

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Family Self-Sufficiency

What is the HCV family self-sufficiency (FSS) Program?

Family self-sufficiency (FSS) is a HUD program that encourages communities to develop local strategies to help voucher families obtain employment that will lead to economic independence and self-sufficiency. Public housing agencies (PHAs) work with welfare agencies, schools, businesses, and other local partners to develop a comprehensive program that gives participating FSS family members the skills and experience to enable them to obtain employment that pays a living wage. A separate program, the public housing FSS program, is available for public housing residents.

How do families apply to the HCV FSS program?

Families that are selected to receive a voucher or who currently receive assistance through the housing choice voucher programs should complete the interest form and submit it to HACY.

What is the history of the FSS program?

FSS was established in 1990 by section 554 of the National Affordable Housing Act. It is a successor program to project self-sufficiency and operation bootstrap.

What services are provided through the FSS program?

FSS program services may include, but are not limited to:

- child care
- transportation
- education
- job training and employment counseling
- substance/alcohol abuse treatment or counseling
- household skill training
- homeownership counseling

What families are eligible to participate in the HCV FSS program?

Families who receive assistance under the HCV are eligible to participate in the FSS program.

Who administers the FSS program?

The FSS program is administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs).

How is the mandatory minimum HCV FSS program size determined?

Some PHAs are required to administer FSS programs because they received FSS incentive award funding, or because they received funding for additional certificates or vouchers in FY 1993 or subsequent years through October 21, 1998. As a result of the Public Housing Reform Act of 1998, funding received after October 21, 1998 no longer mandates an increase in the minimum size of a PHA's FSS program.

A PHA's minimum size is decreased by one slot for each family that completes its FSS contract on or after October 21, 1998. However, a PHA's FSS obligation

continues until the members of families successfully completing the program (on or after October 21, 1998) is equal to the number of FSS slots the PHA was required to administer.

How do PHAs obtain funding from HUD to administer an FSS program?

For the most part, PHAs must rely on their own or other local resources to operate FSS programs. However, under the authority of annual appropriations acts, HUD has been able to provide some funding for FSS program coordinators to assist PHAs in operating housing choice voucher FSS programs. The availability of funding is announced in the *Federal Register* in a notice of funding availability (NOFA).

Can PHAs operate voluntary housing choice voucher FSS programs?

Yes. Removal of the mandate for additional FSS slots does not mean that the FSS program was eliminated. PHAs are encouraged to operate voluntary FSS programs, including FSS programs larger than the PHA's mandatory minimum FSS program size. HUD continues to support the FSS program, that has had demonstrated success in both strengthening families and through employment, helping them to reach other goals such as homeownership.

What requirements must a PHA meet to operate an FSS program?

To operate either a voluntary or mandatory FSS program, a PHA must establish an FSS program coordinating committee and develop an FSS action plan. The FSS program coordinating committee helps the PHA to develop its action plan and FSS program policies, obtain public and private supportive services funding and commitments, and oversee the overall implementation of the FSS program.

The FSS action plan describes the policies and procedures to operate an FSS program. The plan also provides an estimate on the number of eligible families expected to participate and establishes their supportive service needs. HUD must approve the action plan.

How do PHAs select families for the FSS program?

PHAs can give a selection preference--for up to 50 percent of its FSS slots--to eligible families with one or more family member enrolled in, or on the waiting list for, an FSS-related service or job placement program. For all other selections, the PHA must use an objective system, such as a lottery. PHAs may screen applicants for interest and motivation to participate in FSS, but may not screen for education, job history, credit rating, marital status, or number of children.

Can PHAs require families to participate in FSS?

No. Participation of families in the FSS program is voluntary and cannot be condition of receiving assistance under the housing choice voucher program.

What requirements must a family meet to participate in the FSS program?

The PHA and the head of each participating family execute an FSS contract of participation that specifies the rights and responsibilities of both parties. The 5-year FSS contract specifies goals and services for each family. Family members must fulfill all requirements in order to obtain full benefits.

The FSS contract requires that the family comply with the lease, that all family members become independent of welfare, and that the head of the family seek and maintain suitable employment. Possible sanctions for noncompliance with the FSS

contract are termination from the FSS program, forfeiture of the FSS escrow account, withholding or termination of supportive services, and termination of housing choice voucher assistance.

What is the FSS escrow account?

An interest-bearing FSS escrow account is established by the PHA for each participating family. An escrow credit, based on increases in earned income of the family, is credited to this account by the PHA during the term of the FSS contract. The PHA may make a portion of this escrow account available to the family during the term of the contract to enable the family to complete an interim goal such as education.

If the family completes the contract and no member of the family is receiving cash welfare assistance, the amount of the FSS account is paid to the head of the family. If the PHA terminates the FSS contract, or if the family fails to complete the contract before its expiration, the family's FSS escrow funds are forfeited.

What are the responsibilities of the FSS Program Coordinators?

FSS program coordinators assure that FSS program participants are linked to the supportive services they need to achieve economic self-sufficiency.

Does a family have to give up its rental assistance after the family completes its FSS contract?

No. Although it is hoped that families will no longer need housing assistance upon completion of the FSS program, some families that complete the program will still need assistance for housing. The law provides that a family may complete its FSS contract and receive its escrow while continuing to receive housing assistance under the voucher program.

What types of funding are available under the family self-sufficiency program?

Other than annual funding for HCV FSS program coordinators salaries, no specific funding is provided by HUD. PHAs that administer a FSS program will provide opportunities for families participating in the housing choice voucher program to also receive assistance under the FSS program.

What regulations cover this program?

Regulations are found at [24 CFR 984](#).