



DURHAM

HOUSING

AUTHORITY

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Duke University | Sanford School of Public Policy | Spring 2018

Designing with and for Housing Choice Voucher Participants

14 WEEKS OF USING HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN TO
IMPROVE THE HOUSING PROCESS FOR DURHAM'S
VOUCHER HOLDERS.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Everyone deserves a great place to live”

For the Durham Housing Authority (DHA) to best facilitate the delivery of nearly 2,700 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs), we need to understand the challenges HCV participants face as they navigate the housing process.

Over the course of fourteen weeks, a team of four students from Duke University’s Sanford School of Public Policy, used the principles of human-centered design to understand and improve the HCV participant experience.

Our process was divided into three phases: (1) Discovery (2) Design and (3) Delivery.

In the Discovery Phase, we team conducted qualitative interviews, attended DHA workshops, and met with community partners to understand the lived experience of HCV participants. Our team quickly learned that despite the important three-way partnership between DHA, landlords, and participants, the participants are truly the core customer. These participants pass through three distinct stages on the journey to secure safe and affordable housing—(1) applicants on the waitlist, (2) applicants with a voucher, and (3) participants in a home. At each stage, these applicants and participants, have different wants, needs, and concerns.

In the Design Phase, we prototyped an online applicant and participant portal meant to address critical moments along the journey: waitlist notification, the housing search, and the Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA) submission. By co-designing this portal with participants, we sought to create a tool that would be easy to use and would be useful at each stage of their journey.

And for the Delivery Phase, we detailed a plan for implementation and measurement. An online portal will not be built overnight, but our hope is that by following the plan detailed in this book, DHA will create a portal that is feasible, desirable, and useful. We believe an online portal will ease the process for applicants and tenants, saving them necessary time along their journey. But more than that, we believe an online portal will serve that original three-way partnership, making the entire process more desirable for landlords and DHA employees, as well.

Everyone deserves a great place to live. And with this online portal, we believe we are one step closer to making that a reality.

”

"Our resource problem in this case is not the number of vouchers. It's really about coordinating people who have the property to rent, the housing authority, the voucher recipient, and supportive services."

Terry Allebaugh

INITIAL DHA GOALS

1

IMPROVE CUSTOMER
EXPERIENCE

2

IMPROVE WORKFLOW FOR
EMPLOYEES

3

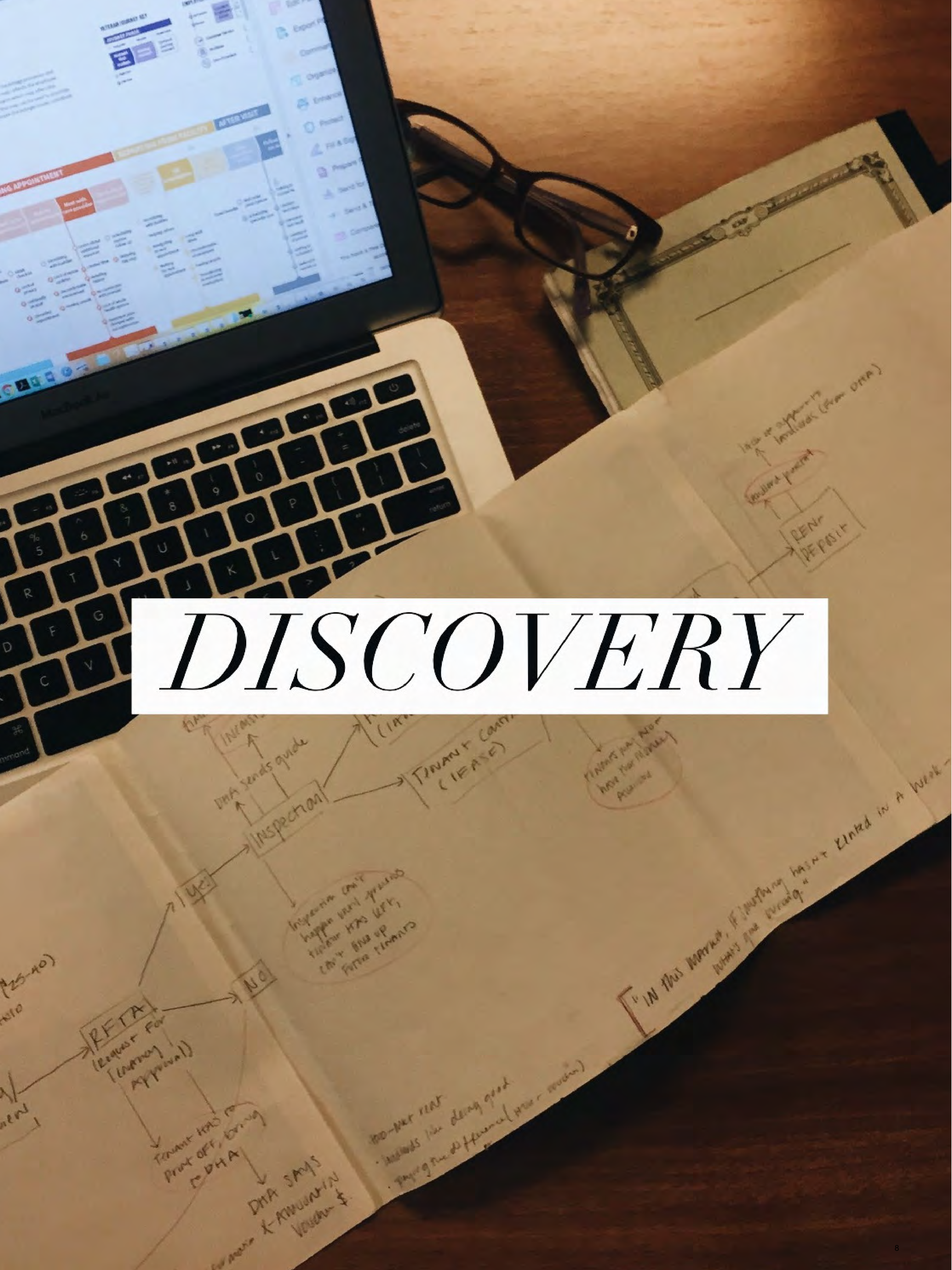
CHANGE PROGRAM
PERCEPTION FOR POTENTIAL
LANDLORDS

OVERVIEW

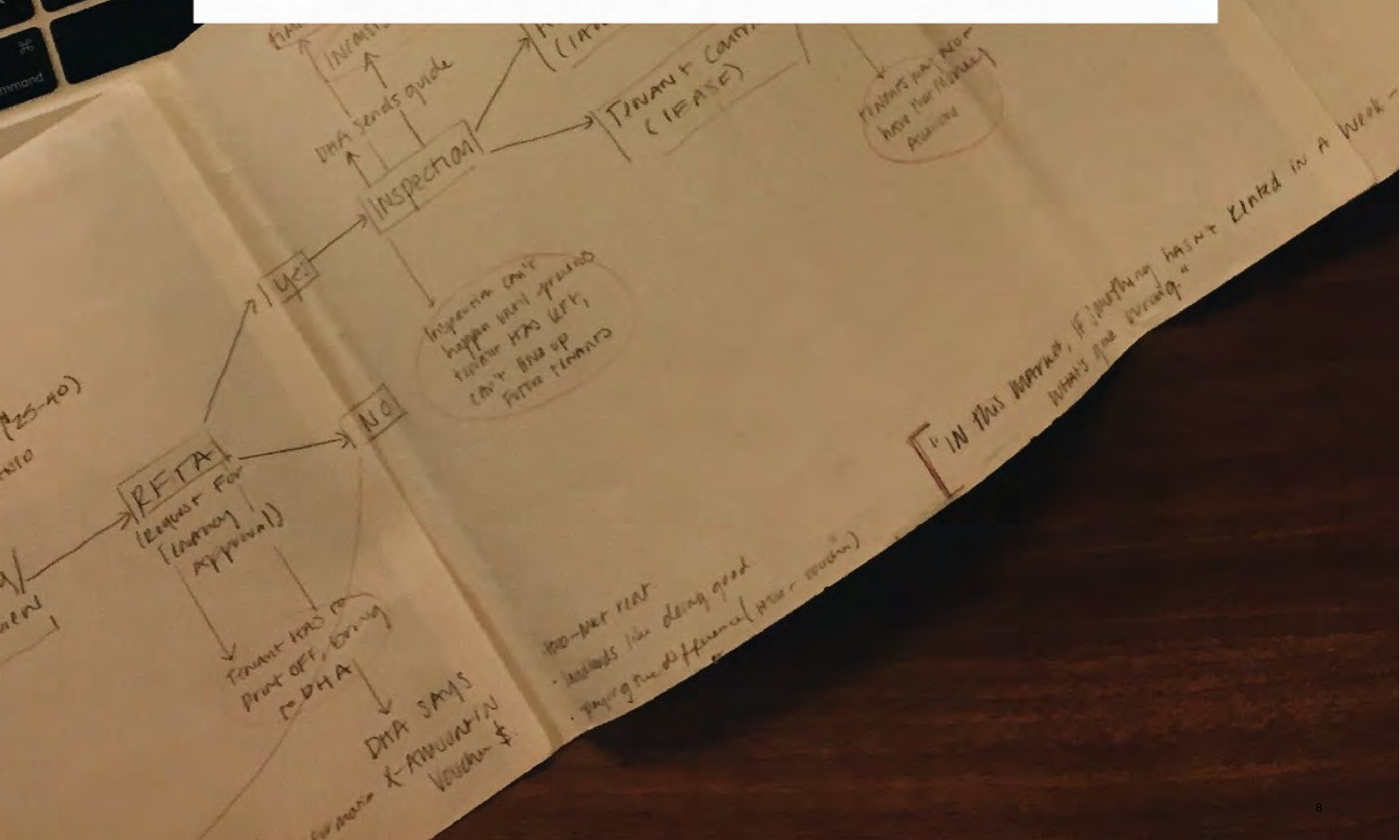


INITIAL QUESTION

How might we
communicate more
effectively with our voucher
holders, landlords, and
employees to address key
program issues?



