



# Family Self-Sufficiency Program

## Guidebook for Owners of Project-Based Section 8 Developments



**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Housing**

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# Family Self-Sufficiency Program Guidebook for Owners of Project-Based Section 8 Developments

Notice H-2016-08 authorizes owners of HUD-assisted multifamily developments with a Section 8 contract to establish a Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program at one or more of their developments. That Notice also describes the basic rules that apply to FSS programs that serve residents of privately-owned multifamily assisted developments.

This Guidebook provides owners with information on promising practices that can help them establish and run an effective FSS program. It is based primarily on lessons learned from existing FSS programs. This Guidebook is organized into chapters that cover most elements of the FSS program. The chapters are ordered in a way that follows the development and implementation of an FSS program, starting with planning an FSS program, moving on to implementing an FSS program, and concluding with the use of data to monitor the program’s success.

| Chapter   | Overview   |
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| 1. <a href="#">Understanding FSS</a>  | Overview of the key features of an FSS program.  |
| 2. <a href="#">Planning an FSS Program</a>                                  | Big picture items that owners should think about in developing their FSS programs.   |
| 3. <a href="#">Developing an FSS Action Plan</a>                            | Tips for putting together an FSS Action Plan that describes the policies and procedures of an FSS program. The FSS Action Plan is required by HUD. |
| 4. <a href="#">Staffing an FSS Program</a>                                  | Overview of FSS program coordinator responsibilities and advice on determining FSS staff caseloads, qualifications, and recommended training.      |
| 5. <a href="#">Developing Partnerships with Service Providers</a>           | Tips for identifying and partnering with local service partners.   |
| 6. <a href="#">Marketing the FSS Program to Residents</a>                   | Advice on how to market the FSS program to attract interest from residents.  |
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| A. <a href="#">FSS Program Resources</a>                                    | Links to program resources identified in the guidebook.  |
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# Chapter 1: Understanding FSS

## What is the Family Self-Sufficiency Program?

The Family Self-Sufficiency program helps assisted housing residents increase their earnings and build financial assets. The program has two key features:

- **A financial incentive for residents to increase their earnings** in the form of an escrow account that increases as residents' earnings increase. The escrow account helps residents build savings that they can use to improve their quality of life and advance their personal goals.
- **Case management or coaching** to help residents access services they may need to overcome barriers to employment, strengthen their financial capability, and address other challenges holding them back from achieving their goals.

The FSS program is optional for owners of multifamily assisted housing developments. Owners who want to establish an FSS program must develop a program design and then submit an FSS Action Plan to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for approval. Once HUD has approved the Action Plan, owners may admit residents into the program.

The FSS program is also voluntary for residents. Residents who choose to enroll in FSS work with an FSS program coordinator who helps them identify a series of intermediate and long-term goals and the steps they need to take to achieve those goals. These steps include services residents may need to access, such as job training or adult education. Each resident will have his or her identified goals and steps to achieve those goals recorded in an Individual Training and Services Plan (ITSP). The ITSP is part of an FSS Contract of Participation (CoP) signed by the owner and the participating family. The CoP records the commitments of the family and the owner to work together to achieve the identified goals.

Every FSS participant is required to have the following two goals in his or her FSS contract:

- (1) For every family member to become independent of income assistance from federal or state welfare programs for at least 12 months. The requirement applies solely to ongoing cash maintenance. Food stamps, Medicaid, or short-term non-recurring payments are not included.
- (2) To seek and maintain suitable employment. "Suitable" employment is different for every participant and is based on the individual skills, education, and job training of the participant as well as the community's available job opportunities.

Residents can also identify other goals. The CoP lasts five years, but residents can graduate sooner so long as they have achieved their goals. If residents need more time to fully achieve their goals, they can request up to two one-year extensions.

Once families enroll in FSS they become eligible to build savings through the FSS escrow account. The FSS escrow account is a savings account maintained by the property owner that grows as the earnings of FSS participants increase. Assisted housing residents pay rent based on a percentage of their household income. When residents' household income rises, the amount they must pay toward rent also rises. For FSS participants, the owner will deposit an amount equal to the increase in rent due to the household's increased earnings into the FSS escrow account. This allows FSS participants to build savings over time.

The specific rules governing the calculation of the escrow account are found in Notice H-2016-08, Section IV.E.4.

There are two ways FSS participants can access their escrowed savings:

- When FSS participants successfully graduate from the program by achieving their ITSP goals, they become eligible to withdraw the full amount of their escrowed savings, which they may use for any purpose.
- At the discretion of the FSS program, FSS participants may be allowed to access their escrowed funds prior to graduation when they have achieved one or more interim goals. FSS escrow funds can only be released early if the funds will be used for a purpose consistent with the participant's ITSP. For example, some FSS programs allow participants to withdraw FSS escrow funds to pay for tuition for college or a job training program or repairs to a car needed to commute to work.

Many FSS programs have one or more program coordinators who provide case management or coaching to participants throughout the course of the program. FSS program coordinators help participants stay on track toward achieving their goals and help participants access resources in the community to support their progress. Owners either employ program coordinators directly or have property management staff or other contracted staff perform the program coordinator function.

FSS programs must link participants to appropriate supportive services and programs necessary for participants to achieve their individual ITSP goals. These may include employment services (such as resume building, job search, and job training), services to build financial capability (including credit repair and financial education), educational programs (such as basic skills development, GED preparation, and two- or four-year college courses), and other service needs. HUD does not fund these services. Most FSS programs make these services available by forming partnerships with service providers in the community and then referring FSS participants to those partners to access the needed services and programs.

### **Why Do Owners of HUD-Assisted Multifamily Housing Establish FSS programs?**

There are several reasons why owners establish FSS programs:

- *FSS programs support owners' efforts to help residents make progress toward economic security.* By establishing an FSS program, owners gain the ability to provide an escrow account for their participants. The escrow account provides both a financial incentive for participants to increase their earnings and a vehicle for participants to build savings.
- *FSS programs help support a mixed-income resident body.* FSS helps existing residents increase their earnings and helps some residents transition to unassisted housing. This frees up space within the development for other needy households.
- *FSS builds loyalty and economic capacity among residents.* Residents appreciate being actively engaged in a forward-looking program designed to help them make progress toward economic security. As a result, like other service programs, FSS has the potential to decrease the incidence of nonpayment of rent, very short tenant stays, and resident damage to units.

## Chapter 2: Planning an FSS Program

This chapter describes suggested steps that owners should take to plan for the launch of their FSS program. The decisions that owners make during this planning phase will help them complete the FSS Action Plan and determine how to structure their FSS program.

### Learn about the Family Self-Sufficiency Program

A good first step is to learn as much as possible about the FSS program. Start by reviewing Notice H-2016-08, which provides guidance specific to multifamily FSS programs, as well as this Guidebook. Then review the resources on the [multifamily FSS page](#) on HUD Exchange, which include a range of introductory webinars. Another good source of information is the [PIH FSS program website](#) which includes, among other things, links to an online training and in-depth guidebook. While there are some policies that are specific to FSS programs run by private owners, the basic functioning of the FSS program is similar for multifamily and Public and Indian Housing (PIH) FSS programs.

Appendix A to this guide provides an annotated bibliography of materials about the FSS program. Appendix B describes the principal differences between multifamily and PIH FSS programs.

