

## This issue

P.1 Homeownership success

P.2 Welcome Ms. Henriquez

P.3 Up and Up campaign

P.4 San Diego Housing

Commission

P.5 SDHC Cont

P.6 Arizona Best Practices

P.7 HCV Tool

P.8 Tips

P.9 Email Etiquette

P.10 Webmail Response

Arteaga Family  
enjoying their new  
home



1



## County of Riverside Housing Authority family meets success with Homeownership Program

After 15 years of residing at the affordable Public Housing community owned and operated by the Housing Authority of the County of Riverside in Desert Hot Springs, CA, the Arteaga Family is the proud new owner of a 3-bedroom home. Mr. and Mrs. Arteaga stated that they have always had the dream of owning their own home, but fear and the uncertainty of pursuing such a dream was often daunting and at times discouraging. Mr. Arteaga explained that his main “obstacle was cleaning up his credit”. He had several late payments on his credit report that resulted from being laid off work and he was not able to make the payments on time.

His second barrier was trying to build “good credit” since it was needed in order for him to qualify for a home loan. In July 2009, Mr. Arteaga was introduced to the new ROSS Program. The ROSS Service Coordinator guided him through the various steps to achieve their goal of homeownership. The first step was to negotiate a payment plan for the Arteagas with the collection agencies. Arrangements were made and a payment plan was put in place in which the Arteagas were able to meet their monthly repayment plan and a majority of their debts were eliminated.

Mr. Arteaga stated that that the greatest fear he had about pursuing homeownership was the fear of what would happen if he lost his job or if his hours at work were reduced. After 15 years of living in subsidized housing, he had a sense of security knowing that if anything were to happen to his income he would always have an affordable apartment to reside in with his family and he valued that security greatly.

The ROSS Service Coordinator informed him that this was the best time to buy and worked with him to obtain information on the First Time Homebuyer’s Program offered through the Economic Development Agency as well as the First Time Homebuyer’s credit.

Mr. Arteaga stated that “making the commitment to purchase a home is scary at first, but it is a dream that we all have and it feels wonderful, especially when you start moving in, then it becomes real”. The Arteaga family demonstrated that through hard work and proper planning your dream can become a reality.

## THE LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF PUBLIC HOUSING

Cordially invites you to a *Meet and Greet* with  
Assistant Secretary Sandra Henriquez

on

**April 12, 2011 from 10:00 – 11:30**

at the

**HUD, Los Angeles**

611 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor (Room 813)

Los Angeles, CA 90017

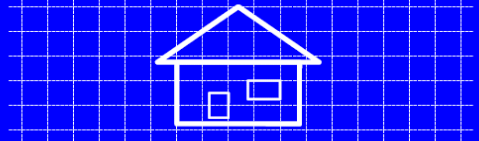
## Sandra B. Henriquez

ASSISTANT SECRETARY  
FOR PUBLIC AND INDIAN HOUSING



Sandra Brooks Henriquez was sworn in as the Assistant Secretary for HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing on Monday, June 22, 2009 after being unanimously confirmed by the U.S. Senate. As part of the senior leadership team at HUD, Henriquez oversees the nation's public housing and rental assistance programs that assist approximately 3.2 million low-income families across the U.S. She is also responsible for the Department's Native American and Native Hawaiian programs, which serve 562 federally recognized tribes.

***Up and Up***  
*Lease Up Campaign*



The Los Angeles Office of Public and Indian Housing (LAOPH) is proud to announce the results of the *Up and UP Lease Up Campaign*. *Up and Up* is designed to help our Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) receive recognition for their hard work, share best practices, and ultimately increase the number of families served.

After analyzing Housing Choice Voucher lease up performance over a three month period, outstanding performers were chosen from four categories: Extra Large, Large, Medium, and Small.

**Congratulations!**

**Categories**

**Los Angeles Office Winners**

**Phoenix Office Winners**

**Extra Large:** San Diego County

City of Tucson

**Large:** City of San Luis Obispo

City of Mesa

**Medium:** City of Norwalk and City of Pomona

County of Pima

**Small:** Hawaiian Gardens

Mohave County Community and Economic Development

*Note from the HGHA*

The City of Hawaiian Gardens Housing Authority (HGHA) would like to thank the Los Angeles Office of Public Housing for selecting the City of Hawaiian Gardens Housing Authority as an HCV “Up and UP Campaign Winner.”

The HGHA increased the number of families served under the HCV Program through hard work, dedication, commitment and assistance from the Los Angeles Office of Public Housing. Also, the HGHA assisted additional families by utilizing the Los Angeles Office of Public Housing newly developed budgeting and forecasting tool which enabled the HGHA to predict its future lease up rates.