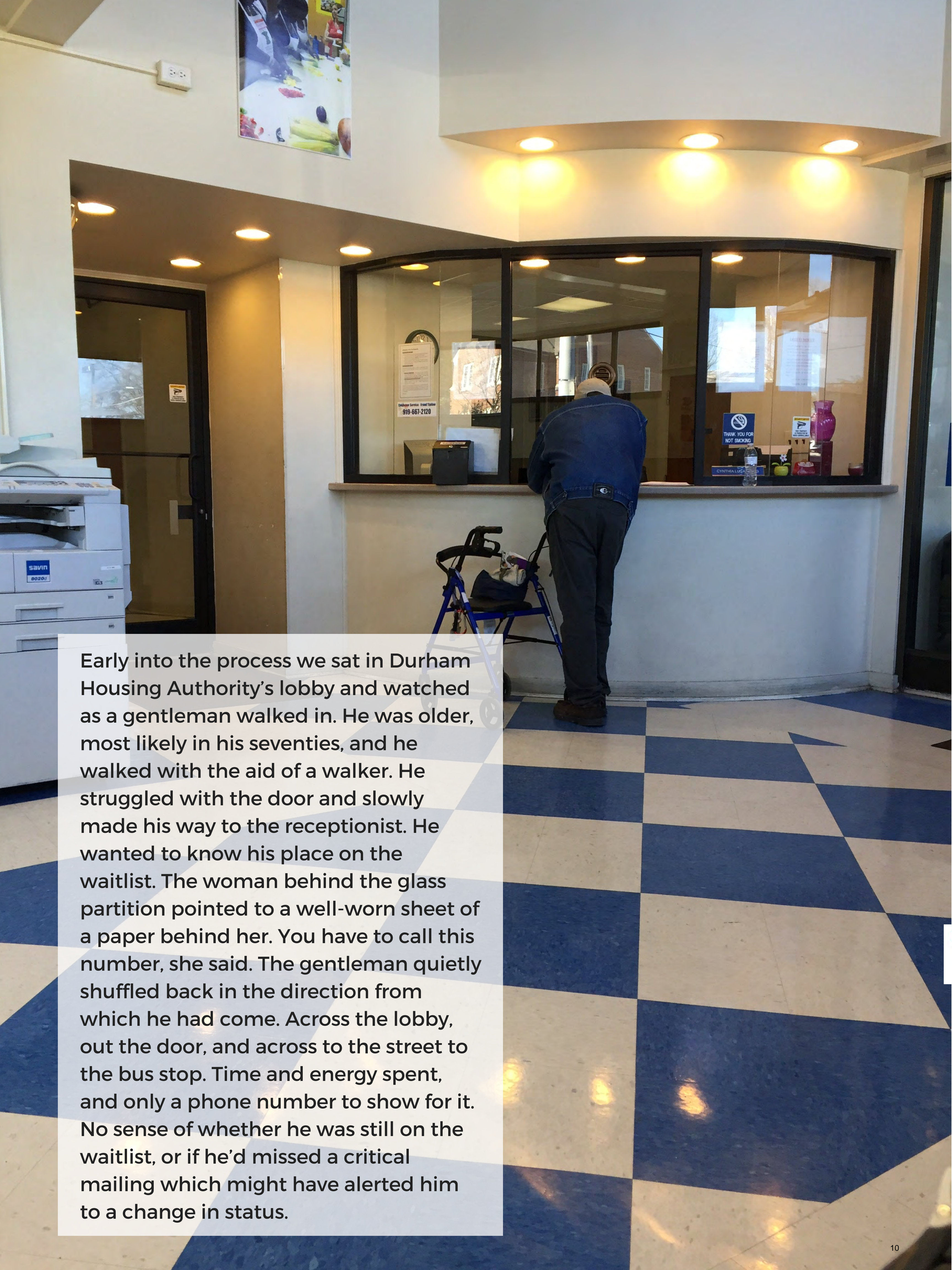
DISCOVERY



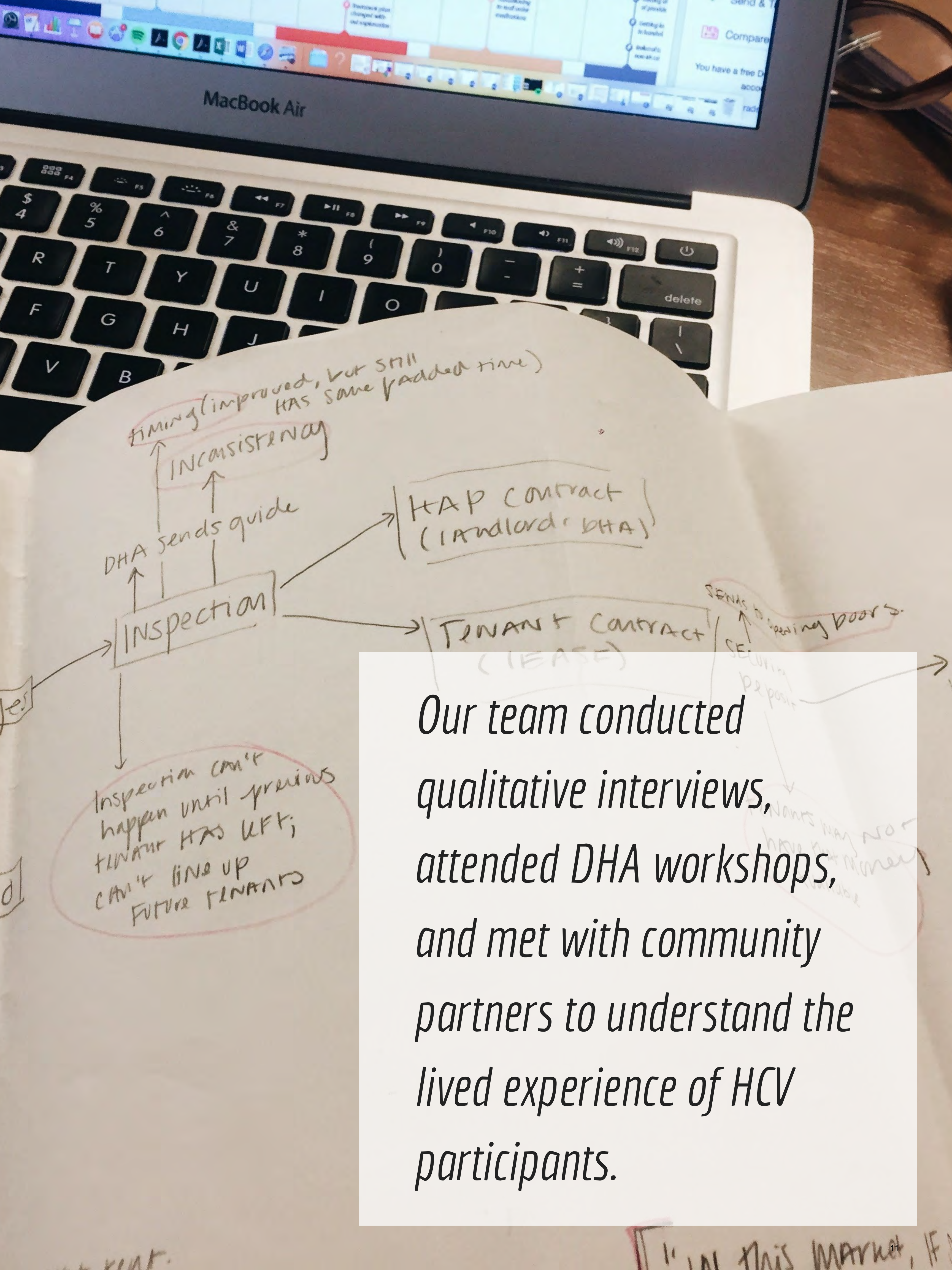
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Everybody deserves a
great place to live.

Durham Landlord



Early into the process we sat in Durham Housing Authority's lobby and watched as a gentleman walked in. He was older, most likely in his seventies, and he walked with the aid of a walker. He struggled with the door and slowly made his way to the receptionist. He wanted to know his place on the waitlist. The woman behind the glass partition pointed to a well-worn sheet of a paper behind her. You have to call this number, she said. The gentleman quietly shuffled back in the direction from which he had come. Across the lobby, out the door, and across to the street to the bus stop. Time and energy spent, and only a phone number to show for it. No sense of whether he was still on the waitlist, or if he'd missed a critical mailing which might have alerted him to a change in status.



Our team conducted qualitative interviews, attended DHA workshops, and met with community partners to understand the lived experience of HCV participants.



INTERVIEWS

04

LANDLORDS

Landlords are happy to rent to voucher holders, but the time and difficulty of the HCV process often proved arduous.

05

EMPLOYEES

Employees struggle with knowing their exact roles. They don't always know the answer to questions and often receive phone calls unrelated to their job duties. The burden of paperwork is overwhelming.

03

PARTICIPANTS

Housing Choice Voucher holders spend so much time waiting. They wait for the waitlist to open, they wait to find out if they are off of the waitlist, they wait to see if their voucher amount will cover the home in which they want to live. There are so many moving pieces, the process is not easy to navigate, and often the feeling is one of "this has got to work out."



LANDLORDS



We approached the landlord interviews with a very specific concern. We feared the stigma associated with housing vouchers would be difficult to overcome.

But we were wrong. Again and again, landlords expressed a real interest in seeing HCV tenants succeed.

The property owners—or landlords we spoke to—came to this business for all sorts of reasons. For one gentleman, he's building a family business, for another it's a late in life investment project. One landlord we spoke to previously worked at a housing authority, and another has taken this on as a second job—a safety net for his family should anything happen to him.



I've had tenants who've cried
when they've gotten the keys to
their home. These are renovated
homes in nice areas. I have a
woman who pay \$25 a month.
And she now has a place for her
three children in a safe
neighborhood--and hopefully
better outcomes for those
children.

Durham Landlord



EMPLOYEES



On the employee side, we heard similar themes over and over again: understaffed, under-resourced, not enough time. We also heard each employee explain their personal connection to the mission of their work, and about their commitment to DHA's purpose.

The key takeaways from our conversations with employees include the following:

- Paper is a systemic drain. From the monthly mailings, to the notification mailings, to the necessary daily paperwork, it takes time and energy to complete on the front end, and file on the back end.
- There is a desire for increased professional development opportunities and a structural reset. It seems practices from the previous leadership period have carried over simply out of convenience, but employees are eager to update their knowledge and adapt best practices.
- There seems to be a lack of communication within the organization, both between internal teams and between management and staff. Emphasizing collaboration and seeking input from all levels of employees could help bridge these divides.