### Identify Funding for the Program

A thorough review of the funding rules described in Section I.D of Notice H-2016-08 will help owners understand the available funding for multifamily FSS programs. The largest expense associated with the FSS program is the cost of employing or retaining an FSS program coordinator. Owners who meet the criteria described in the Notice may use funds in their residual receipts account to pay for the cost of one or more FSS program coordinators. Owners planning to use available residual receipts to employ or retain an FSS program coordinator are exempt from the requirement to use residual receipts to offset Section 8 payments, as set forth in Housing Notice 2012-14, “Use of “New Regulation” Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments (HAP) Contracts Residual Receipts to Offset Project-Based Section 8 Housing Assistance Payments.”

Owners should review the current balance and past use of their residual receipts accounts. This will help them estimate whether and to what extent funds are available to cover the anticipated costs of an FSS program coordinator. Residual receipts are only allowed to cover salaries and benefits of FSS coordinators and cannot be used to support other aspects of the FSS program.

Residual receipt account funds will not be available until HUD approves the FSS Action Plan and the Residual Receipts Funds Authorization form [HUD-9250](#). HUD will approve residual receipt requests in accordance with [HUD Handbook 4350.1](#), Multifamily Asset Management and Project Servicing, Chapter 25.

In addition to FSS staff, owners should consider other FSS-related expenses:

- **Case management software** can be useful to support the coaching or case management of FSS participants. Owners who are already using existing property management software to track and report household data may be able to add case management or supportive services modules to their package. Stand-alone case management software is also available.

- **Modifications to the owner’s accounting software can be useful** to support calculation and tracking of the FSS escrow. HUD provides a template escrow worksheet ([HUD Form 52652](#)) to calculate the monthly FSS escrow deposit for each participant
- There are **expenses associated with managing the FSS program and program staff**. Owners need to consider whether the initial FSS program coordinator will also function as the program manager, overseeing the entire program. Owners may decide to use another staff member to manage the FSS program, such as the owner’s existing resident services or property management staff.

In addition to residual receipt funds, **owners may wish to consider the following funding sources** for their FSS programs:

- **Grants from philanthropic foundations**. Some FSS programs have successfully obtained grants to cover a portion of the costs associated with administering the program. In funding applications, owners can present both the residual receipts account funding and the HUD funding for the escrow account as leverage for foundation investments.
- **Partnerships with entities that have similar goals**. Owners may find that they can serve more families if they partner with other organizations that have similar goals of helping low-income residents to increase their earnings and assets. For example, case management services may be available for participants who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
  - Other organizations with similar missions, such as asset-building non-profit organizations, community action agencies, community colleges, agencies running employment and training programs, and others may also provide case management services. Based on the agencies’ and FSS program’s common goals and interest in serving the same population, the agencies may be willing to dedicate staff time to providing case management or coaching services for FSS participants.
- **Volunteers**. Some programs have used properly-supervised volunteers, students, or interns to augment the case management or coaching capacity of the FSS program. For example, college students earning their degree in social work or related fields often seek hands-on training and experience. FSS graduates or successful participants can also play a role by mentoring or working with other participants to help them achieve their goals. However, it would be difficult for an FSS program to provide case management or coaching solely with volunteers.

## Develop a Program Design

Individual FSS programs have substantial discretion to design programs that meet the specific needs of their participants. The following are some of the big-picture program design choices that owners may wish to consider in structuring their programs:

### *Overall Approach to Promoting and Supporting Work*

One advantage of FSS is that it does not require owners to follow a single specific approach to promoting and supporting work. This allows owners great flexibility to design programs that meet the needs of their residents. Another advantage is that the FSS Contract of Participation lasts five years. This is more time than many programs offer, allowing FSS participants to focus on long-term education and skills-development that can lead to higher-paying jobs.

The flexibility of FSS can also pose a challenge for new FSS programs. Individual owners will have to determine how much emphasis to place on the different tasks involved in supporting participants in

increasing their earnings (generally through referrals to service providers in the community). These tasks include helping participants to:

- Identify jobs for which they are qualified
- Prepare their resume and build job search skills
- Access basic education to address skills gaps and obtain a GED or high school equivalency diploma
- Access post-secondary education
- Access job training services
- Focus on building executive skills (such as the ability to break down complex challenges into manageable goals)
- Access child care and transportation services
- Persist in searching for and retaining a job

It is important for FSS programs to be flexible in tailoring service referrals and case management support to the needs of each individual. At the same time, it is helpful for coordinators to understand enough about their local job market and the challenges commonly faced by their participants to be able to identify the pathways that are likely to be most successful in helping participants meet their employment goals. This will help owners design effective programs to support these pathways.

Some FSS programs, for example, encourage participants with an interest in specific careers to focus their early efforts on obtaining a professional certification or college degree before obtaining a job so they can qualify for a higher paying career-ladder job. Other programs encourage all participants to be employed throughout the program, on the theory that they benefit from immediate and sustained participation in the workforce. Still other programs emphasize basic education and skill development before clients search for a job.

FSS programs do not need to select a single approach, and many find that a mix of approaches, tailored to the needs of each individual, is most effective. When starting a program, owners will benefit from talking with other FSS coordinators and partner agencies in the area. They can share information about which approaches have worked best for them under different circumstances. Owners will be better positioned to design an effective FSS program once they have a thorough understanding of the kinds of jobs available in their market and the qualifications needed to obtain them. In addition, it is helpful for owners to understand the needs and skills of prospective FSS participants, the types of services available in the community, and the approaches that have been used successfully to help individuals in similar situations increase their earnings.

### ***Case Management versus Coaching***

One of the main responsibilities of FSS program coordinators is to work with participants to help them fulfill their responsibilities under their Contract of Participation and achieve the goals set out in their Individual Training and Services Plan. FSS programs employ different approaches to working with participants. For example, some programs use what they call a “coaching” model, which they distinguish from a more traditional “case management” approach. In practice many FSS programs find that they draw on both approaches to varying degrees, but it is useful to highlight the two models so owners can decide how they want to structure their interaction with participants.

Under both the traditional case management and coaching approaches, FSS program coordinators:

- Assess the employment needs and interests of new FSS participants
- Identify services and training/education opportunities
- Make referrals for services and training
- Monitor the completion of goals in each participant's ITSP

The difference between the two models lies largely in how the interaction with the participant unfolds. In a traditional case management approach, the case manager provides guidance on what he or she thinks would be most helpful for the participant based on the results of an assessment of the participant's needs. The case manager then recommends specific services tailored to the participant's needs. This process is driven primarily by the case manager, who encourages participants to obtain the resources believed to best benefit them, based on that case manager's professional judgment.

In a coaching model, by contrast, the participants drive the process. As with the case manager approach, the participants select their own goals. However, in the coaching model the participants also determine how best to meet their goals. Coaches help participants understand the pros and cons of different approaches and provide encouragement and support through active listening. When requested by the participants, coaches make referrals to particular services. Ultimately, however, participants decide on the course of action, supported by coaches who see their role as helping the participants learn to address challenges on their own.

FSS coordinators may wish to adopt one or the other of these approaches, or may decide on an approach that blends aspects of both.

### ***Focus on Financial Capability***

FSS has always included an asset-building component in the form of an escrow account that grows as household earnings grow. Beyond the escrow account, however, individual FSS programs have discretion to decide how much to emphasize the goals of asset-building and building financial capability. Some FSS programs place a major emphasis on asset-building activities such as helping participants improve their credit scores, pay down high-interest debt, build savings, and develop and adhere to a budget. By building participants' financial capability in this way, the programs help to position participants to succeed in achieving their financial goals.