Once again the HGHA would like to thank the Los Angeles Office of Public Housing for their assistance and acknowledging the City of Hawaiian Gardens as an exemplary Public Housing Authority.



## The Achievement Academy of the San Diego Housing Commission



*Pictured from left to right:*  
San Diego Housing Commissioners Sam Guillen, Allen Sims, Chairman Gary Gramling, Khadija Basir, and Roberta Spoon and seated is Richard C. Gentry, President & CEO of the San Diego Housing Commission.

Completion of the new Achievement Academy of the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) is welcome news to many families impacted by the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Located at SDHC's downtown San Diego headquarters, the 9,600 square foot learning and skills center offers rental assistance clients expanded classes and workshops that enhance the agency's established Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) programs.

"Its timing was quite fortunate," remarked Richard C. Gentry, agency President and Chief Operating Officer. "The state of the economy has sparked a renewed interest in our career development programs and the Achievement Academy will be able to meet that need."

The Achievement Academy evolved from a determination that SDHC's FSS programs needed a new strategic communications vision and a central facility to accommodate new programs and increased participation.

This was accomplished by:

- Constructing a one-stop learning and skills center, including a large computer lab, that offers on-site classes and instructional workshops.
- Reintroducing the agency's Family Self-Sufficiency programs and marketing the new skills center all under the umbrella of the Achievement Academy of the San Diego Housing Commission.

Input from resident surveys and focus groups were considered when designing the space elements and technological features of the Achievement Academy, ensuring that the program would effectively represent the people it would be helping.

SDHC's "Moving to Work" designation allowed for the use of \$1.26 million in federal Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher funds/reserves to design, construct and furnish the Achievement Academy. Several departments within SDHC collaborated on the project:

- The rebranding and communications strategy for the Achievement Academy was developed by the Community Relations and Communications Department.
- The Real Estate Department's Construction Services Unit took the lead in the construction of the new facility.
- Business Services' Information Technology Unit was instrumental in the planning process for the computer lab and audio/visual components.

The Achievement Academy continues to meet a 1990 HUD mandate that required Housing Authorities to help clients become less reliant on government assistance by achieving economic independence.

## The Achievement Academy of the San Diego Housing Commission continued



*Pictured: Teresa Smith, helping an Achievement Academy participant with income tax technical assistance*

Administered by the Rental Assistance Department's Workforce and Economic Development Unit, the Achievement Academy's core curriculum is comprised of three programs: Family Self-Sufficiency, Aspire, and The Money Project for teenagers. The emphasis is on career planning, improving job skills and building savings and assets through Individual Development Accounts matched with funding from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and local partners.

The prospect of enhanced career development is a motivating factor that attracts many participants to the agency's self-sufficiency programs. Now employed as a concierge for a local hospitality company, Karen said she won't forget how the Achievement Academy transformed her life. "Anyone that has the opportunity to enter the FSS program should take advantage of it," Karen exclaimed. "You will benefit not only yourself but your children's lives and show them that they can achieve all their dreams and aspirations."

Beyond its core programs, the Achievement Academy offers additional client workshops and services including tax preparation assistance, benefits eligibility assessment, computer literacy, commercial painter training, tutoring, tenant rights, and one-on-one financial coaching.

The Achievement Academy has also become a popular venue for hosting outside agencies to conduct classes and seminars. Recently, at the request of HUD, the nonprofit Rural Community Assistance Corporation conducted a training class on Financial Management for local housing counseling agencies, fair housing agencies and several other nonprofit organizations.

Several private partners including the United Way, San Diego Workforce Partnership, Juma Ventures, Thrive, Citibank, U.S. Bank, Springboard, Community HousingWorks, and the Small Business Development & International Trade Center of Southwestern College have signed on to provide supportive services and resources at the Achievement Academy.

A dedication and grand opening celebration for the Achievement Academy is scheduled for April 2011.

## Arizona Field Office recognizes Mohave County Housing Authority's Best Practices

At Mohave County Housing Authority, we believe that communication —personal, digital and paper-based — is the essence of running our program successfully and efficiently. Not only is there timely communication between all program staff, but also communication between the Admin/Finance staff and the program staff. Rarely a day goes by when there is not some interaction between the two areas. That enables us to maintain accurate client, program and financial data.