We are social workers too. We deal with
mental health, seniors, the
homeless...there's so much we do outside
of our scope, because [participants] don't
have a support system."

DHA Employee



DURHAM'S HOUSING MARKET



The housing market in Durham is incredibly competitive. One landlord we spoke to said that if a home is sitting on the market for more than a week, he's asking himself, What's wrong? The amount paid by housing vouchers and DHA is often competitive. However, the current timeline required to complete paperwork, the RFTA process, and the inspection often takes more than a week. This extended timeline makes voucher holders less competitive applicants.

THE PROCESS

Applicants face more than the challenges of a competitive housing market. Confusion throughout the process wastes time and resources.

Applicants have a difficult time finding housing because most landlords don't post on websites like GoSection8. There is no central listing or directory where applicants can find homes that are (1) appropriately priced and (2) will accept vouchers.

[illegible]

There is also confusion about the full amount of each voucher. Often, it is only after applying to live in a unit, that applicants learn what they thought was a \$1,000 voucher, is only worth \$800.



DHA should tell tenants and landlords what their approved maximum rent is right on the voucher. If they give the tenant a \$1,000 voucher, then let that mean \$1,000, instead of \$1,000 minus utilities. In that way I, as the landlord, would know right from my first contact with the prospective tenant what rent they are approved for.

It is unfair to make a person who is already in financial hardship **apply over and over again** for different homes (paying an application fee each time) only to learn they have not been approved for the rent and will therefore not be getting the home they now have their heart set on.

HCV Participant Journey

Applicants and Participants lack access to vital information throughout the Housing Voucher process. This lack of information leads to confusion, frustration, disempowerment, and wasted time at critical moments throughout the process.

Selected from Waitlist
& Attends Briefing



Applicants are often on the waitlist for years.

Find Unit &
Submit RFTA



Very few landlords post on goSection8. There is no one place to find a current list of available units.

Wait



The discrepancy between what applicants think their voucher is worth, and the amount DHA then approves, proves both confusing and frustrating.

Sign Lease &
Move In



The time crunch to sign a lease and move in within 90 days is daunting.

One Year Later



Participants must go through recertification and an annual inspection.

DISCOVERY



JOURNEY PHASES



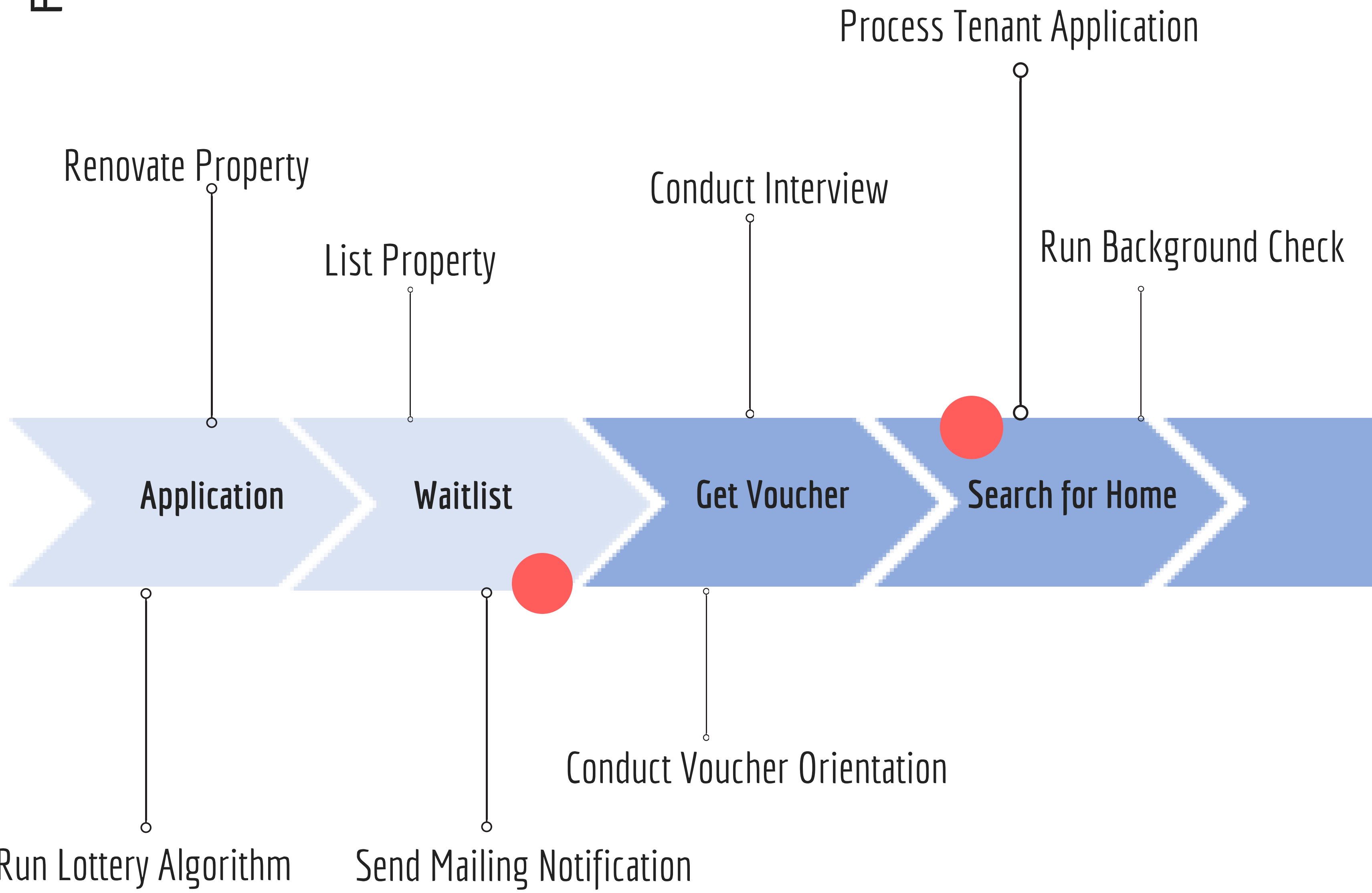
In creating a customer journey map, we identified a few things immediately.

Despite the important three-way partnership between DHA, landlords, and participants, the participants are truly the core customer.

Participants pass through three distinct and specific phases on their journey to securing safe and affordable housing:

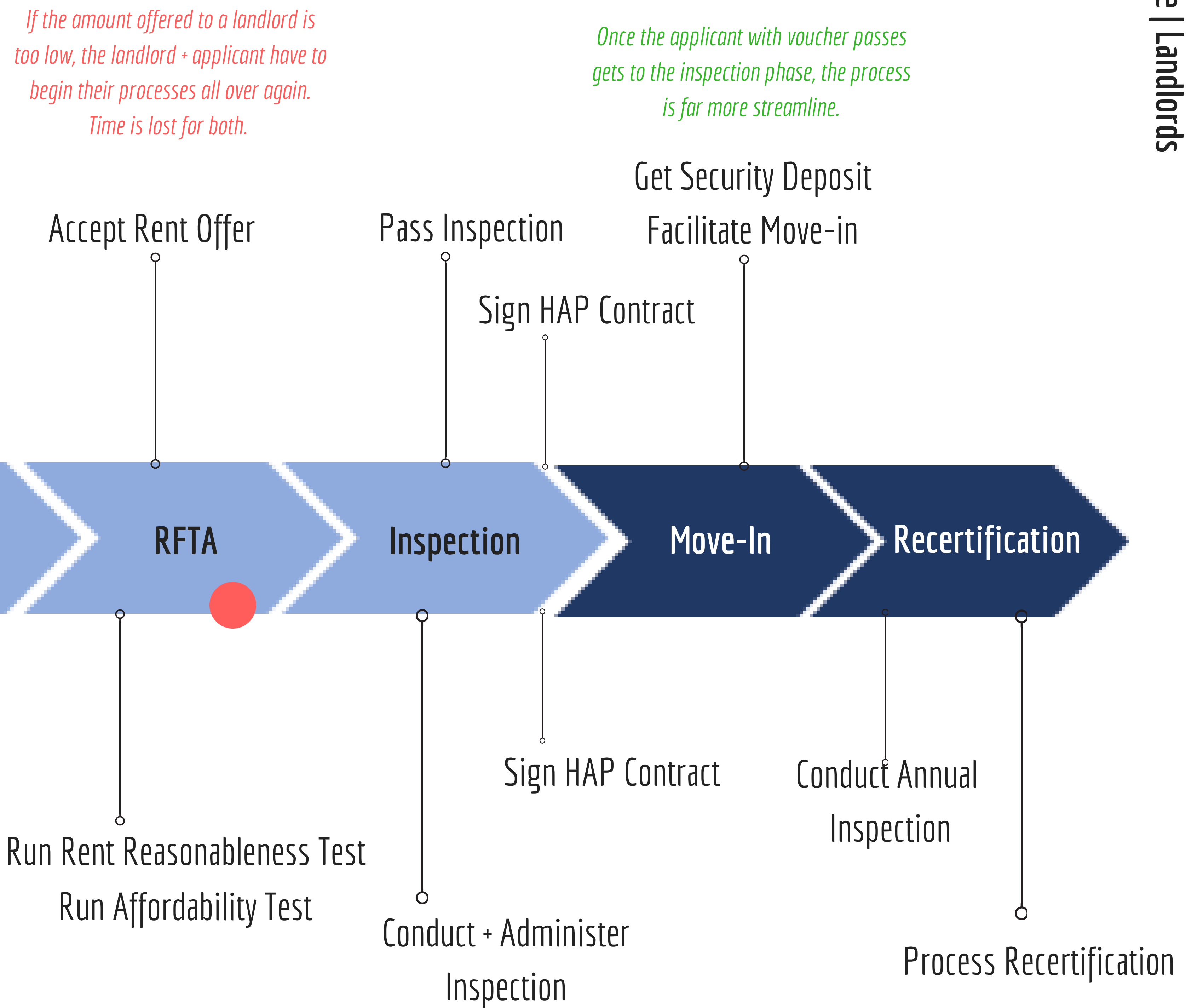
- (1) Applicants on the waitlist who have applied for a voucher, but have yet to receive one.
- (2) Applicants who have received a voucher but are in that critical 90-day window in which they must secure housing or lose the voucher.
- (3) Participants in a home.