Focusing on financial capability also can be useful in helping participants to understand their options for spending their escrowed savings upon graduation. This may increase the likelihood that those funds are spent in a way that helps participants achieve their long-term goals.

Even programs that do not include a strong focus on building participants' financial capability usually refer participants as needed to partners that provide financial education or credit counseling. These programs can help address debt levels, low credit scores, and a participant's need for a checking account.

### **Determine Accountability Structure and Relationship to other FSS Programs**

Another important step in program planning is for owners to consider how they will structure their FSS programs in relation to other existing FSS programs administered in their area. Owners will want to determine whether they will partner with other FSS programs, such as those run by PHAs or other private owners, or develop their own program. Owners will also have to decide whether they will establish a program coordinating committee (PCC) or other type of advisory body. PCCs facilitate the

engagement of partners and provide oversight and input into their FSS programs. While assisted multifamily housing owners are not required to establish PCCs, owners must still secure commitments from public and private partners for the provision of supportive services and programs to FSS participants.

More information about PCCs and establishing relationships with existing FSS programs may be found in the [\*Developing Relationships with Service Providers\*](#) section below.

## Chapter 3: Developing an FSS Action Plan

Once owners have developed a program design, they can begin working on an FSS Action Plan. The plan describes the program's policies and procedures and is required by HUD. Owners cannot begin using residual receipts for the program or sign any contracts with participants until HUD approves the FSS Action Plan.

HUD's Notice H-2016-08 describes the required elements of an FSS Action Plan for multifamily owners. Owners may want to consider the following guidance as they develop their action plans:

- **Family demographics.** Owners should provide demographic information on the families expected to participate in the FSS program. New FSS programs may assume that FSS participants will have a similar composition to the overall resident body. The following data elements may help owners understand the service needs of FSS participants: household size, family composition, age of head of household and spouse, disability status of family members, income and sources of income, employment status, and educational levels.
- **Estimate of participating families.** Owners should describe the number of families expected to participate in their FSS program. It is illegal to refuse participation in FSS based on a participant's disability status or age. However, experience with FSS programs run by PHAs indicate that non-elderly non-disabled residents tend to enroll in FSS at a higher rate than older adults or persons with disabilities. Accordingly, the number of households headed by an individual who is neither a senior nor a person with a disability may be useful as a benchmark for estimating likely program participation.

Based on experience with PHA-run FSS programs, an owner may expect initial enrollment in FSS to equal about five to 10 percent of this benchmark. With aggressive outreach and marketing, some programs may reach 20 percent of this benchmark, but this will take time and usually is not achieved in the first year of operation. The amount of funding available for FSS program coordinators will also limit the number of participants a program can effectively serve.

- **Expected service needs of residents.** The demographics section should also discuss the expected service needs of residents. The information from annual recertifications of income can be helpful in identifying the employment status, income, and earnings of prospective participants. If available, survey data can provide a finer-grained understanding of resident goals and needs. An owner's existing resident service coordinator and community partners can also help to identify the services that residents will need to increase their income and build assets.
- **Outreach efforts.** Owners should describe the outreach activities they plan to conduct to market the program to potential FSS participants. An overview of basic outreach and marketing strategies for FSS may be found in the [Marketing the FSS Program to Residents](#) section.
- **Incentives to participation.** Owners should describe the incentives they will offer to encourage residents to enroll in FSS. Incentives include the FSS escrow account as well as any other program component that can motivate residents to participate and successfully complete the FSS program. Examples of incentives include allowing interim disbursements of escrow account funds for education- or employment-related activities, matching funds for savings in an Individual Development Account, a fund to help participants meet emergency needs without tapping their escrow accounts, and financial support for education and training. More information on interim disbursements can be found in the [Working with Residents](#) chapter.

- **List of FSS activities and services.** The Action Plan should describe the FSS activities and services/resources that owners will provide to residents, both directly and through partners. Service categories typically provided include education, job skills training, employment, mental health/health, financial education, child care, transportation, and case management/coaching. If the owner offers other self-sufficiency programs at the property where the FSS program will be administered, these should be noted, along with a description of how the FSS program will complement the existing resources.
- **Method of identifying family support needs.** Owners should describe how families' needs will be identified and linked to appropriate support services. Owners should describe the assessment tools and case management/coaching techniques they plan to use to identify barriers to participants' employment and describe how they will provide participants with services to overcome these barriers.
- **Implementation schedule.** The Action Plan must include a schedule for program implementation, including when enrollment will begin. Owners should plan to have their marketing strategy prepared and ready to be executed as soon as HUD approves the Action Plan and the use of residual receipts (if applicable). This will help owners meet their enrollment targets within the initial nine month period so they can access the residual receipts funds. Additional information on residual receipt funds can be found in the [Working with Residents](#) chapter.
- **FSS enrollment policies.** The Action Plan must describe the policies and procedures for admitting participants to the FSS program. Owners must establish an objective selection process. For example, families may be selected via lottery or based on the date when a potential participant was admitted into subsidized housing or first expressed interest in FSS. Owners are not permitted to adopt any other preferences, such as for people of a particular educational level, employment status, or age. The Action Plan should describe any ineligibility criteria for participation in the FSS program such as failure to comply with lease requirements or previous termination from the FSS program.
- **Screening for motivation.** Owners are permitted to screen residents for motivation to participate in the FSS program. For example, an owner can require heads of households to complete a prerequisite to demonstrate interest in FSS, such as attending an FSS orientation or a meeting with an FSS program coordinator. Any required tasks must be accessible to all potential applicants, including persons with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency.

## Chapter 4: Staffing an FSS Program

Owners have discretion in determining their program’s staffing structure. Most FSS programs have at least one staff member whose sole or primary responsibility is administering the FSS program. This position is known as an **FSS program coordinator**, FSS case manager, or FSS coach. Owners may employ one or more FSS program coordinators directly or contract with another organization to serve as the FSS program coordination staff.

The functions generally executed by FSS program coordinators are listed in the box to the right.

While FSS program coordinators can maintain and track escrow account transactions, often the owner’s accounting staff perform this responsibility. In some programs, FSS coordinators conduct annual and interim income recertifications for FSS participants. In these situations, properties do not have to coordinate the interaction of FSS program coordinators and recertification staff. In other programs, the functions are kept separate, which frees up time for the FSS coordinator to provide case management or coaching to more participants. The latter approach takes advantage of the coordinators’ specialized skills and reduces concerns that the income verification process could interfere with the development of trust between the coordinator and FSS participants.

Based on the estimate of participants and HUD’s caseload guidelines in Notice 2016-08, owners can determine how many FSS program coordinators will be needed to staff the program. They can also decide if current resident services or property management staff can take on this role or if they must hire new staff or contract with a third party to administer the FSS coordinator’s functions.

### ***FSS program coordinator responsibilities include:***

- Recruiting participants
- Completing participant assessments
- Helping participants set goals
- Formalizing the ITSP and CoP
- Building partnerships with providers
- Supporting participants’ job search, placement, retention, and advancement and achievement of other goals
- Making referrals to service providers
- Monitoring participant progress
- Maintaining escrow accounts
- Determining when a participant has graduated and approving escrow disbursements
- Reporting on program outcomes

### **Oversight of FSS Program Coordinators**

Owners will need to assign someone to be responsible for designing the FSS program, overseeing its execution, and providing support to FSS program coordinators when they run into challenges. Owners that contract with third party organizations to administer the FSS program on their behalf should consider how the owners will monitor the performance of the contractor through regular meetings, reports, and review of a sample of FSS participant files. At a minimum, managers should review the FSS reports that are submitted to HUD on a quarterly basis. Additional information on FSS Quarterly Reports can be found in [Chapter 8: Monitoring an FSS Program](#).

