

# Housing Resource Center

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## PREPARING FOR A HOUSING INTERVIEW

Tips  
For  
Applicants

# Tips for Preparing Applicants for a Housing Interview

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## **1. What Will They Know About Me Before I Arrive For The Interview?**

Most residences require paperwork on all applicants before they schedule an interview. Depending on the housing model, they will require all or some of the following: an approved HRA application, a psychosocial assessment, a psychiatric evaluation, and results of a TB test(if available). In addition to the basic identifying information, the HRA application includes information about your housing history, living preferences, income, employment history, psychiatric and medical history, and support service needs. If you want HIV related information to be included, you need to sign a release form giving your consent.

## **2. Why Do They Need To Have All of That Information When All I Want Is A Place To Live?**

Housing providers are trying to keep their buildings safe and secure and therefore want to know as much as possible about the people that may live there. Providers attempt to determine whether or not they will be able to meet the service needs of people applying for housing and whether or not it is a good match for you. Many questions are of a personal nature and address sensitive issues such as substance abuse history, mental health history, relationships with friends or family and what you do with your time as well as examples of how you spend your money. It is fine to tell the interviewer if a question makes you uncomfortable or to ask them to return to a question later because you'd like time to think it over. Think about what you do not want a provider to know and why. Since you are applying to supportive housing, the interviewer is expecting you to have some service needs. The interviewer wants a clearer picture of those needs as well as to observe your ability to identify them.

## **3. What Should I Know About The Housing Provider?**

The interview is a two-way street. You can ask anything you'd like to know about the place you are applying to. Some examples may include:

- A description of rules & policies (visitors, curfew, etc.)

- Information about the housing model (permanent or transitional, day program requirements, lease or other occupancy agreement).
- The type of neighbors you would have (special needs, working people, age range, ethnic backgrounds).
- Safety precautions taken in the building and the surrounding community.
- What type of programs are tenants expected to attend?

Ask for clarification if needed. This will help you get a clear idea of what the interviewer is saying, shows that you are interested and may help reduce stress for some people. It can also be helpful for interviewees to show their understanding of the supportive housing program; for example, "I understand program attendance is optional, is that correct?"

When it comes to the interview itself, you may want to know:

- How many interviews are required?
- How long they will take?
- The steps in the intake process.
- Who will conduct the interview?
- Whether or not your case manager can be present.

#### **4. What Can I Do To Prepare For The Interview?**

Think about the kind of place you want to live in. What are things you are willing to compromise on and what is included in your "can't live without" category? The clearer you are about what you want and what options are available the easier your search will be. If it is unlikely you will move into your ideal or first housing choice right now, will you consider a second choice as a transitional step?

It can be helpful to do a practice interview. This can make the actual interview less stressful and intimidating because it won't feel so unusual. Being asked in-depth and personal questions by a stranger is enough to make anyone feel nervous, but remember you are also interviewing the housing provider to decide whether or not this seems like a place you'd like to live. If you are interested in the housing facility, let the interviewer know.

In preparing for the interview you may find that you can't remember everything or when certain events happened. This is not uncommon and it can help to go over some things, such as your housing history, your job history, and your hospitalization history with your caseworker. Certain questions or observations may help you fill in some of the gaps. It can also be helpful to write down some information to bring

with you to your interview (i.e. SS#, medication list, your questions for the provider, etc.)

### **5. What Kind Of Person Are They Looking For?**

This will depend on the housing model. You can ask the interviewer who they typically accept into their program. In general, supportive housing providers use the following guidelines to make their decision:

- **Will this person pay their rent?** Have they done so in the past? What do they do with their money? What might interfere with their ability to pay their rent? Have they had a representative payee in past?

**Tip: You can ask if budgeting help is available if you have had problems paying rent in the past.**

- **Can we meet this person's service needs?** Do they have insight into their needs? (i.e., do they know how to ask for help and have they done so in the past?)

**Tip: Asking about program hours or when staff is available might be one way to show your interest and awareness of on-site services.**

- **Will this person be a good neighbor?** Do they want to help build a community where people take care of the building and participate in decisions about the building? Do they appear sensitive to others (i.e., won't blast their stereo late at night, has the skills required to respectfully discuss problems with their neighbors etc).

**Tip: You can ask about tenant association meetings, when these take place and how they operate.**

- **Is this person being honest and up front with me? If not, why not? What do they have to hide?**

**Tip: You should be consistent with your answers and be honest about what you don't understand about the residence.**

- **Can this person pass a Self-Preservation Test?**

**Tip: In many interviews, especially for congregate housing, applicants may be asked several questions around fire safety, including: name some ways you can tell if there is a fire; what would you do if the house you were in was on fire? Applicants may also be asked to take an evacuation test, where they will be required to leave the residence from a main and alternate exit in less than two and a half minutes. It may be helpful to practice these questions and skills prior to an interview, especially if English is not your first language.**