

**Orange County Housing Authority
February 15–29 Waiting List Opening
Questions and Answers**

Introduction/Overview:

We are extremely pleased to announce that our Orange County Housing Authority (OCHA) will be accepting pre-applications for the Housing Choice Voucher Program beginning February 15, 2012 through February 29, 2012.

OCHA is the largest of four local Public Housing Agencies in Orange County and currently provides monthly housing assistance for more than 25,000 people/11,700 households in 31 cities and unincorporated areas. (The cities of Anaheim, Garden Grove and Santa Ana operate their own housing authorities and have their own waiting lists).

The Housing Choice Voucher Program allows very low-income families/individuals as well as seniors and disabled persons to pay approximately 30% of their monthly income towards rent. The remaining rent is paid by OCHA directly to a property owner or manager.

Who qualifies for housing assistance?

To qualify, applicant households must earn below 50% of the County's median income. Persons who live or work in OCHA's 31 cities are placed ahead of applicants from outside the area on the waiting list. For example, for a family of four, that amount is \$48,150 while the amount for an individual is \$33,750.

How often do you accept applications for housing assistance?

This is the first opportunity people will have to apply since November 2005. In 2005, OCHA received over 18,600 pre-applications. During 2012, OCHA will likely get to the end of the 2005 waiting list. To ensure we have a smooth transition and no gap in time to begin pulling names from a new list, we plan to open the waiting list and accept more pre-applications in February 2012.

Why do you call them pre-applications?

We call them "pre-applications" because people will be applying for a position on the OCHA waiting list not for rental assistance. As names are pulled from the waiting list by order of preference categories, applicants are then scheduled for an appointment at OCHA to go through the formal process of income eligibility for rental assistance. Due to the limited number of existing Housing Vouchers and the large number of people that submit pre-applications for the waiting list, it

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may take several years before all of the people on the waiting list are called for the next step in the process.

Is this a first-come first-served situation?

No, all applicants who apply during the two-week enrollment period will receive equal consideration for placement. After all applications are received during the two week period, applicants will be grouped into categories called preference groups. I'll explain that in a moment.

How will people be able to apply?

Beginning February 15, 2012, applications for the Waiting List will be available online at www.ochousing.org and at participating cities and branches of the Orange County Public Library. Applications and/or assistance sites will also be available at participating community organizations which will be listed on the website and/or available by calling OCHA at (714) 480-2740.

How can applications be submitted?

Pre-applications can be submitted in three ways:

- online at www.ochousing.org, Beginning 12:01 a.m. February 15, 2012 through 11:59 p.m. on February 29, 2012, or
- by fax to: (714) 667-6544, Beginning 12:01 a.m. February 15, 2012 through 11:59 p.m. on February 29, 2012, or
- by mail to: P.O. Box 22005, Santa Ana, CA 92702 and postmarked between February 15 through February 29, 2012.

What is the best way to apply?

County libraries and a number of participating community partners will have computers available to apply online. All applicants are strongly encouraged to apply on-line because this method is convenient, fast and applicants can instantly print a receipt for verification that they applied.

In terms of the best process to follow, applicants are encouraged to initially print the pre-application form from the website, follow the instructions and complete all of the information on the printed paper pre-application. Once applicants have completed all of these steps, they should log onto the website, complete the electronic version of the pre-application by referring to their completed hard copy application and submit the application on-line. The estimated time for application completion is about 5 to 10 minutes.

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February 15–29 Waiting List Opening
Questions and Answers**

What happens after people apply and what are preference categories?

At the conclusion of the open enrollment period, applications will be grouped by preference categories. Applicants who live or work in our 31 cities will be placed ahead of those who do not meet these criteria. As previously mentioned, OCHA cities include all Orange County cities except Anaheim, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana. Additional preference categories include veterans, seniors, disabled, working families/individuals and non-working families/individuals. Once applicants are identified and grouped by live/work area (inside or outside of OCHA cities), they will then be randomly placed within their qualifying preference group and assigned their position on the waiting list.

After submitting the pre-application, when will the Orange County Housing Authority call the applicant for an interview?

This will depend on a number of factors such as the applicant's preference category, the availability of Housing Choice Vouchers, and the number of applicants on the waiting list. After we compile the new waiting list, all applicants will receive a letter that confirms they are on the list. The letter will list their preference category and provide an approximate waiting time. Here is some information from our previous experience in 2005:

- OCHA began interviewing the highest preference group: U.S. Veterans about six to ten months after they applied.
- The next category included elderly, disabled and working families/individuals who live or work in our 31 cities – and those persons waited between one to four years,

How long is the waiting list and why is it long?

The previous waiting list from 2005 was over 18,600 and demonstrated the need for housing assistance at that time. With the current economic conditions, we expect to see an even longer list. The reason that people have to wait so long is that housing authorities have not received additional HUD Voucher allocations for people on their waiting lists since 2003. We have received limited new funding for special programs that target Veterans or special needs clients; however, these vouchers not available to assist waiting list applicants. The Housing Choice Voucher Program funding is determined by Congress each year and the national budget is a major factor in determining if the program will be expanded or reduced.

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Questions and Answers**

Is there anything I can do to get a better position on the waiting list?

Applicants should be careful to provide accurate information on their pre-application and advise OCHA if they are in a wrong preference group. They will see this when they receive their confirmation letter. Also, if there is a change in address or other circumstances, for example someone becomes disabled, that should be reported to OCHA in writing as soon as possible.

When will I get my voucher and what do I have to do?

We talked about being called in for an interview in the first question. At that time, applicants will be asked to bring in documents that verify income and family composition and other information. After the interview, OCHA staff can usually finalize the eligibility process within 8 weeks. If determined to be eligible, the applicant will be scheduled to receive their Voucher at a briefing session conducted at OCHA. Briefing sessions will take about two hours and can be conducted in several languages as needed.