At each phase, applicants or participants, have different needs, different fears, and different frustrations.



Applicants don't know their position on the waitlist and worry they've missed a critical mailing alerting them to a change in status.

There is almost no support offered to applicants as they search for a home. Applicants with vouchers don't know where to look.



There is often an inconsistency between what an applicant thinks their voucher is worth and the amount they are approved for.

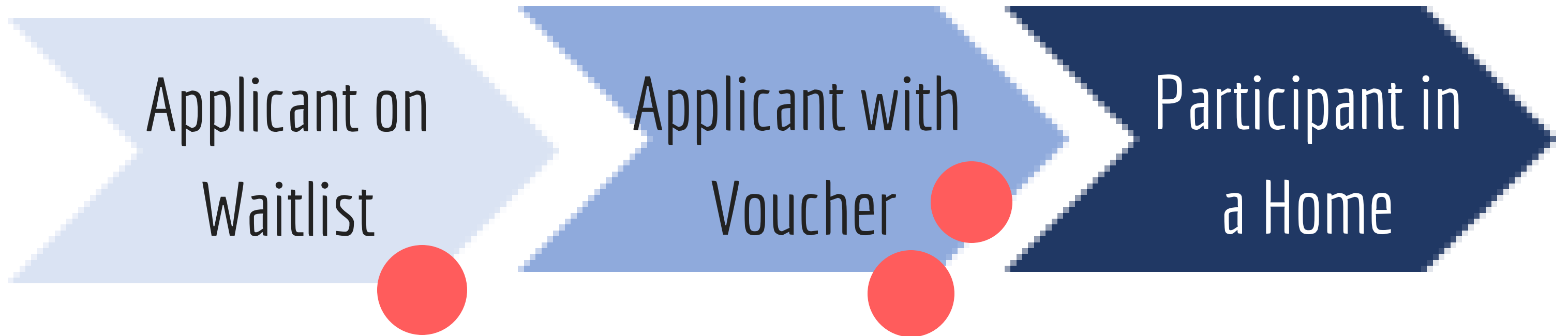
The full inspection process now takes on average three days.

What are the insights in support of opportunity?

KEY INSIGHTS

1. Applicants are often on the Housing Waitlist for years.
2. Very few landlords post on the GoSection8 website so there is no one place to find a current list of approved housing.
3. The discrepancy between what applicants think their voucher is worth, and the amount DHA then approves, proves both confusing and frustrating.

DISCOVERY



WHAT ARE THE MOMENTS THAT MATTER?

1. Waitlist Notification
2. Housing Search
3. RFTA Process



CRITICAL MOMENTS

In creating the customer Journey Map we looked for moments where the process seemed to snag—where time was lost, or applicants and tenants felt significant frustration.

As we mapped out the experience, three critical moments came into focus.

Oftentimes individuals are on the waitlist for years. This extended timeline creates a specific fear for applicants that they will not know when they've been selected. Applicants want to be able to confirm their waitlist status and ensure that they have not missed some critical notification that they've been selected.

Few resources are available to applicants as they search for housing. Applicants with vouchers are up against a 90-day clock in an incredibly competitive market. These applicants need to find a place to live as quickly and easily as possible. But most landlords don't post on Go Section 8. For these applicants, knowing where to look—not investing time and interest in units that are above market rent or don't accept vouchers—is critical to the applicant's timeline.

There is confusion surrounding the value of each applicant's voucher. Applicants often mistake the dollar amount listed on voucher the voucher's actual worth and fail to consider the added cost of utilities. Applicants go into the community and apply for units that they cannot afford. However, neither the applicant or landlord understands this until after the RFTA is submitted. This confusion proves costly to applicants. They've lost time and money—often in the form of an application fee. But more than that, applicants experience disappointment and frustration. For landlords, they are now further into their one week timeline. Because an empty unit is incredibly costly (due to loss of income), the landlord is now more likely to rent to someone without a voucher who can put down a deposit immediately.

A person in a blue uniform is pushing a blue walker in a hospital hallway. The floor is checkered with light blue and white tiles. In the background, there is a glass-walled room with a person inside. A sign on the wall reads "Catholic Services - Inpatient Teller 919-667-2120". Another sign on the counter says "THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING".

KEY TAKEAWAY

A lack of information leads to
confusion, frustration,
disempowerment, and
wasted time at critical
moments throughout the
process.

APPLICANT ON
WAITLIST

①

APPLICANT WITH
VOUCHER
(90 DAY WINDOW)

②

TENANT WITH
VOUCHER
IN A HOME

③

* HOUSING
DIRECTORY

* UPDATE
INFORMATION

SUBMIT
QUESTION/COMMENT

INTERVIEW
FORM

DESIGN

CHECK
WAITLIST
STATUS

* APPOINTMENT
REMINDERS

RE-
CERTIFICATION

TALLY ON
VOUCHER
TIME

ORIENTATION
PROCESS

January 2018

Please keep a copy of this document in case you want to read it again.

Date

Signature

Name

DESIGN



THE DESIGN CHALLENGE

How might DHA improve access to vital information for applicants and participants in the Housing Choice Voucher program?

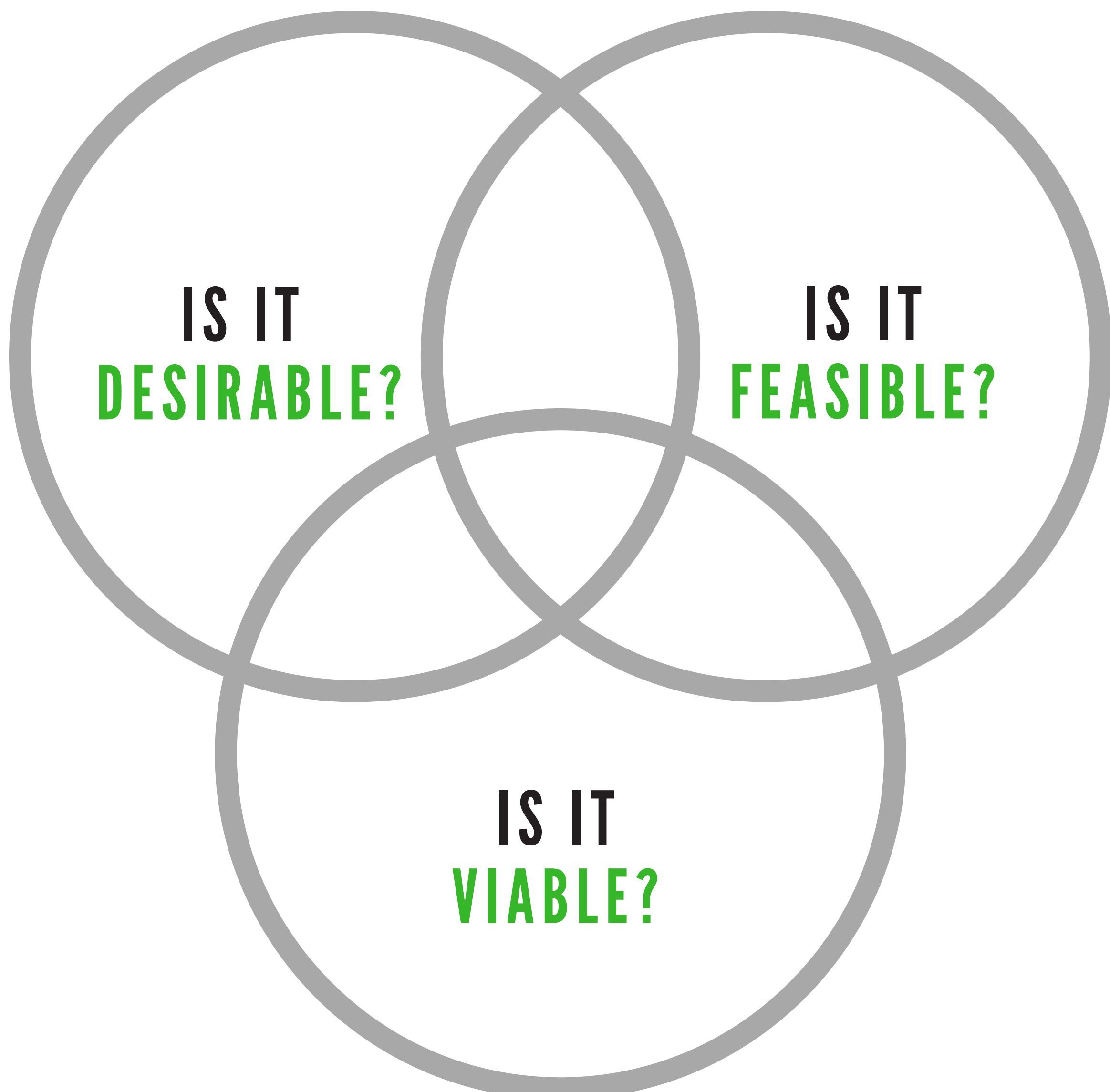


DESIGN



HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE?

The Discovery Phase highlighted the burden of paperwork and the frustration it causes. Time is lost at crucial moments in the process of finding a home. But what if applicants and participants had access to an online portal?



WHAT WE WANT TO KNOW

1

Will people use something online?

2

Will it be useful?

3

And if so, what should it look like?

DESIGN



PROTOTYPING WITH PARTICIPANTS

A key element of the prototyping process in the human-centered design framework is co-designing with customers themselves. First, our team met with participants one-on-one to get a better sense of what resources would be useful to them. Next, our team prototyped with participants using a card sorting method. We had 19 notecards with potential online features and asked participants to sort them into the 3 stages identified in the Discovery Phase (applicant on the waitlist, applicant with a voucher, and participant with a voucher).

We also brought a large poster to one voucher briefing and one relocation class and asked applicants and participants to rank the features from most important to least important and to tell us about any additional features they would like to see that we may have missed. As individuals interacted with our activity, we took notes and pictures to capture the rankings and feedback.

Which of these things is
most important to you?

What do you think is
missing?

What stage do you think
each card falls under?

A woman in a black top is standing and pointing with a yellow marker at a table. The table is covered with a large sheet of paper and numerous sticky notes in various colors (yellow, orange, pink, green). Other people are partially visible around the table, and a white cup and a black bag are on the table surface.

