Housing Vouchers

Discovery and Solution Generation Work Plan

February 2023

Project Summary

In 2022, 4,401 DC residents were identified as experiencing homelessness.* That same year, DC Government added more than 3,400 new vouchers, the largest ever single-year increase in vouchers, but 1,100 were used.

To help improve residents' ability to use vouchers, we are conducting a discovery phase to learn about their experience and identify opportunities for improvement.

*Number from January 2022 Point in Time Count

What is Discovery and why do we do it?

Discovery is our process of gathering information from a variety of people and through a variety of methods.

We do this because we need to first **understand** the District's housing voucher program from all angles.

Then we can work on solutions that make the program more transparent, respectful, trauma-informed, efficient, and accessible for residents.

Who is doing the Discovery?
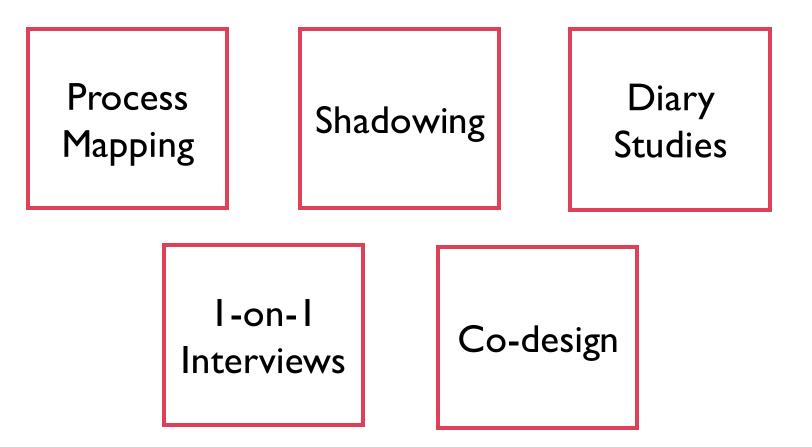
District of Columbia Housing Authority

DC Department of Human Services

The Lab @ DC

Resident Researchers—community members who have recently experienced housing instability in DC

What activities are we doing?

Process Mapping

Shadowing

Diary Studies

1-on-1 Interviews

Co-design

How will we ensure a representative sample in our activities?

We'll recruit participants who are eligible for vouchers, while also ensuring that our participants' demographic diversity is representative of the population of applicants.

We'll shadow key processes more than once, and speak to 2-3 participants for each category of stakeholders we want to interview. This will help us to gather a variety of perspectives, while also identifying patterns and similarities across those various experiences.

Process Mapping

What is it? A map or flow chart that details the granular steps taken by residents, case managers, and DC Government staff to move through the voucher process.

We'll start by mapping the processes for eligibility verification, recertification, and relocation. We will also account for the following variations in the process:

- Individuals vs. families
- Project-based vouchers vs. tenant-based vouchers

Diary Studies

What are they? Self-reported data on behaviors, frustrations, opinions, and desires related to housing and the voucher program over time.

We'll facilitate diary studies with case managers and our Resident Researchers. Participants will receive carefully designed prompts or tasks to respond to.

These diaries will allow us to collect several snapshots to understanding the experiences of housing instability and supporting the voucher process.

Shadowing

What is it? Observations of key events and activities in the voucher process.

These shadows will allow us to see how services are experienced and delivered, noting challenges and successes. Shadows could include:

- Administration of VI-SPDAT and F-SPDAT, a series of questions a person or household are asked when they seek homelessness services in DC

- A case manager and resident completing a voucher application

- DCHA staff reviewing a voucher application for eligibility

- A Coordinated Assessment and Housing Placement (CAHP) meeting that facilitates referrals to vouchers

- A voucher orientation session

- A DCHA inspection of a housing unit for lease

1-on-1 Interviews

What are they? Indepth conversations with residents, case managers, landlords, and advocates about their experiences with the voucher process.

We hope to talk to:

- [Permanent Support Housing](#) case managers
- [Targeted Affordable Housing](#) case managers
- Non-profit advocates
- Landlords
- Residents in the Individual voucher track
- Residents in the Family voucher track

Of the residents we speak with we hope to have the following experiences represented:

- A resident who is applying for a voucher
- A resident who has leased-up with their voucher
- A senior or resident with a physical disability
- A resident whose preferred language is not English

What will we do with our findings?

We will produce a **Discovery report** that synthesizes what we've learned and notes key areas for improvement. Those key areas will be where we focus on generating solutions through co-design.

Co-design

What is it? Interactive workshops that take a participatory approach to generating solutions to a community issue. Sessions are usually 2-3 hours long, in-person with a small group, and interactive.

We'll host sessions to allow residents, case managers, landlords, nonprofit advocates, and government staff to engage with the most pressing challenges in the voucher program and collaboratively produce a set of solutions to address them.

This helps us expand our thinking of possible improvements.