### **Typical Caseloads**

Owners have discretion to determine how many participants to assign to each FSS program coordinator, but must meet certain minimum caseloads if they wish to obtain HUD approval to use residual receipts to fund the salaries and benefits of FSS coordinators. Notice H-2016-08 notes that one full-time FSS

program coordinator is generally expected to serve at least 25 individual participants. HUD may approve one part-time FSS program coordinator if the owner plans to serve fewer than 25 individual participants. An additional part-time coordinator may also be employed at the same hours-participant ratio.

On average, PIH FSS programs have found that one full-time FSS program coordinator is generally expected to serve at least 25 individual participants, while each additional full-time coordinator should be able to serve at least 50 participants. The caseload is set at 25 for the first full-time FSS program coordinator to allow the coordinator time to develop the program design and build relationships with service providers. This results in a caseload of approximately 75 individual participants for two full-time program coordinators. However, some PIH FSS programs report average coordinator caseloads that are larger than HUD's recommended guidelines. For example, some programs report participant caseloads of 65, 75, 100, or more for one full-time coordinator. FSS coordinators' ability to manage their caseloads will be contingent upon whether they have other responsibilities, such as income certifications. Owners considering large caseloads should be careful to monitor their programs to ensure coordinators have sufficient time to provide participants with the support they need to succeed in reaching their goals.

### **Preferred Qualifications for FSS Program Coordinators**

Many FSS programs require coordinators to possess at least a four-year college degree in social work or a related field. However, some programs also report success using coordinators that have less education but substantial prior case management experience. Coordinators should be nonjudgmental, be committed to the mission of the program, have relevant work experience, and demonstrate comfort working with low-income families and diverse populations. Coordinators should preferably have knowledge of the local resources available to help residents increase their earnings and assets. However, if needed, knowledge of resources can be learned on the job.

### **FSS Program Coordinator Training**

Ongoing training in the following areas will help FSS program coordinators succeed in their positions:

- **Basic requirements of FSS.** An overview of all aspects of the program, including the escrow account, will benefit all FSS coordinators, even those who are not responsible for calculating escrow. It is essential that FSS program coordinators understand what the account is and how it is calculated so they can explain the account to participants.
- **Developing trusting, supportive relationships with participants.** FSS program coordinators should ideally enter the position with experience working with the populations served by the FSS program. Nonetheless, ongoing training will be essential for helping participants overcome a broad range of challenges. For example, many FSS participants have inconsistent work histories and limited employable skills, complicated by low educational attainment and poor credit scores. Some have also experienced trauma, instability, and they and/or their children suffer from chronic mental and/or physical health issues. Many FSS participants are single parents and some may lack a support system, models for effective parenting, or the belief that they can improve their lives. Training topics that may be helpful include motivational interviewing, coaching, and trauma-informed care.
- **Conducting FSS participant assessments.** FSS coordinators need to know how to conduct thorough and thoughtful participant assessments. Assessments help coordinators ascertain participants' service needs, strengths, and barriers to accessing education, employment, and financial management (such as poor budgeting, high levels of credit card debt, or low credit scores).

- **Working with participants to facilitate their economic security and keep them on track.** FSS coordinators should be prepared to help participants define and achieve goals focused on three key areas: education and job training, employment, and financial capability.
- **Tracking progress for reporting.** FSS coordinators may need training on case management or other software systems used to track participant data and program outcomes.
- **Finding local resources to help participants overcome barriers.** Ideally, FSS program coordinators will come to the position with some knowledge of available community resources and services. However, they may need training on how to locate resources and successfully connect participants with effective programs. Since personal referrals are often most effective, personal introductions to key partners are very important.
- **Providing crisis intervention.** FSS coordinators should be well-versed in resources for crisis intervention to address issues such as a need for immediate financial assistance, a family member’s medical or mental health or physical safety issues, or educational or training problems.

### **FSS Program Coordinator Training Materials**

There are a number of training resources available through consulting firms and other organizations. While most of these resources charge a fee, some offer an initial or teaser class free of charge. A web search for “Family Self-Sufficiency program training” should identify options for such training. Additionally, some local PHAs have developed their own FSS trainings and offer this training to other PHAs or FSS programs for free or a nominal fee. When making initial contact with local PHAs, owners can inquire whether any of these trainings are available in their community.

Although not specific to the FSS program, there are numerous resources and training related to case management, coaching, financial counseling, and workforce development available on the Internet or from consultants or other training organizations.

## Chapter 5: Developing Partnerships with Service Providers

Strong partnerships with service providers are essential to the success of local FSS programs. Owners must ensure that residents have access to available resources and identify these resources in their FSS Action Plans. FSS participants have a diverse range of needs and educational and employment backgrounds. By identifying a broad range of partners and building close working relationships with them to facilitate referrals, FSS program coordinators can greatly expand the resources available to help participants succeed.

### Key Supportive Services Partners

While the availability and coordination of supportive services will vary from one community to the next, FSS program coordinators should strive to secure partners who can provide services in the following areas:

- **Employment Training Programs and Placement.** Every FSS program should include employment training and placement partners. Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) or Workforce Development Boards that operate state and local workforce development and training programs can provide FSS participants with access to specific work-promoting services. The WIBs oversee the [American Job Centers](#) (formerly One-Stop Career Shops) that provide employment search and training assistance. Other important employment-related partners include local employers and providers who offer career planning advice, job search assistance, assistance with resume-building, and training in soft skills such as communication and organizational skills that will help participants succeed in maintaining employment.
- **Education and Skills Development.** Key partners in education and employment training include local Adult Education programs, community colleges, four-year colleges, vocational training programs, and employment placement services, as well as programs funded with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment & Training funds.
- **Financial Education and Capability.** Partners who provide important asset-building and financial education services include financial education and credit counseling providers, asset-building nonprofit organizations, homeownership counseling providers, and banks and credit unions.
- **Human Services/TANF Agency.** If a significant percentage of residents are receiving TANF or welfare benefits, the local department of human services or TANF agency will be an important partner for the owner's FSS program. In addition to already working with many of the same families, these agencies provide services for which FSS participants may be eligible including employment services, health and mental health services, cash assistance, child care, and emergency financial assistance. The TANF agency can also be a significant source of connections to other programs that serve low-income families.
- **City or County Government.** Owners should reach out to representatives of their city or county government, such as the office of the Mayor or City Council. Local governments have been a source of funding for some FSS programs, including through allocations of grant funds to local departments of health and mental health services, for example, to provide services and resources to FSS program participants.

Other important partners include the Department of Rehabilitation Services and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) organizations. Still others include organizations providing literacy and English

language classes, program funders, disability service providers, transportation services, child care providers, and agencies providing emergency services.