3 CATEGORIES

19 POST-ITS

2 EVENTS

PARTICIPANT-DESIGNED PORTAL

Applicant on
Waitlist

Check Status - here you can see if you are active on HCV waitlist and the predicted date of reopening

Change Address - here you can update your current mailing address

Update Information - here you can update income, household composition, and contact information

Appointment Scheduler & Reminders - here you can schedule your voucher briefing and set appointment reminder preferences (mail, text, email)

Housing Directory - here you can find a list of available units and shelters

Applicant with
Voucher

Voucher Time Countdown - here you can get your voucher expiration date and request an extension

RFTA Calculator - here you can get a better estimate of the amount your voucher will cover

Appointment Scheduler & Reminders

Orientation Materials - here you can review all materials presented at your voucher briefing

Update Information

Housing Directory

Participant in
a Home

Recertification Documents - here you can complete your recertification documents

Appointment Scheduler & Reminders

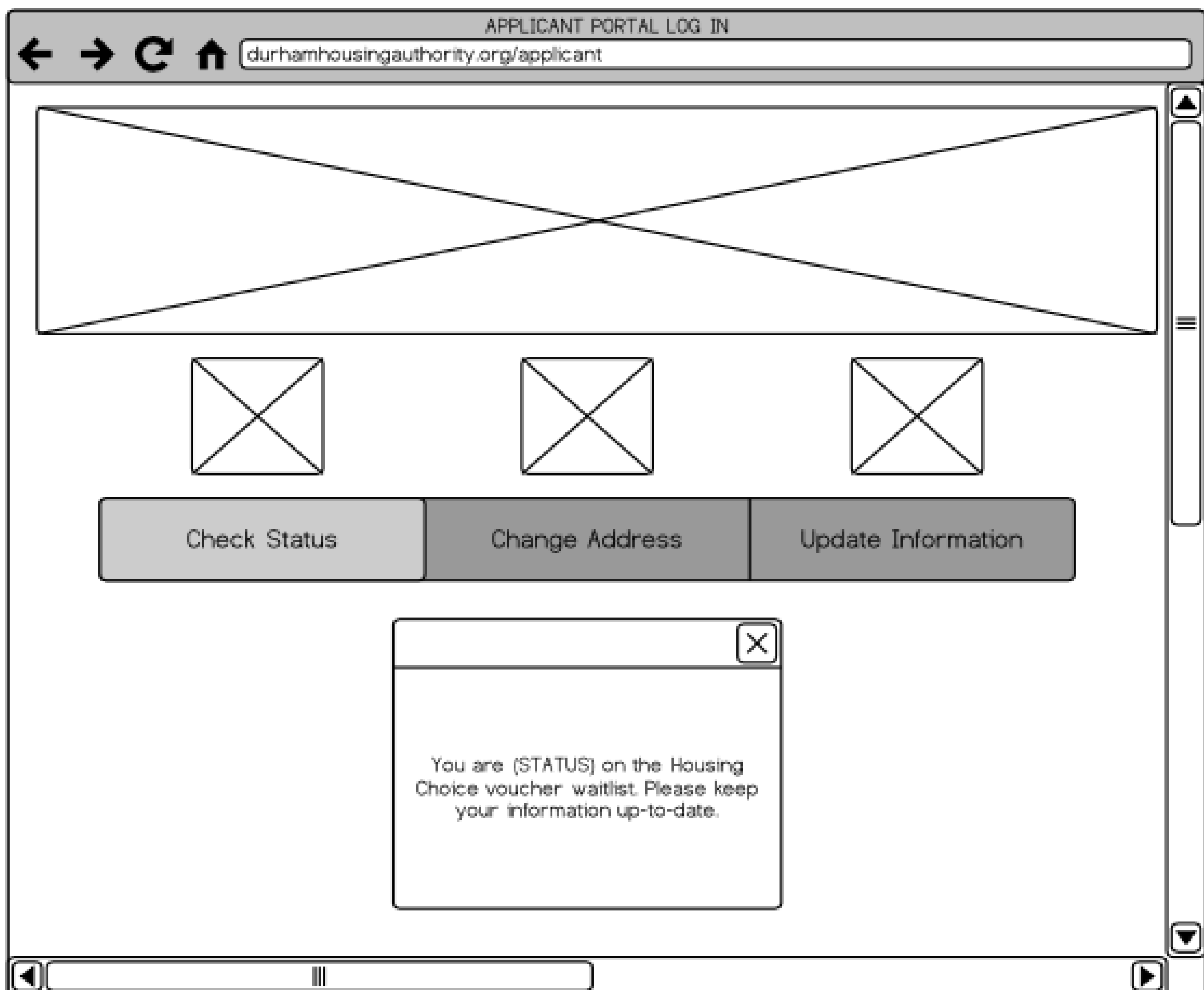
Update Information

DESIGN



PORTAL WIREFRAME

applicant on waitlist



On this page, applicants would be able to log in and check the status of the waitlist, change their address, and update other important information. Applicants at this stage expressed a lot of anxiety around not understanding if they were still on the waitlist or when the waitlist would next open. The checking status feature will ease applicants of this stressor. Additionally, many applicants get lost during the notification process since their information is not up to date. The ability to change your address and update other information online should mitigate the applicants that DHA loses touch with.

DESIGN



PORTAL WIREFRAME

applicant searching for housing

APPLICANT PORTAL LOG IN

durhamhousingauthority.org/applicantwithvoucher

Voucher Countdown Appointment Scheduler Update Information

Voucher Amount Calculator

March 2018

S	M	T	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Your voucher expires on (DATE).

Got it!

Housing Directory

Orientation Materials

This page will provide applicants with a voucher expiration countdown, a housing directory with hyperlinked information, copies of the orientation materials for reference, an updated rent reasonableness calculator to more accurately reflect the voucher amount after accounting for utilities, and an appointment scheduler. Applicants at this stage commented on the difficulty of the housing search process. We believe that transferring resources to an online platform will make the materials more accessible and ultimately expedite the housing search process.

DESIGN



PORTAL WIREFRAME

participant in a home

PARTICIPANT PORTAL LOG IN

durhamhousingauthority.org/applicantwithvoucher

Recertify Appointment Scheduler Update Information

March 2018

S	M	T	W	Th		
	1	2	3	4	11	12
7	8	9	10	11	18	19
14	15	16	17	18	25	26
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Your relocation class is (date) at (time).

Got it!

Housing Directory

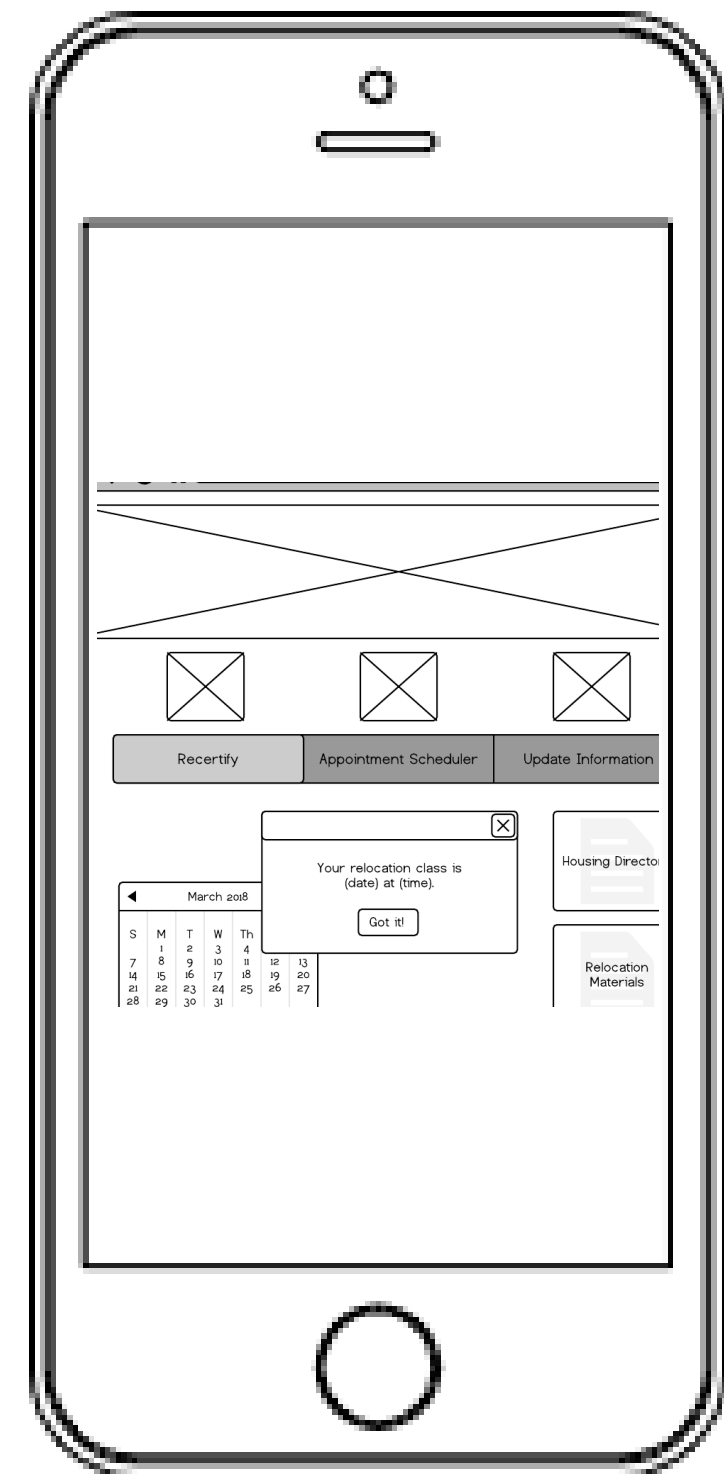
Relocation Materials

This page is for participants already in a home. Here they can update their information, schedule an appointment, go through the re-certification process, access relocation materials and access the centralized housing directory. Having the relocation resources online will save time and energy for participants and minimize burden on DHA employees.



MOBILE-FRIENDLY

While prototyping with participants, we heard that any online tool should be mobile-friendly. Users want to be able to easily use the portal from their smart phone. This would not need to be an app, but rather a mobile-friendly "responsive" site.