We use various systems to make our digital and paper-based communication simple (beyond email, of course). To manage our data, we use two types of systems – HAPPY Software is used by the program staff to manage client data, and we have developed several internal Microsoft Access-based Management Information Systems databases: a waiting list database to manage voucher status (primarily used by program staff, but contributes lease-up stats for monthly VMS reporting), and a Section 8 Finance database to manage the financial side of the equation (used for HAP checks, VMS and other reporting). Reports are generated using Business Object Crystal Reports, so that we have maximum flexibility to extract, manipulate and analyze data from one or more databases at need and as standard on-demand reports.

When clients lease up during the month, whether local or portable, forms are transmitted the same day by program to the Finance staff and the client is entered into the Section 8 Finance database. Any time there is a change to a client's status due to lease-up, interim, annual review, or other changes that affect the financial side, program staff submit forms to Finance and the data is changed in the Section 8 finance database.

Any questions are answered at that time, so that payment can proceed timely.

In the above we talk almost exclusively about data, but the data is transferred through communication — paper-based, digital and face-to-face. Your principal best practice will always be communication to maintain data integrity

Each month when we process the HAP claim, we compare Section 8 Finance data (finance side) to the HAPPY software database (program side) to ensure that there are no discrepancies between the two. This is an incredibly important step, because if the two sides do not agree, your data may be meaningless and cannot be utilized with surety. Since institution of this database system, staff time required to process the 300+ HAP/UAP monthly checks has been reduced from 2+ person-days to less than 3 person-hours most months — a substantial saving! — and as a bonus, current analytic and statistical data is always available to management via on-demand and/or ad hoc reports.

Our monthly VMS data comes straight from the Finance database, and reporting is almost effortless, both for the current month and for making past month corrections. We can also quickly respond to any requests from the field office, since we have 5+ years of data in the various databases.

After the monthly HAP reconciliation meeting, program staff meets with the manager and analyze unit months available for the possibility to increase leasing. It is critical that leasing be looked at on a monthly basis and appropriate projections made.

## Two Arizona PHAs coordinate to achieve success

The Tucson and Pima County PHA's work seamlessly together in the operation of the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

Both PHAs stated that they constantly reevaluate their internal processes to accommodate the needs of our clients (waiting list applicants) and partners (landlords) and then balance those needs against the changing program requirements. Always asking "why" is this or that happening or not happening. Complacency in this program is detrimental to its success.

In addition, the PHAs stated that they understand the relationship between managing the program and its impacts your finances. The two have to work in concert with each other - which is not an easy task.

### HCV Utilization Tool

The Pomona Public Housing Authority (HA) Finance Department makes use of the budgeting tools provided by HUD as they relate to:

1. Lease up- A monthly/weekly monitory report is an integral component of a PHA's ability to house as many families without exceeding its allowable program size.
2. HCV Utilization Tracking Budget Authority Utilization- It is imperative that both the Finance Department and HCV administration staff remain in communications.
3. HCV Turnover Tracking vs. Eligible Waiting List Applicants- Turnover is offset by maintaining a pool of pre-verified applicant at all times. Income being re-verified prior to voucher issuance, reducing the issuance and lease time.
4. The HA validates the accuracy of reported information in PIC manually periodically.

The HA keeps staff informed and accountable for the day-to-day operations.

1. In the first phase the HA conducted an analysis and verification of all HCV participants and how they are reported in PIC. Staff is asked to assure accurate reporting in PIC systems and rectify any errors as they are identified.
2. Staff is required to provide a complete monthly report on their caseload with proposed terminations phased and vouchers approaching expiration categories to PROJECT turnover, as oppose to reacting to a number drop. It is important staff knows processing time for all activities to project terminations.
3. PHA conducts regular monitory of PIC reports vs. in-house monitory for accuracy that may at times account for inaccurate reporting.
4. It is also equally important to work closely with other HA on portability issues-which affect % inconsistencies.

Aside from program utilization and management elements, the PHA's recognizes staff needs to be wholeheartedly behind the goal. Management decisions and successfully achieving the goal go hand in hand. Create a team environment by coaching. And never underestimate "Staff Praising," they worked hard and it should be acknowledged. data can be entered.



## Reporting on Units Leased and their Associated HAP Expense during the Proper Month

**Problem:** The Department requires that units and their associated housing assistance payment (HAP) expenses are to be reported in the month the payment was due, rather than the month it was actually paid. VMS requires that housing authorities correct prior month reporting to reflect any units and their associated HAP costs that should have been reported as leased on the first of a specific month. Thus, if a PHA issues a HAP check in December for a lease-up and the associated HAP cost that took place in October, the PHA's October VMS report should be corrected.