## Program Coordinating Committee

FSS programs run by PHAs are required to have a Program Coordinating Committee (PCC) comprised of core partner agencies. Multifamily housing owners are not required to establish a PCC, but there may be good strategic reasons to do so. A PCC helps FSS programs engage and keep the interest of service providers and provides a forum to discuss how to align services with the needs of FSS participants. Multifamily owners can establish their own PCC or seek to partner with another owner or a PHA to share a PCC or participate in an existing PCC. Alternatively, owners may want to set up a different kind of advisory body to provide oversight and input into the FSS program.

The PCC is usually comprised of some or all of the service providers that accept referrals for FSS participants. At a minimum, PCC members should include agencies focused on employment, adult education, financial education, and other key services of particular local interest. It is also good practice for at least one FSS participant to be on the PCC.

The formal role of the PCC is to help guide the administration of the FSS program and ensure that there are available supportive services to meet the needs of program participants. While there are some rules that govern PCC composition for PHA FSS programs, owners of multifamily assisted developments can determine the size and makeup of the PCC and how frequently it meets.

Many PHA FSS program PCCs meet quarterly or twice a year. Owners may choose to meet more or less often depending on how much guidance and collaboration are needed. As an FSS program initially gets off the ground, an owner may need more frequent meetings. Typical discussion topics at PCC meetings include updates on outreach and enrollment in the FSS program, proposed changes to the program, and gaps in resources or new service needs. Owners may also want to regularly celebrate participant successes and graduations and invite graduates and other participants to PCC meetings to share their experiences in the program.

## Identifying Potential Partners

There are many ways to identify potential service partners, and owners are encouraged to identify as many providers as possible to understand the full spectrum of services available in their communities. Owners can look within their own networks for potential service providers. If owners already provide some supportive services at the property where the FSS program is being developed, they should build off their existing established relationships with service providers. If owners operate supportive housing, onsite property managers at these developments may also be good sources of potential service partners.

### ***Should you have a PCC?***

A PCC provides a forum for:

- Engaging partners and building and maintaining their interest in FSS
- Coordinating services among different providers to ensure the needs of FSS participants are met
- Collaborating on grant applications and funding opportunities
- Obtaining input on proposed FSS Action Plans and policy changes
- Learning about other programs in the community
- Building a network of programs that advocate for and support each other

Below are recommendations on how to identify service providers and develop referral relationships with them.

### ***Contact Local PHA FSS Programs***

Whether or not a multifamily owner decides to develop a formal partnership with an existing FSS program, such as through a shared PCC, a good place to start to identify local service providers is to contact a PHA that operates an FSS program in the owner's community. The existing FSS program should be a good source of information on the local service providers they find most valuable for their participants.

A list of HUD-funded PHA FSS programs may be found on [HUD's website](#). Some PHAs run FSS programs without HUD coordinator funding. Even if your local PHA is not on the list, it is still worthwhile to contact it to see if it offers an FSS program.

### ***Contact other Local Organizations that Serve Low-Income Families***

Owners also can join or build off other existing service provider networks in the community. Often city or county government or TANF agencies will have a committee or standing meetings of organizations that serve low-income families. Nonprofit organizations such as Goodwill or United Way may have advisory committees or regular community meetings with service providers. Community newspapers and websites and local government websites are good sources of information about community organizations and standing government committees and meetings.

### ***Consult Provider Directories***

When building a service provider network from the ground up, it is helpful to consult provider directories. For example, the 211 network is a national initiative to provide a centralized resource for people to learn about available supportive services in their community. A directory of 211 local networks may be found at [www.211.org](http://www.211.org). Another online resource is [www.auntbertha.com](http://www.auntbertha.com), a directory of government assistance and supportive service programs searchable by zip code. In some communities, the United Way or other local organization may also maintain a directory of providers.

## **Potential Arrangements with Partners**

HUD does not require that owners formalize relationships with service providers with a written agreement, but there are some circumstances in which it is good practice to do so. Some PHA-administered FSS programs find it useful to document relationships in writing, and believe that written partnership agreements are helpful for clarifying expectations and deepening the partner's commitment to serving FSS participants. Other PHA FSS program coordinators recommend developing informal partnerships with providers; formal agreements take time to execute and may be unnecessary since many providers offer services that FSS residents could access outside of the FSS program. Still other PHAs have established a middle ground, creating informal partnership agreements that do not need to be signed by the heads of the organizations but still lay out general expectations for the services that will be provided and how they will be coordinated, and what participant data will be tracked and reported between agencies.

There are occasions in which a formal written partnership agreement is particularly important. If owners and partners intend to share data with one another about their interaction with residents, it is vital that the parties develop a written policy on how the resident data will be shared and protected for confidentiality. A contract or other formal agreement is also recommended if money is exchanged for services. If a formal partnership is desired, owners can sign Memorandums of Agreement or Understandings that define each organization's responsibilities in the program.

### ***Frequency of Interaction with Service Providers***

The frequency of interaction between FSS program coordinators and providers can vary depending on the communication preferences of the FSS program and the provider. Some partners may wish to be in communication with the FSS program each time the FSS program makes a referral. Others may want to establish a regular schedule for communicating information on participants, whether it is by in-person meetings, phone calls, emails, or written reports. Some PHAs report stronger results when the FSS coordinator contacts a specific individual at the partner agency to let them know they are making a referral and to provide a personal introduction to the FSS participant being referred.

### ***Tracking Participant Referrals to Providers***

In order to determine whether participants have achieved their ITSP goals, FSS program coordinators may need to verify whether the participants have followed through on the referrals for services and resources. FSS coordinators can obtain this information either from self-reporting by participants or from the providers themselves. To meet this objective, FSS coordinators are encouraged to develop a way to track referrals, including the dates participants enroll in and complete services. Some FSS programs have established a simple referral form that is sent to the provider when a referral is made. The coordinator fills in information about the participant and his or her service needs; the provider completes information about the resident's participation and returns the form.

Some FSS programs have established agreements with service providers to share participants' data with one another. PHAs can sometimes get read-only access to the databases of partner agencies so that they can track referrals and see whether participants enroll in or complete programs or services. This access can reduce the need for tracking forms and follow-up calls to service providers. If an FSS coordinator wants to share participants' data with another agency, the participant will need to sign a release of information. This release must be voluntary and can be incorporated into the FSS enrollment process when the participant signs the contract of participation. The release must indicate the types of information that will be shared and with which organizations.

## Chapter 6: Marketing the FSS Program to Residents

Because FSS is a voluntary program, owners will need to proactively market FSS to their residents to encourage them to enroll. Many FSS programs have found recruitment to be a challenge given the voluntary nature of the program, residents' wariness of a new and unknown program, and in some cases negative experiences with prior resident services programs. An effective marketing strategy is a key component of program design and implementation.

Simultaneously employing a variety of tactics may be the best way to reach prospective participants. Many residents may need to hear about FSS several times before deciding to participate. At a minimum, owners should educate all property-based and visiting staff about the basics of the FSS program. Interested participants should be referred to a central point person for more detailed program information and enrollment.

If there are more interested residents than coordinators' caseloads will allow, owners can establish objective selection procedures to govern admission into the program.

The following are marketing approaches that have been used successfully by FSS programs to recruit participants. It is recommended that all programs utilize, at a minimum, the first two approaches, which leverage properties' regular interactions with residents. Mass mailings are also efficient ways of reaching large numbers of residents. As programs gain experience, they may wish to consider using peer representatives to help market the program; experience has shown they can be very persuasive in encouraging other residents to try the program.