FUTURE TOOL: COMMUNICATION PORTAL

During the relocation class, we spoke with two women who have been HCV participants for a few years. When asked what was missing, one woman spoke about a potential communication tool - "Like Duke MyChart" - where participants and applicants could send messages through the portal rather than calling DHA.

50

Skateboard



Housing
Direct

PAPER
Directory

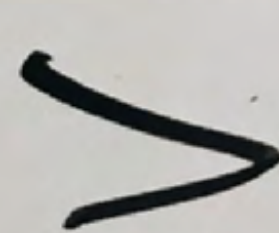
UNlocking
DOORS

google
DOC.

DELIVERY

60

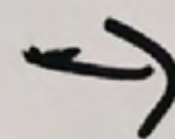
90



ONLINE TOOLS
READY FOR USE*

120

Motorcycle



Calc
Utilities

HD in
portal



180

Car



full portal

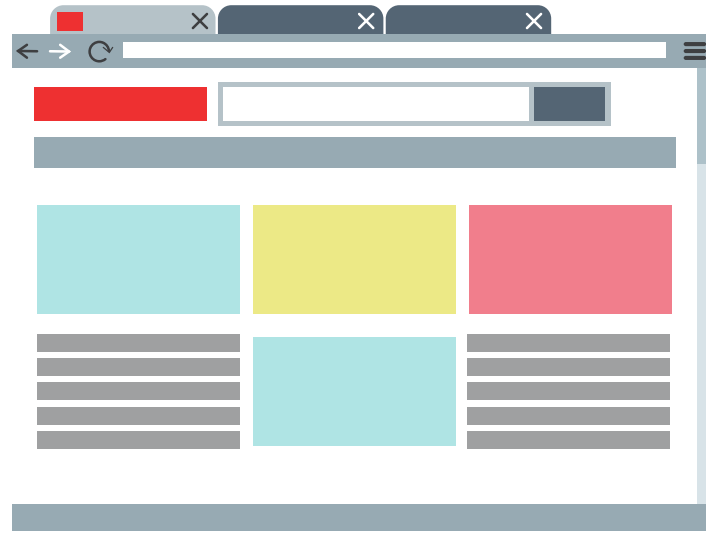
H.D
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Person
lo

DELIVERY



IMPLEMENT



To implement the applicant and participant portal successfully, we recommend rolling it out in five stages. The initial stage to the final product evolve from simple to complex, with pieces added along the way. DHA should aim to complete a stage of the project every 30 days.

This process can be thought of like the evolution of a car. Beginning in small steps, such as a skateboard, will get the process moving forward without becoming too complicated all at once. The following pages outline a suggested implementation plan to be rolled out in the first six months of the project. Each stage is broken into an explanation of the project piece on the left, as well as general steps for DHA to take to get started.

MEASURE



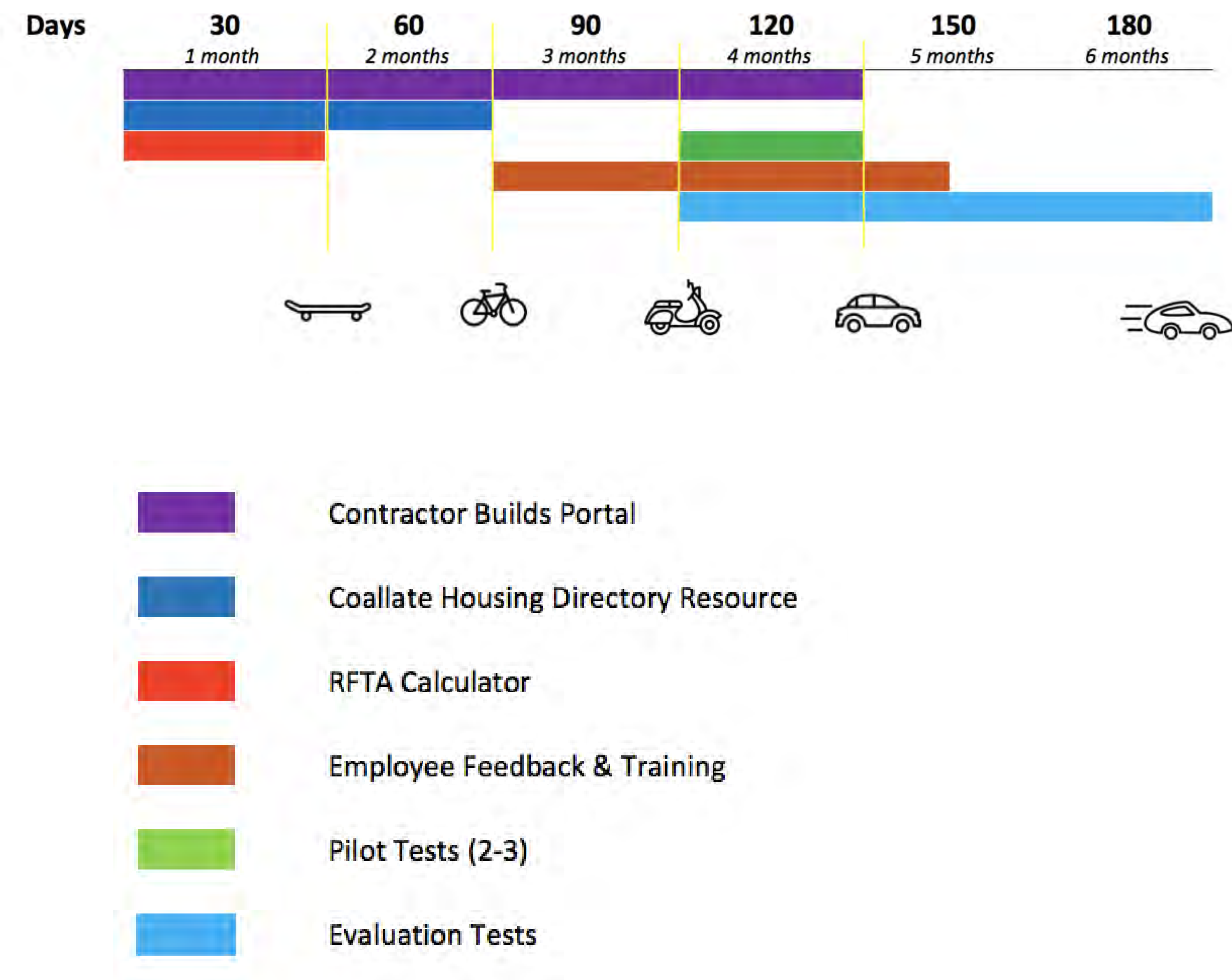
The applicant and participant portal is designed to address the key moments that matter in the journey of the participant to get housed: waitlist notification, the housing search, and the Request For Tenancy Approval (RFTA) submission. To measure the portal successfully, we recommend a quarterly survey that gauges effectiveness, emotion, and ease. DHA employees, DHA leadership, landlords, and HCV participants will benefit from measuring the usefulness of the portal. Data collected will allow for more frequent feedback so that DHA can adapt resources and programming for HCV participants as necessary to improve their experience.

DELIVERY



IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

First 6 Months



DELIVERY



Virtual Rent Affordability Calculator | 30 Days

Because the DHA website already has a version of the calculator, we identified this as a natural entry point. By adding just a few categories to the existing online infrastructure, applicants will experience increased agency and save money as they'll be able to avoid application fees for units beyond their price range.

This calculator will save DHA employees time and stress by streamlining the rent affordability process. In the final iteration of the portal, when it is totally responsive (or mobile-friendly), applicants with vouchers will be able to access this calculator on their smartphone and in real-time while looking at an apartment.

Following the model of the [Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority](#) (CMHA), DHA should incorporate a Rent Affordability calculator on their website that includes variables such as neighborhood, utilities, and appliances. While it does not ensure absolute accuracy, the virtual RFTA calculator will provide participants with more clarity in the housing search.

How do we get started?

- Enlist contractor to build on the current DHA Rent Affordability Calculator feature
- Add drop-down options for:
 - Durham neighborhood
 - Energy Source
 - Unit type
 - Water/sewer payment
 - Trash payment



Housing Directory Resource | 60 Days

Currently, participants do not have a serviceable, centralized place to find affordable housing in Durham. This slows the housing search process and creates frustration.

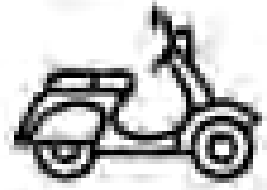
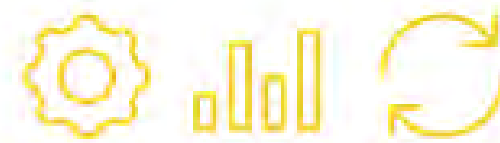
Using their partnerships with community partnerships and landlords, DHA should collate a housing directory for participants. This can start as a paper document or google doc, and can build up to a living virtual resource that landlords and community partners can contribute to. Due to their previous work in Durham housing, we recommend collaborating with Unlocking Doors to establish a strategic method for compiling the resource.

This database will streamline the work flow for DHA's employees, enabling them to work more efficiently. This increased efficiency will then benefit applicants who have applied for a particular unit as the entire process will move faster, making them more competitive to landlords seeking tenants.

How do we get started?

- Partner with Unlocking Doors
- Communicate With Landlords
- Utilize volunteers

DELIVERY



Personalize the Portal | 90 Days

At this stage, the contractor should be ready to implement individualized portal information.

Applicants and participants will have the ability to log in, view and schedule appointments, and check waitlist status, if applicable.

A commonly used strategy in housing authorities is to automatically set the username and password.

Ex:

Username: Last name

Password: 4 digit code (i.e. last four digits of SS)

How do we get started?

- Communicate with contractor
- When contractor is ready, test feature with groups at DHA participant events such as voucher orientation
- Mobile capability is crucial at this stage



Full Applicant & Participant Portal | 120 Days

Using the provided **wireframe**, contractor should assemble online portal. To test the impact and capabilities of the portal, we recommend 2-3 pilot tests of 10-20 participants each.

Each pilot test should consist of assessing the participant's understanding of the tool via a quick email survey asking about the ease of use for each section of the tool being measured. DHA can also utilize short intercept interviews when possible and can do short pilot demonstrations and get live feedback from participants during in-person onboarding trainings (such as during a orientation or housing relocation session).