Typically, PHAs close their general ledgers after the end of a month and do not re-open them. This is done to allow the PHA to generate monthly financial statements. Since data previously reported to VMS can change, there will always be some differences between a PHA's general ledger for HAP expense and the VMS report during any month. PHAs which do not have a system to track the difference between the leasing month and the HAP payment issuance run the risk of never correcting their VMS reports.

**Solution:** One way for PHAs to ensure that they can reconcile the difference between their monthly ledgers and VMS reports is to create a spreadsheet which shows for each month the number of units moved from one month to another and the associated HAP expense. Accurately reporting voucher leasing and HAP costs in the correct months is essential to ensuring that the PHA is awarded the appropriate level of renewal funding under re-benchmarking.

## Pro-Rated vs. Full Month HAP Checks

**Problem:** PHAs may also mistake which HAP amounts should be reported in the field "all voucher HAP expense after the first of the month." This field is only for pro-rated HAP checks for a partial month, that is, the HAP costs for that month for new HAP contacts effective after the first day of the reported month. It is not for the reporting of full month HAP checks.

**Solution:** Create an internal control system to separate out full month HAP payments from partial month HAP payments.

## Reporting of Special Use Vouchers in the Incorrect Category

**Problem:** PHAs have often counted their special use vouchers in the "All Other Vouchers" field.

**Solution:** PHAs should enter Special Purpose Vouchers in the appropriate VMS field. These fields are clearly identified, i.e. VASH vouchers should be entered in the VASH field, etc.

## Misreporting the Number of Vouchers Leased on the Last Day of the Month

**Problem:** Some PHAs misreport in the field "number of vouchers leased on the last day of the month." They may assume that the number under lease on the first of the subsequent reporting month is the same as the number leased on the last day of month. This is not the case. This field should reflect the actual number of vouchers under leased on the final day of the month. This data is used as the basis for determining if a PHA is meeting the PIC reporting requirements.

**Solution:** Check the numbers; don't rely on assumptions.

## Inconsistent Balance Reporting in NRA and UNA Accounts

**Problem:** PHAs are not consistently reporting the balances in their Net Restricted Assets (NRA) and Unrestricted Net Assets (UNA) accounts.

**Solution:** At this time, there are no edits on these fields, so PHAs must ensure that they make the entry. Neither field will accept "0" as a response. If "0" is the correct value, the PHA may choose to note that fact in the Comments. The next software release will resolve this by allowing the entry of "0" in both fields.



## Common Errors in the Voucher Management System (VMS)

Assessments of Voucher Management System (VMS) reporting have found that users tend to make mistakes in similar areas. To assist public housing agency (PHA) voucher staff in improving their reporting performance, here are some common errors in data submitted to the VMS. Remember, reducing or eliminating errors makes your life easier: errors require hard edit responses that must be approved before a new month's data can be entered.

### SUMMARIZATION SCHEDULE FOR JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2011

- The Monthly Summarization extract is run the First Friday of the month and continues throughout the weekend. The summarization process starts, barring any complications, at about **5pm Pacific Standard Time**. If something hangs that part of the summarization is rerun the next weekend.
- Data received and processed before the First Friday cutoff will be included in the reports if its effective date falls within the report date range. HAs **must** make sure the 50058 submissions are completed the Thursday prior to the commencement of the summarization process.
- Monthly summarization reports are generated based on the effective date of the actions. Therefore, whatever the effective month of the action, that will be included in that month ending report. For example, if a PHA submitted a 50058 with an effective action date of January 2011, it will show in the January 31, 2011 reports, etc.
- The monthly summarization reports are generated based on the effective date of the actions. So whatever the effective month of the action, that will be included in that month ending report.
- Exceptions to First Friday summarization are made when:
  - a) The First Friday falls during a software release
  - b) The monthly summarization fails to run successfully, and/or
  - c) Other operational problems prevent the running of the summarization that weekend.

End of the Month	First Friday/weekend of summarization process
December 31, 2010	January 7-9, 2011
January 31, 2011	February 4-6, 2011
February 28, 2011	March 4-6, 2011
March 31, 2011	April 1-3, 2011
April 30, 2011	May 3-5, 2011
May 31, 2011	June 3-5, 2011
June 30, 2010	July 1-3, 2011
July 31, 2011	August 5-7, 2011
August 31, 2011	September 2-4, 2011
September 30, 2011	October 7-9, 2011
October 31, 2011	November 4-6, 2011
November 30, 2011	December 2-4, 2011
December 31, 2011	January 6-8, 2012

**THESE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE**

## **EMAIL ETTIQUETTE**

### **A Kicker plus 20 Tips**

#### **Kicker:**

Valid legal requests for information including but not limited to subpoenas, litigation or potential litigation, and the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request may allow inspection of electronically stored information (**e-mails**). In many instances, electronic files are treated in the same way as paper files. For instance, FOIA allows inspection of public documents (including electronic files), as defined by FOIA, through an appropriate FOIA request. This means that **every electronic file is subject to inspection** unless there is a specific legal reason that such material is protected.