- **Providing information at initial occupancy.** Sharing information about FSS during orientation for new residents is a good opportunity to educate them about the program and its benefits. Residents can begin thinking about the benefits of FSS so they are prepared to enroll the next time they are asked. Including communication about FSS in an orientation meeting also helps to establish FSS as a core component of the owner's housing program. A form can be included in new residents' welcome packets for interested residents to complete and return.
- **Annual recertification meetings, case management sessions, and other one-on-one interactions.** Many PHAs provide information on the FSS program to eligible residents at annual recertification meetings and other individual meetings. Since the resident's income and monthly rent are discussed at these meetings, there is a natural segue to discuss the benefits of the FSS program in terms of building escrow. It is also helpful to have FSS brochures or fact sheets at the desks of all staff who meet with residents.
- **Peer representatives.** Connecting potential FSS enrollees to current program participants or successful graduates can be a very effective marketing tool. Current or graduated FSS participants can speak at group meetings, be listed as a resource on promotional materials, or be matched one-on-one with potential enrollees.
- **Group meetings.** Community meetings, social events, and other formal or informal resident gatherings are great spaces to introduce and discuss the FSS program and introduce the FSS program coordinator. Together the FSS coordinator and property management staff can explain the program and answer residents' questions.

- **Targeted outreach.** Door-to-door outreach and other strategic, targeted efforts, such as eye-catching fliers and brochures, are good ways to inform residents who are less involved in the community.
- **Mass mailings.** Mass mailings require less staff time than door-to-door outreach. Mailings can include inspirational postcards that appeal to residents' desires to obtain higher earnings and build savings. Other promotional and informational materials and a program application can also be enclosed. Due to the low cost and significant outreach capacity, many FSS programs employ this marketing strategy.
- **Advertising in public spaces.** Owners can advertise the FSS program on bulletin boards and by leaving promotional materials in lobbies or other public spaces.

### ***Suggested Informational Materials***

Many of the recommended outreach strategies involve written informational materials. Materials can be distributed widely by the owner as well as by partners who interact regularly with residents. The following are suggested topics for informational materials:

- **A description of the FSS program**, noting that it is a voluntary program designed to last five years, but that residents can complete their goals and graduate from the program sooner.
- **A description of the process through which participants advance through the FSS program** including participant assessments, developing individual service plans, and identifying steps to achieve long-term goals.
- **A list of benefits of enrollment in the FSS program**, including automatic savings through an escrow account and the support, guidance, and resource linkages provided by an FSS program coordinator.
- **Sample escrow calculations** that highlight how growth in earnings leads to substantial escrowed savings.
- **A list of services** that the FSS program can help participants access.
- **Sample profiles of successful FSS program graduates** can be effective recruiting tools. All profiles should be with the explicit permission of the individual and should only include their first names or initials or use a pseudonym.

## Chapter 7: Working with Residents

Once a program has launched and recruited participants, the essential work of helping residents begins. This section focuses on working with residents. The section begins with a summary of the applicable program requirements, including developing the CoP and ITSP and tracking and disbursing escrow funds. It then provides practical tips on how to assess participant service needs, work with residents to develop goals, and support residents as they work toward achieving those goals.

### FSS Program Requirements for Working with Residents

There are several program requirements for resident participation in FSS. HUD requires that FSS programs:

- Create and execute a CoP with each participating family and an ITSP for each participating family member
- Refer participants to needed supportive services and resources
- Monitor participants' progress toward their goals
- Track participants' escrow account balances
- Make determinations regarding the eligibility of participants to access their escrowed savings

This section provides information on these and other roles that FSS coordinators play in working to support residents in achieving their goals and successfully graduating from FSS.

### *Contract of Participation (CoP) and Individual Training and Services Plan (ITSP)*

Notice H-2016-08 includes detailed information on the CoP and ITSP and provides a sample of each document.

All participating families must enter into a CoP that sets out the rights and responsibilities of the FSS family and the owner. The CoP is signed by the head of household and the owner (or the property management company as the owner's agent). The CoP must incorporate an ITSP for each participating family member.

FSS programs may work with any interested adult household members. Each adult participant must develop his or her own ITSP. The ITSP specifies the services that will be provided to the participant, the activities and steps that the participant will take, and the estimated, agreed-upon completion dates for the services and activities.

The ITSP includes goals established by the participants that reflect their aspirations for achievement by the end of the CoP. Every CoP must include the following two goals which must be achieved before a household can graduate and receive its full escrow savings:

- A **final goal** that the head of household must seek and maintain suitable employment by the expiration of the CoP, and
- An **interim goal** that the FSS family must be free of welfare assistance (e.g., TANF cash assistance) for at least a year before the expiration of the CoP.

### *Tracking Escrow Balances*

Owners are responsible for maintaining a single depository account for the escrowed savings of all FSS participating families. The escrowed savings must be deposited in one or more HUD-approved

investments. Owners must carefully account for the amount of escrowed savings (and associated investment income) of each participating family and provide families with regular statements of their escrow balances. These statements must be provided at least once per year, but it is good practice to provide statements more often. The statements can help motivate participants to further increase their earnings. HUD has developed a sample escrow tracking sheet for multifamily housing owners or owners may purchase their own accounting software program for this purpose. Existing accounting software programs that are designed specifically for HUD assisted housing programs may already include this function.

As described in Notice H-2016-08, participants whose income exceeds 80 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) will no longer accrue escrow funds. They can, however, remain in the FSS program until the CoP has expired, they have met their goals, or they have left the project-based Section 8 development. Owners may modify goals for families whose income has increased to exceed 80 percent of AMI to allow these families to graduate and access their escrowed funds, so long as the head of household has maintained suitable employment and all family members are independent from cash welfare assistance for at least a year.

### ***Disbursing Escrowed Funds***

FSS program coordinators make the determination of whether FSS participants have met their ITSP and CoP goals and can “graduate” from FSS, entitling the participating families to full disbursement of their escrowed funds. In order to graduate, the head of household must be suitably employed, the family must have been independent of cash welfare assistance for at least a year, and all members of the family with an ITSP must have met their goals, as determined by the FSS coordinator. In support of this determination, FSS coordinators should maintain participant records, including copies of class schedules, grades, certificates, diplomas, and degrees that are relevant to the participant’s ITSP goals. FSS participants have up to five years to graduate from the program and may request an extension of up to two years if needed to complete their contracts, for a total of seven years. FSS programs have discretion to decide whether or not to approve the extension requests. FSS participants may also graduate before the CoP’s expiration date and many do. FSS families may graduate as soon as they have completed their goals

FSS programs may also establish policies to allow interim disbursements of some of the escrowed savings. Interim disbursements are at the discretion of the owner and should only be released for purposes consistent with the CoP and its ITSPs. For example, a participant may need funds for college tuition, a training or GED program, books or other training materials, used car purchase or repair, or uniforms for work.

### **Advice and Tips for Working with FSS Participants**

As long as they comply with the above basic requirements, owners have great latitude to determine how best to work with participants to help them achieve their goals. Owners and FSS coordinators, with HUD approval, can establish their own procedures and standards for working with residents that match the mission of their agency and meet the unique needs of their community. The following section summarizes practical advice from other FSS coordinators on helping residents meet their goals and graduate from the FSS program.

### ***Participant Assessment Best Practices***

Both traditional case management and coaching models rely on participant assessments to identify supportive service needs and barriers to education and employment. A participant assessment is needed in order to develop the initial ITSP and is usually performed when the participant first begins the

enrollment process. Collecting information on residents when they enroll in the FSS program can also help FSS coordinators provide individualized coaching and resource information.