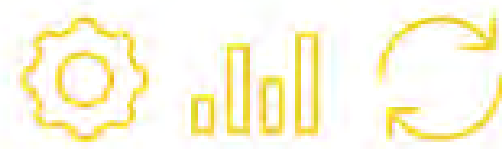
Example pilot question – *The RFTA calculator is easy for me to use.* Participants can respond on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Training with DHA employees should include uploading forms, scheduling appointments, and comfortably navigating the site.

How do we get started?

- Communicate with contractor
- Meet with small groups of employees and participants to get feedback on portal usability
- Test portal functionality and address key uncertainties through pilot tests

DELIVERY



Continuous Evaluation & Feedback | 120-180 Days

We recommend continuous evaluation of the portal in order to maximize its effectiveness and ease.

Conducting evaluation tests every month for the first few months will ensure that major features are running smoothly and participants are understanding the features.

After the 6 month mark, evaluation tests can occur every 3 months.

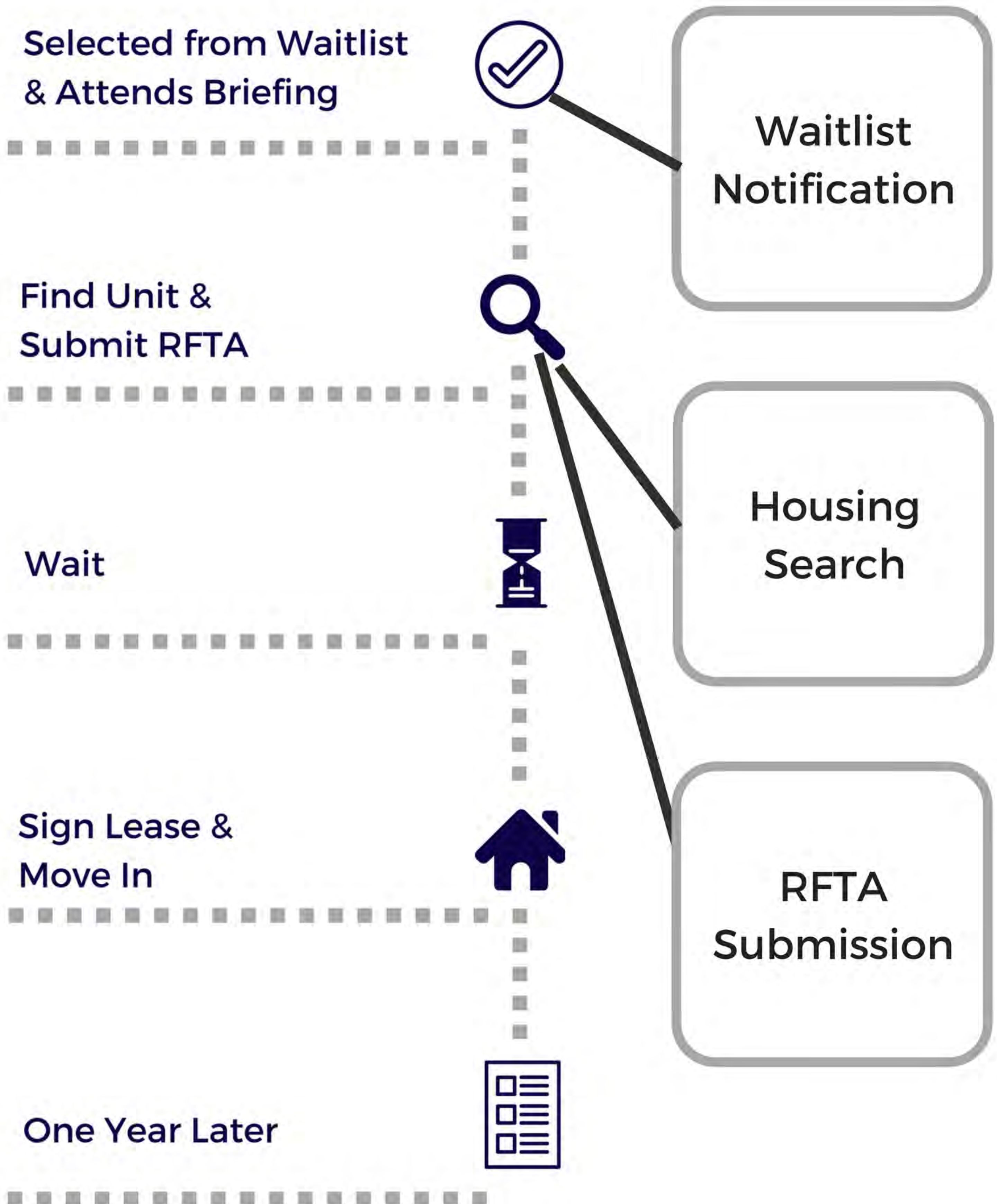
How do we get started?

- Design testing plans
- Recruit participants
- Set up evaluation
- Document process, impact, and responses
- Iterate on materials & repeat process for continuous evaluation





MOMENTS THAT MATTER





MEASURING MOMENTS THAT MATTER

EFFECTIVENESS

The first metric examines if the portal helps achieve the end outcome of a participant finding housing within the critical 90-day window. It will be measured as the percent of HCV applicants who receive a voucher and find housing within the 90-day target window. We will also have a secondary effectiveness metric that measures the percent of participants with a voucher who find housing within the 120-day window. We felt it was important to separate the 90-day success rate from the 120-day success rate since the ideal is 90 days but participants are able to ask and get an extension for 120-days. DHA should already have the data in their records and would just need to begin quarterly reporting of the data. We feel that quarterly reporting makes intuitive sense given that DHA already functions on a general 90-day incremental timeline.

EASE

Ease will be measured by the statement "It was easy to secure housing with a DHA voucher". The statement will be followed by an open response question asking the participant to "please explain the number value they chose above". The participant will be able to respond on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We will calculate the percent of participants who agree or strongly agree with the statement (select a 4 or 5 when responding to the question). With the goal of 65% of participants responding affirmatively.

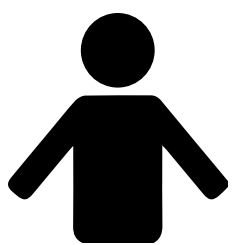
EMOTION

Emotion will be measured by the statement "I felt supported by Durham Housing Authority during my housing search process". The statement will be followed by an open response question asking the participant to "please explain the number value they chose above". The participant will be able to respond on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). We will calculate the percent of participants who agree or strongly agree with the statement (select a 4 or 5 when responding to the question). With the goal of 70% of participants responding affirmatively.



WHY MEASUREMENT MATTERS

The data gathered from the participant survey will help all parties involved. Participants will feel heard and can give honest feedback without fear of repercussions. DHA staff, both front-line employees and leadership, can use the data to shift culture and make program related and resource changes to benefit participants. One of the biggest concerns for landlords is the timeline with renting to a HCV participant. As the process tightens and improves for participants, landlords will have fewer issues related to timeline delays.



PARTICIPANTS

- A chance for HCV participants voices to be heard
- Result in HCV participants having a better experience
- Can express their main sticking points on their housing journey



DHA FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

- More immediate feedback and will be able to change behaviors as necessary so that participants can have a better experience



DHA LEADERSHIP

- More accurately gauge the effectiveness of their programming and resource to adjust them as necessary
- A clear measure of how well DHA is fulfilling their mission to get participants housed in a timely manner
- A better sense of the culture at DHA and how it affects participant's experience and success in finding housing



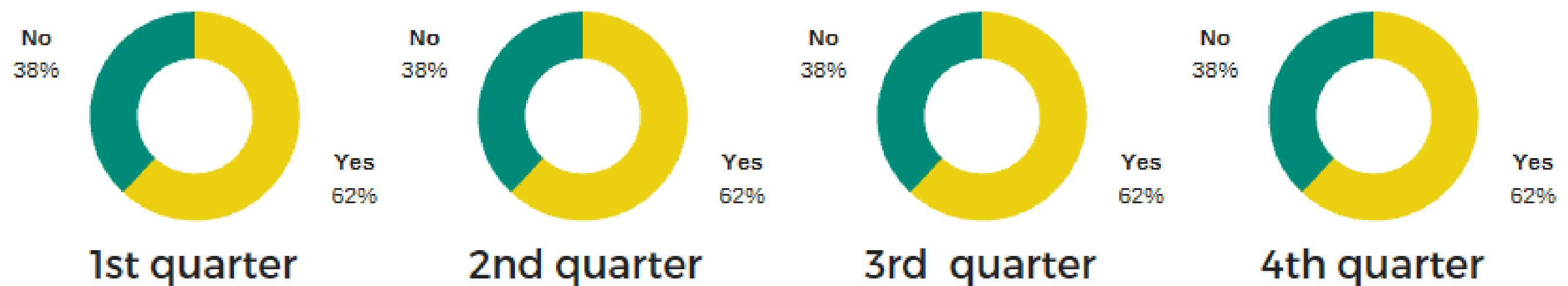
LANDLORDS

- The landlord's experience will improve as DHA makes programmatic and resource adjustments to improve participant experience
- A shortened and easier process for participants will make it more desirable for landlords to rent to participants