#### **20 Tips below:**

##### **1. Please be concise and to the point.**

Do not make an email longer than it needs to be. Remember that reading an email is harder than reading printed communications and a long email can be extremely discouraging to read.

##### **2. Use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.**

This is not only important because improper spelling, grammar and punctuation give a bad impression of your organization, it is also important for conveying the message properly. Emails without closing punctuation are difficult to read and can often change the entire meaning of the message.

##### **3. Answer promptly.**

Employees send an email because they wish to receive a quick response. If they did not want a quick response they would send a letter or fax. Each email should be responded to within a 24 - hour period, and preferably within the same working day.

##### **4. Do not attach unnecessary files.**

By sending large attachments you can annoy people and even bring down their email system. Wherever possible compress attachments and only send attachments when they are productive.

##### **5. Use proper structure and layout.**

Since reading from a screen is more difficult than reading from paper, the structure and lay out is very important for email messages. Use short paragraphs and blank lines between each paragraph. When making points, number them or mark each point as separate to keep the overview.

##### **6. Do not write in CAPITALS.**

Since writing in capitals indicates shouting or yelling, this practice is generally frowned upon in daily email communication. Therefore, refrain from sending messages in all capital letters.

##### **7. Do not overuse "Reply to All".**

Only use "Reply to All" if you really need your message to be seen by each person who received the original message.

##### **8. Take care with the use of abbreviations and use of emoticons.**

You should limit the use of abbreviations. The recipient might not be aware of what these mean if they are not explained in the message. And also, avoid the use of emoticons (i.e. :-), L-0, etc) in professional emails.

##### **9. Do not overuse the high priority option.**

If you overuse the high priority option, it will eventually lose its function when you really need it. Moreover, even if your mail has high priority, your message will come across as slightly aggressive if you flag it as 'high priority'.

##### **10. Be careful with formatting and the use of color.**

Remember that when you use formatting in your emails, the sender might not be able to view formatting, or might see different fonts than you had intended. When using colors; use colors that are easily read on the background.

##### **11. Use active voice rather than passive.**

Use the active voice of a verb wherever possible. For instance, 'We will process your order today', sounds better than 'Your order will be processed today'. The first sounds more personal, whereas the latter, especially when used frequently, sounds unnecessarily formal.

##### **12. Read your email before sending it.**

Many people don't bother reading their mail before sending it out judging from the many grammatical and spelling errors contained in emails. Read your message through the eyes of the recipient and always perform a spell check before sending it out.

##### **13. Avoid long or run-on sentences.**

Keep your sentences to a maximum of 15-20 words. Email is meant to be a quick medium and requires a different kind of writing than letters.

##### **14. Use a meaningful subject line.**

Use a subject that is meaningful to the recipient as well as yourself. This will help the recipient to formulate a proper response and store your message in the proper manner.

##### **15. Include enough information in your response.**

If you are sending in a question to which you expect a response, make sure you include enough information to make the response possible. For example, sending the message "My spreadsheet program doesn't work" to Outlook Technical Support really doesn't give them very much to work with; similarly, sending the message "What has happened to my order?" to a vendor is also unhelpful. When requesting technical support, include a description of the problem and the version of the program you're using; when following up on an order, include the order number, your name and organization, and any other details that might assist in tracing your order - and so on.

##### **16. Use cc: field sparingly.**

Try not to use the cc: field unless the recipient in the cc: field knows why they are receiving a copy of the message. Using the cc: field can be confusing since the recipients might not know who is supposed to act on the message.

##### **17. Carefully, watch the tone of your message.**

Be cautious when using sarcasm and humor. Without facial expressions and tone of voice, they do not translate easily through email.

##### **18. Do not copy a message or attachment without permission.**

Do not copy a message or attachment belonging to another user without permission of the originator. If you do not ask permission first, you might be infringing on copyright laws.

##### **19. Repeat part of the question in your response.**

Repeat a small part of the question or original email so the recipient is reminded of your last conversation.

##### **20. Always remember to use "Please" and "Thank You" in your messages.**

Remember your real-world manners. Whether you are asking someone to pass the salt or emailing someone to 'cancel my newsletter', the magic word is still 'please'.