There are numerous assessment tools available online for free, but their quality and comprehensiveness vary. FSS program coordinators are encouraged to review different assessment tools. Often FSS coordinators will adapt existing assessment tools or develop their own assessment tools tailored to the needs of their program.

At a minimum, it is recommended that the assessment tool include the following basic information on the family:

- Legal status
- Marital status
- Household members
- Educational level
- Vocational training, licenses, and certifications
- Employment history
- Career interests
- Family income
- Monthly spending
- Amount of savings and other assets
- Amount of debt
- Credit score
- Child care needs
- Transportation needs
- Health and mental health needs

**Below are additional tips from FSS program coordinators on how to conduct participant assessments:**

- Coordinators should schedule ample time with residents to complete initial assessments at enrollment. A comprehensive assessment can take one to two hours to complete.
- To the extent possible, assessments should be completed in person to strengthen the relationship and build trust between the FSS program coordinator and new participant.
- Participant assessments should take a holistic view of the family. Coordinators should consider the participant's and other household members' health and mental health, financial skills and well-being, and other conditions that could create barriers to employment.
- Coordinators should ask about the family's ability to overcome barriers in the past. Learning which methods for increasing participants' skills and earnings have worked (or not) in the past will provide beneficial information to the coordinator.
- To build trust and mutual respect, coordinators should only ask about the factors relevant to the participant's success and not topics beyond the scope of the program.

***Practitioner Advice for Developing ITSP Goals***

Programs can take different approaches to developing goals. In addition to the two required goals that the participant seek employment and the entire family become free of cash welfare assistance, participants and coordinators can work together to establish additional interim and final goals. Many PHA FSS programs only establish a single final employment goal for participants. These programs establish other employment-related goals such as education and vocational training as interim goals. Others prefer to identify all long-term goals as final goals, using the term "interim goals" to refer to goals that can be achieved in a relatively short time frame.

Developing goals may require an additional one- to two-hour meeting between the FSS program coordinator and the participant beyond the time needed for the participant assessment. Other FSS

programs combine the participant assessment and discussion of job interests and goals into one meeting.

**Below is some practical advice from FSS practitioners on how to work with residents to establish FSS goals.**

### ***Establish Long-Term Goals***

Since all FSS heads of household must be suitably employed by the end of the CoP period, some programs focus on setting goals primarily related to employment and education necessary for obtaining suitable employment. For example, residents who do not have a high school diploma or college degree may identify obtaining these degrees as interim goals on the path to stable and higher level employment. Residents with a high school diploma or equivalent may be interested in pursuing a two- or four-year college degree or taking targeted job training courses. Completion of these programs could be included as goals for those participants.

Participant goals can also expand beyond a focus on education, training, and employment. They may address the head of household's health, mental health, financial literacy, as well as the needs of other household members.

Some common long-term goals for FSS participants (beyond the required goals) include:

- Completing a specific job skills training and obtain a license/certificate
- Obtaining a GED or high school equivalency credential
- Obtaining an associate or bachelor's degree
- Obtaining a promotion/wage increase
- Completing financial literacy, budgeting, and credit repair training
- Completing homeownership preparedness training

### ***Break down Long Term Goals into Smaller Steps***

For each long-term goal identified in the ITSP, coordinators may wish to work with participants to determine smaller steps—sometimes called “activities” or “milestones”—that the participant needs to take to progress toward meeting the goal. For example, if a long-term goal is completion of a GED or high school equivalency, activities could include learning about the requirements for obtaining a diploma, enrolling and completing specific GED preparatory courses, and taking a practice test. Establishing and tracking achievement of smaller steps is a good way to monitor participants' progress. Tracking these activities also helps participants achieve small successes and build confidence.

While an ITSP must be developed as part of the participant's enrollment into FSS, many participants may not be ready to establish all of their interim and final goals when they enroll. Some FSS coordinators address this challenge by initially establishing small, short-term goals in the ITSP that the participant can complete within three months (along with the required goals). Then, as work with the participant progresses, the ITSP can be amended to establish additional steps and longer-term goals as appropriate.

### ***Set Reasonable and Attainable Goals***

Goals should be realistic and attainable within the FSS CoP term. To ensure that difficult-to-attain goals do not act as a barrier to graduation and receipt of escrow funds, many FSS programs prefer to include in the ITSP only those goals that the participant can realistically achieve, rather than those based on factors outside of the participant's control. For example, many participants aspire to become homeowners. However, a family's ability to purchase a home in their desired community is based on a variety of factors including local

housing prices. A more attainable goal may be the completion of a homeownership and counseling course. Likewise, it may not be prudent to identify specific hourly or annual wages as a goal. Wage goals could better be measured by percent increases or broader income ranges.

The ITSP may be modified before the participant graduates. This gives FSS program coordinators and participants the flexibility to revise the ITSP if needed to allow a participant who has made substantial progress to graduate. Many FSS programs value this flexibility as it ensures participants' goals can be adjusted to reflect changing circumstances or interests. Sometimes previously identified goals are no longer appropriate or obtainable. Participants who achieve their goals prior to the end of their CoP may also modify their ITSP to add new goals, if approved by the FSS program coordinator.

There is no penalty for completing FSS goals early. Participants do not need to wait until their CoP period ends before accessing their escrow account if they meet their final goals.

### ***Develop Templates for Common Goals***

Coordinators may want to develop ITSP templates for certain common goals such as securing employment, completion of educational or vocational training, financial counseling/credit repair, and homeownership preparedness. While templates can be a good starting point for helping residents develop their own goals, each ITSP must reflect the individual needs, interests, and goals of the participant and his/her household.

The following are some examples of participant goals and the activities indicated to reach them:

#### **Goal: Graduate from Community College with an Associate Degree**

| <b>Activities/Services</b>   | <b>Timeline/Target Date</b>  |
|--|------------------------------|
| 1. Contact the college's financial aid office for assistance in applying for financial aid                                 | Six months from enrollment   |
| 2. Enroll in classes each term and provide class schedule  | One year from enrollment     |
| 3. Continue enrollment at least ½ time (6 credit hours on a 12-credit system)  | Each semester while enrolled |
| 4. Maintain at least a 2.0 average in all classes and submit grades to FSS program coordinator at the end of each semester | Each semester while enrolled |

#### **Goal: Complete Homeownership Preparation Activities**

| <b>Activities / Services</b>                | <b>Timeline/Target Date</b> |
|---|-----------------------------|
| 1. Obtain a credit report                   | Two months from enrollment  |
| 2. Pay off current debts. No late payments. | Ongoing                     |
| 3. Complete homeownership counseling class  | By end of year 2            |
| 4. Obtain mortgage pre-qualification        | By end of year 4            |

### **Tips for Keeping Participants on Track to Meet their Goals**

Most FSS program coordinators establish regularly scheduled in-person meetings, emails, or phone calls with participants. In doing so, they can check in on participants' service needs and progress toward meeting their goals. FSS programs may use a combination of communication methods, but it is recommended that coordinators check in with participants on a regular basis. The frequency of these meetings or communications varies widely among FSS programs or even within programs, but most FSS

coordinators schedule monthly or quarterly check-ins with their participants. The coordinator's caseload and participant needs may also affect the frequency of one-on-one meetings.

