding sources to reach as many tenants in need as possible and build upon existing infrastructure.
- **Community Outreach & Messaging are essential to an effective Rent Assistance Program.** It is important to prioritize a clear message about the programs available and use multiple venues to get the word out; this requires financial and human resources.
- **Assistance should/must target low & very low income families and historically disinvested communities of color.**
- **Ensure an equitable Distribution of Funds.** Utilization of randomized distribution of eligible applicants and the collaboration with local Direct Assistance CBOs have better equitable results.

[2] Housing Stability TF Work Groups

Rent Assistance [RA] Preliminary Recommendations

- **Consider the amount of Assistance and Other Requirements.** The amount of Assistance should consider both if the program is providing a one time relief or ongoing assistance and flexible use of the assistance. Payment agreements should be required for any arrears beyond assistance.
- **Prioritize user experience, their needs and preferences.** For Tenants, this includes considerations to cover current and future rent payments, not only current debt to landlords, and setting aside funds and human resources to assist tenants in navigating and completing the assistance application. For Landlords, this includes assurance that payment will be made quickly and reasonable program restrictions.
- **Good actors should be prioritized in funding distribution,** local jurisdictions should not reward landlords that lead eviction filings.
- **Build Local Capacity of CBOs for Rent Assistance efforts beyond emergencies and post-disaster contexts.** Their build capacity can support local jurisdictions in times of crisis through outreach, application reviews and distribution of funds.
- **Develop innovative venues and systems to distribute rent and direct financial assistance.** The use of pilot projects to test new systems is recommended [ie. Tenant-Landlord Facilitated Conversations, & Rent Assistance Landlord Auction Concept]

[2] Housing Stability TF Work Groups

Access to Justice [A2J] Preliminary Recommendations

- **Work to Develop Early Dispute Resolution and Tenant-Landlord Mediation Programs.** The work group recommends two types of interventions in tenant-landlord disputes: (1) Early Dispute Resolution upstream of a potential eviction been filed, (2) Tenant-Landlord Mediation before an scheduled eviction hearing.
 - (1) Currently explored through the Tenant-Landlord Facilitated Conversations Pilot Project.
 - (2) The Work Group recommends Voluntary or Mandatory Mediation Services at the JP Courts. The County should consider providing the space for tenant-landlord mediation conference in the court systems has proved effective in preventing evictions.
- **Tenant Education and Reporting through a Centralized Web-based Resource for Renters Assistance.** The Work Group recommends the county prioritizes the development of a centralized public education resource through a proof of concept/pilot project to determine its effectiveness and future needs.
- **Essential Information Distribution and Outreach Efforts.** Two months after the distribution of CDC order to halt evictions, some tenants and landlords are not aware and there is general confusion about what will happen after the Order ends. The Work Group recommends to convene a rapid-response public private leadership group with the sole purpose of producing and distributing timely, accurate and easily accessible information for the general public.

[2] Housing Stability TF Work Groups

Landlord & Property Stabilization WG

- It is anticipated that **program recommendations will be developed by late December 2020.**
- A definition of small – medium sized landlords has been established.

Landlord Discussion on Potential Assistance programs to Small Landlords

- Direct cash assistance to renters helps landlords.
- Expansion of HUD Section 8 would be helpful.
- Access to low-interest lines of credit and lower-interest sources to refinance.
- Resources are needed by landlords that didn't already have strong relationships with local banks.
- Lower/manage real estate tax assessments.
- Extend homestead exemption for rental units with long-term tenants (10+ year tenancy)
- Insurance rates have risen, relief would help.

Next Steps

- There appears to be adequate anecdotal and empirical evidence to support “rapid prototyping” of a ***Houston Area Landlord Property Support Initiative***. The initiative will be designed to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on housing stability.
- The next meeting will be a remote workshop. The goal will be to develop the outline of a Landlord Property Support Initiative for review by the Task Force and submission to Harris County officials and others.

Housing Stability TF Pilot Initiatives: Tenant-Landlord Facilitation

Who is participating?

- Three CBO's are engaged in the pilot project: The Alliance, Memorial Assistance Ministries and Wesley Community Center
- There is one FTE at each site with a total of 8 facilitators.

Trainings & Learning Outcomes

- Training to facilitators has included:
 - Legal aspects of eviction – HVLA
 - Fundamentals of facilitation – Chris Turner of Turner Mediation
 - Review of Facilitation Skills – Martha Macris and Facilitators
 - Review of the Components of Facilitation Session – Martha Macris
- Facilitators have understood:
 - the difference between facilitation and advocacy
 - How to remain neutral
 - How to set the tone for the session
 - What their role is during a tenant-landlord facilitated session

Next Steps

- Weekly meetings with agencies to track pilot challenges and successes.
- Expect to start facilitated conversations next week.

[2] Housing Stability TF Work Groups

Bi-weekly Meetings + Presentations

- Our last meeting of the year will be on December 18th & the first meeting on the next year will be on January 8th.
- Presentations will be focused on National Best Practices and Information sharing, what can we learn from other geographies that can be implemented locally. Please let us know if there is someone you would like to hear from.

<p>20 years of Evictions in Harris County</p> <p>Presenter: January Advisors</p>	<p>What does the eviction process currently look like?</p> <p>Presenter: Dana Karni and Howard Bookstaff</p>	<p>The State of Rental Housing in Houston and Harris County</p> <p>Presenter: Kinder Institute</p>
<p>COVID-19 and Racial Disparities in Rental Housing</p> <p>Presenter: Urban Institute</p>	<p>COVID-19 Impacts on Mom & Pop Landlords</p> <p>Presenter: AVAIL</p>	<p>Social Cost of Evictions in Harris County</p> <p>Presenter: Kinder Institute</p>

**Additional updates at:
housingstabilitytaskforce.org**