

MOVING TO WORK: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

What is “Moving to Work”?

Moving To Work (MTW) is a federal program authorized by Congress in in the late 1990's; the goal of MTW is to give limited number of local public housing agencies the flexibility to try out new and more efficient ways of delivering affordable housing. There are currently 34 agencies with the MTW designation, many of them very large housing authorities such as Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Seattle and King County. The Fairfax County Redevelopment and Housing Authority (FCRHA) only recently became eligible to apply for MTW designation.

What does MTW mean for local housing authorities like the FCRHA?

Public housing agencies (PHAs), like the FCRHA, that are selected for the designation may be exempted from many existing Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher program rules in order to achieve three main goals:

- Reduce costs (for both program administrators and participants) and achieve greater in the use of federal funds;
- Give incentives to families with children where the head of household is working, is seeking work or is preparing for work by participating in job training, educational programs or programs that assist people to obtain employment and become economically self-sufficient; and
- Increase housing choices for low-income families.

PHAs with the MTW designation also have the flexibility to combine federal Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher funds to help better meet the purposes of the housing programs while also meeting the needs of the community.

While MTW agencies have considerable flexibility, they must still abide by federal laws, including the Fair Housing Act, the Civil Rights Act, labor standards, environmental rules, procurement guidelines, demolition and disposition procedures and relocation regulations. For all activities that affect their residents' rent payments, PHAs must also conduct an analysis in order to identify unforeseen circumstances that may affect residents and develop an appropriate hardship policy.

Will I have to move?

Current residents in the FCRHA's housing programs will not be required to make an immediate move. As you increase your income and self-sufficiency skills over time, you may be required to move to a different step in the housing continuum so new families can access the FCRHA's housing. Moving from one step to the next in the housing continuum does not necessarily mean you would have to physically move.

Will I be required to work?

Adult members who are able to work will need to be engaged in an activity that promotes self-sufficiency – such as employment, schooling, job training, etc. Elderly individuals, persons with disabilities, and sole caretakers of a disabled family member will be exempt from this requirement.

What if I am elderly or disabled?

Elderly or disabled households may choose their level of participation in many aspects of the FCRHA's THRIVE housing. For example, elderly and disabled households will benefit from recertifications every three years, but are exempt from any work requirement.

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How will the Fairfax County MTW Plan benefit me?

MTW will allow the FCRHA to significantly enhance the impact it has on our residents, their families and the community as a whole. For the FCRHA's residents, the benefits could include:

- **Less intrusion, less paperwork:** Most customers will only need to go through the full recertification process every other year, instead of annually. Elderly and disabled families on a fixed income will only need to recertify every three years.
- **Saving for the Future:** Residents and voucher participants may have an opportunity to have a portion of their income increases go into a savings account instead of paying more rent, giving them an opportunity to save for goals including education, buying a home or retirement.
- **Opportunities to Grow:** Customers will be provided the services they need to pursue opportunities, such as finding a better job, more education, and English language skills.
- **Focusing on Customer Needs:** FCRHA staff will be able to spend less time on paperwork and verifications and more time focusing on our customers. This new relationship will help customers in setting their own goals and in connecting them to the right services and support networks.
- **Rebates for Good Housekeeping:** Customers who maintain their homes well help reduce the maintenance costs to the FCRHA. Good housekeepers will be rewarded with a rebate at the end of each year.
- **New Options for Persons with Special Needs:** Residents who have a disability or are elderly may choose their level of participation in many aspects of the THRIVE/MTW program.
- **A Path to Recovery:** For customers with health problems or substance abuse issues, or those with disabilities, the FCRHA's THRIVE/MTW program will provide a connection to services from other county agencies and non-profit organizations – services aimed at helping with recovery and being successful in housing.
- **Getting on the Road to Self-Sufficiency:** The FCRHA will work with residents to move them from dependency on public subsidies and programs to becoming self-sufficient. THRIVE/MTW will assist residents every step of the way through services, resources and support. The goal will be to move ahead in every aspect of life – most especially in housing. The goal is to have the FCRHA's customers move along the housing continuum from deeply subsidized housing (the local rental subsidy program, Housing Choice Voucher and Public Housing) on to moderate priced housing (the Fairfax County Rental Program) and eventually on to market rate rental housing or homeownership.

The FCRHA's Housing Continuum will move residents towards self-sufficiency and, for those who are able, serve as a gateway to homeownership and market rental housing. By fostering self-sufficiency, new opportunities for households with the greatest needs to be served will be created; households moving off of the program will have enhanced skills that make them – and our community – economically stronger.

How does MTW work?

MTW PHAs are permitted to combine their public housing operating and capital funds and Housing Choice Voucher funds in order to use these funds interchangeably. For example, an MTW agency could use public housing capital funds to issue additional vouchers or use voucher funds to develop more public housing to better fit the needs of its community.

MTW agencies also have the authority to use their funds to implement innovative policies that go beyond these two traditional forms of housing assistance to serve more low-income families.

The caveat to this flexibility is that MTW PHAs "assist substantially the same total number of eligible low-income families as would have been served had the funding amounts not been combined." This provision helps ensure accountability of MTW agencies to HUD and their communities. In most cases, more families are served when an MTW agency shifts funds between programs through the use of the MTW block grant.

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Has someone studied MTW and how it affects communities?

Yes. HUD recently submitted a report to Congress titled, "**Moving to Work: Interim Policy Applications and the Future of the Demonstration.**" The report finds that MTW status provides public housing agencies the flexibility to fund and design unique strategies to address local needs. This has produced significant successes such as allowing MTW housing agencies to serve additional families, improve residents' quality of life and preserve public housing.

A **Congressionally-mandated evaluation** by the Urban Institute of the MTW Demonstration, covering the earliest MTW sites, was delivered to Congress in January 2004.

The **Promising Practices Reports** for each PHA also offer a snapshot of the successes of each MTW agency.