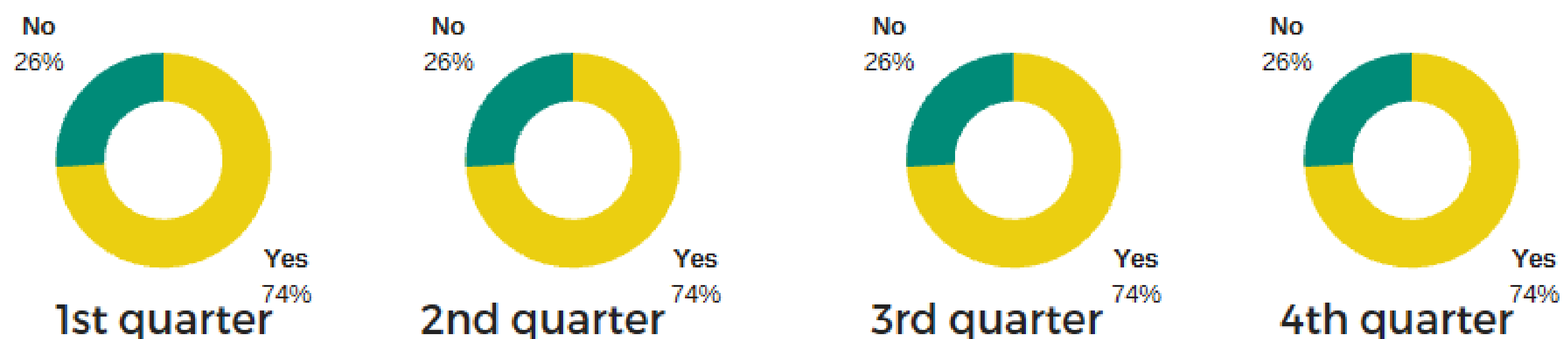


Effectiveness

Percent of applicants with a voucher who found housing in 90 days **Goal: 65%**

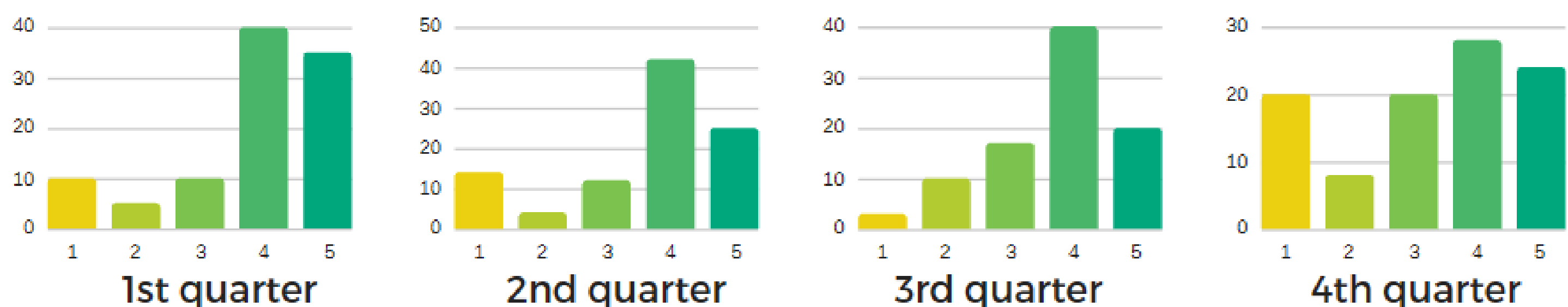


Percent of applicants with a voucher who found housing in 120 days **Goal: 60%**



Ease It was easy to secure housing with a DHA Voucher **Goal: 65%**

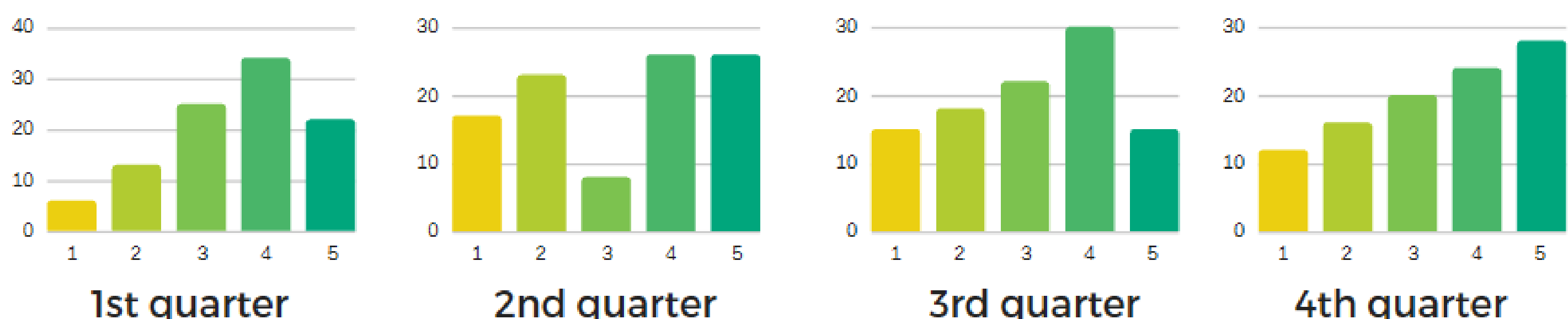
Responses on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)



Participant quote: "The housing directory made the moving process manageable."

Emotion I felt supported in my partnership with DHA **Goal: 70%**

Responses on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)



Participant quote: "DHA was there every step of the way."



HOW TO MEASURE MOMENTS THAT MATTER

A week after a participant with a voucher finds housing, DHA should send out a quick survey via email. This email should include the ease and emotion questions listed above. We believe email is the best method to reduce bias. Initially, we thought participants could sit down with a DHA staff member upon signing their HAP contract. However, we feared having DHA staff administer the survey could bias the results. Particularly, we worried participants would answer more favorably than they otherwise might. One downside to email is there may be a lower response rate. We recommended DHA send out one follow-up email reminder to those who did not answer the initial survey a week after the first email.

Survey platforms, like Google Form, are free. They aggregate the data and put the responses into an Excel sheet. While this data should be collected constantly (as participants move into housing) we recommend, in keeping with the 90-day timeline for the effectiveness metric, that DHA aggregate and report on this data quarterly. Email and online surveys will minimize the administrative burden.

Survey questions will only be sent to participants who successfully find housing. We made this choice because those who do not find housing will be measured - or caught - in the effectiveness metric. We do recommend that, in the future, DHA develop a different set of questions to better understand the experience of those who do not find housing.

FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The best laid plans may still experience bumps and pitfalls along the road. There are a number of critical uncertainties when it comes to implementing and measuring the portal.

For implementation, the main critical uncertainties revolve around buy-in. We cannot assume that just because a tool exists, it will be adopted and used. On the participant side, it is critical to incorporate the portal into DHA events and trainings such as voucher orientation. It is also important to gain buy-in from employees. Using this portal to its fullest extent will require employee training, and systemic routine changes for elements such as waitlist notification and appointment scheduling. Eventually, it is the hope that the portal becomes internalized within DHA's operations and culture.

There is also uncertainty in measuring the effectiveness of the participant portal. For example, we cannot be sure that people will respond to the email survey or that they will understand that their responses will not affect their relationship with DHA. It will be important to consider how participants engage with the portal and take their feedback to heart.

MEET KIM



We met Kim during one of our HCV participant interviews. We called him upon our arrival, and he let us know that he was still a few minutes away. After waiting about twenty-five minutes, just as we were about to leave, we watched as a man crossed the street, waving at us.

Kim apologized for his delay and welcomed us into his home. It became clear immediately just how much pride he took in his home. Kim had been in his current apartment for three years, but had recently been given one month's notice to vacate—the landlord was looking to renovate the unit. Kim was tasked with renewing his HCV voucher, finding a new home, and getting the unit approved. And he had 30 days to do it.

One of the first things we noticed about Kim—besides his love for Duke—is that he carried a medical device in the front pocket of his sweatshirt. Kim explained he had hernia surgery a year ago, and due to complications from the procedure, still needed the medical device.

During our interview Kim pulled out an impeccably organized file of critical documents. He showed us his new voucher, which the DHA had expedited for him. He explained that he'd been late to meet us that morning because he'd walked downtown and back to pick up a listing of potential houses from another social service agency. He planned on spending the afternoon calling numbers listed in the directory and inquiring about their units. Kim was three-weeks into his housing search.

We sat listening as Kim explained the situation and we quickly ran through the timeline in our head. Even if Kim found a home that afternoon, he'd still have to submit an application to the landlord. DHA would then have to assess rent reasonableness and rent affordability and send an inspector out to the unit. It was Wednesday. The possibility that this process would be done in a week felt almost impossible.

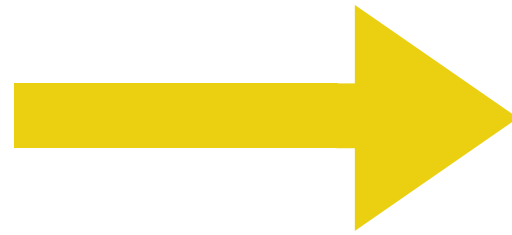
Sitting with Kim, we realized just how critical an online applicant portal could be and how it might be utilized. Had the portal been available to Kim, he could have logged in to (1) submit his application for a new voucher (2) searched a directory with hyperlinked phone numbers and (3) assessed the likely value of his voucher so that he could target specific listings close to that price.

Kim would not have had to walk across town to DHA or other agencies in search of paperwork and directories. Accessing information online would have saved him time and energy and streamlined the process. We believe the portal will provide participants with vital information and give participants the necessary tools to expedite the housing process.

FUTURE KIM

BEFORE

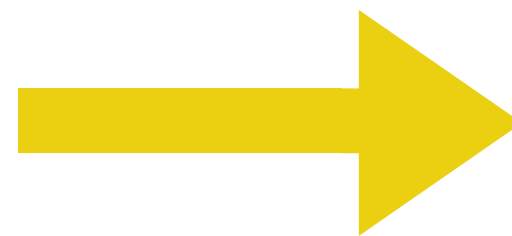
Went to DHA in person and asked for a new voucher for his new housing search



AFTER

Future Kim will save time and a trip downtown by scheduling his request online

Walked downtown to another local agency to find a paper housing directory




Future Kim will save time by logging into the mobile friendly applicant portal and searching for housing on the digital housing directory

Took so much time renewing his voucher and searching for an affordable unit that even if he found a place there would not have been time to complete the RFTA and inspection before his 30-day deadline expired



Future Kim can use the applicant portal to save time in the voucher renewal and housing search process. He would then have additional time to get through the rent reasonable and inspection process by the end of his deadline. Using the updated RFTA calculator on the applicant portal would also save Kim time in the search process and minimize the likelihood that he applies for a unit he cannot afford with his voucher

The background image shows the interior of a community center. In the center, there is a service counter with a person standing behind it, pushing a blue stroller. The counter has various items on it, including a sign that says "THANK YOU FOR NOT SMOKING". To the left of the counter, there is a large white copier. The floor is made of blue and white checkered tiles. The ceiling has several recessed lights. On the wall to the left, there is a framed picture of a group of people. The overall atmosphere is bright and clean.

For HCV applicants and participants who lack access to vital information, our portal is an online tool that will provide individuals with the necessary information to secure safe and affordable housing.