Below is some advice from FSS program coordinators on establishing ongoing communication with participants:

- Meeting participants in person and on a regular basis is the best way to assess a participant's needs and progress toward goals. Meetings allow coordinators and participants to assess progress toward goals and maintain a trusting relationship.
- Meeting with participants in their home is also an option if the family is amenable. Coordinators might gain insight into barriers to family members' employment by observing the home environment. Participants might not readily bring up or even recognize these issues.
- Communicating with participants by email or text may be beneficial for certain occasions such as following up on referrals, sending reminders for appointments, or marketing FSS programs or events.
- FSS coordinators may want to meet with those seeking employment more often than those who are already employed because they may need more services or have more barriers to address. However, FSS coordinators have noted that the start of a new job may also be a time when additional support is needed.
- Participants who are working full time may find it difficult to meet in person during business hours. Programs should consider options for facilitating the continued participation of employed participants, such as scheduling meetings outside of business hours, meeting less often, or allowing certain check-ins to take place by phone or email.
- A monthly or quarterly newsletter can be a good way to keep residents engaged and aware of services and events.

***Tips on Monitoring Participant Progress during Meetings***

- Go over the ITSP and review participant goals and action steps
- Recognize and celebrate small achievements and steps toward larger goals
- Show how much the participant has accrued in his/her escrow account
- Develop personal reports that visually show participants' progress toward goals
- Ask open-ended questions to understand how the participant is doing and whether he or she is experiencing challenges

## Chapter 8: Monitoring an FSS Program

HUD will monitor multifamily FSS programs through required reports that owners submit on FSS participants and their outcomes. Owners must submit quarterly reports that provide basic information such as the head of household's starting and ending education level, start and end date of the CoP, and escrow balance, as well as information on program completions and terminations. Notice H-2016-08 includes a sample reporting tool and documentation that owners must keep on file for HUD's review. HUD will also monitor progress of the FSS program through submission of data collected by the owner from the participant at required income recertifications.

Many FSS programs collect and analyze more than the required program data in order to track the success of participants and to monitor program outcomes. Some programs have established their own internal program goals or are accountable to internal management boards or external funders. Program data can also be helpful when applying for outside funding or recruiting service partners. Data showing community needs and initial program successes can be powerful information to include on funding applications. Data on participant characteristics give service providers essential information about participant needs.

Owners may find the following data elements helpful in monitoring the progress of their FSS programs:

- **Tracking participant information.** Participant information can help owners estimate future FSS caseloads and provide justification to HUD for FSS program coordinator funding. Recommended participant data to track includes:
  - Number of participants served over time
  - Percent of all residents enrolled in FSS
  - Ratio of households enrolled in FSS to the number of households whose head is not elderly or a person with disabilities
  - Caseload of FSS program coordinators and trends in caseloads over time
- **Changes in earnings/employment.** Owners may wish to take a more in-depth look at changes in earnings and employment over time and across different segments of the FSS population. Recommended data to track to understand changes in earnings and employment over time include:
  - Overall changes in household earnings since enrollment in FSS
  - Average annual earnings since enrollment (to capture earnings that fluctuate over time)
  - Changes in employment status (e.g., share of FSS participants who progress from being unemployed to being employed, or from part-time to full-time work)
  - Changes in earnings by length of time in FSS
  - Changes in earnings for groups of FSS participants defined by starting earnings or employment level (e.g., for FSS participants who enter the program unemployed, employed part-time, employed full-time, or earning more than a certain threshold level)
- **Graduates and exits.** Coordinators will need to track completion of FSS goals and determine whether a participant is eligible to graduate from the program and access the funds in the escrow account. Owners may also find it useful to track the progress of participants who leave the FSS program even if they cannot count them as FSS program graduates. Recommended data to track on graduates and other program exits include:

- Number and percent of participants who graduate from the FSS program (and information on their changes in earnings, changes in employment status, and accumulation of FSS escrow)
- Number and percent of participants who voluntarily leave the FSS program (and information on their changes in earnings and employment status)
- Number and percent of participants who are terminated from the FSS program (and information on their changes in earnings and employment status)
- **Savings and debt.** Some owners, especially those whose programs have a specific focus on building financial capability, may want to track participant information with regard to savings, debt, and credit over time. These items can include:
  - Amount of FSS escrow accumulated
  - Amount of savings acquired outside the escrow account
  - Amount of credit card debt and other forms of debt
  - Credit score
- **Services provided.** As noted in previous sections, FSS coordinators typically monitor and evaluate the services and resources provided to individual participants to ensure that their particular service needs are met. In addition, FSS coordinators may wish to track the following:
  - Amount and types of services provided to all FSS participants (in order to find trends in participant needs and interests)
  - The value of in-kind services provided to families
- **Participants after graduation.** Some FSS programs attempt to collect data on participants after they graduate to gauge participant success after the program ends and to obtain participant feedback on the program. In addition to surveys administered a year or more after the program ends, coordinators can administer exit surveys or hold closeout meetings with participants prior to graduation to learn more about the participant, including:
  - Experience in the FSS program
  - Planned use of escrowed savings
  - Future plans for employment and economic stability

Much of the data discussed above can be collected during participant assessments, through regular participant meetings, and through information obtained during annual and interim recertifications. In addition to participant assessments at enrollment, some coordinators administer the initial participant assessment annually or administer other brief assessments or surveys during the year. Many FSS programs use an off-the-shelf case management software system or create their own database with the specific fields they want to track.

## Appendix A: FSS Program Resources

### HUD Resources on the FSS Program

| Name   | Website   |
|--|---|
| HUD Notice H-2016-08: Family Self Sufficiency Program in Multifamily   | <a href="http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=16-08hsgn.pdf">http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=16-08hsgn.pdf</a>   |
| 24 CFR Part 984: Section 8 and Public Housing Family Self-Sufficiency Program Statute  | <a href="https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2012-title24-vol4/CFR-2012-title24-vol4-part984">https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2012-title24-vol4/CFR-2012-title24-vol4-part984</a>                                 |
| Office of Public and Indian Housing FSS Website  | <a href="http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fss">http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/public_indian_housing/programs/hcv/fss</a>             |
| FSS Online Training (from Office of Public and Indian Housing)   | <a href="https://www.hudexchange.info/trainings/courses/family-self-sufficiency-training/">https://www.hudexchange.info/trainings/courses/family-self-sufficiency-training/</a>   |
| Administering an Effective Family Self-Sufficiency Program: A Guidebook Based on Evidence and Promising Practices (from Office of Public and Indian Housing) | <a href="https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/FSS-Program-Guidebook.pdf">https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/FSS-Program-Guidebook.pdf</a>   |
| Housing Choice Voucher Guidebook: FSS Chapter (from Office of Public and Indian Housing)   | <a href="http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=DOC_11767.pdf">http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=DOC_11767.pdf</a>   |
| HUD Handbook 4350.1: Multifamily Asset Management and Project Servicing  | <a href="http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/administration/hudclips/handbooks/hsg/4350.1">http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/administration/hudclips/handbooks/hsg/4350.1</a> |
| FSS Account Credit Worksheet   | <a href="http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=52652.pdf">http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=52652.pdf</a>   |

### Resources for Identifying Service Providers

| Name  | Website   |
|---|---|
| Directory of Workforce Investment Boards and American Job Centers | <a href="http://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/service-locator.aspx">http://www.careeronestop.org/LocalHelp/service-locator.aspx</a> |

| Name   | Website   |
|--|---|
| Directory of TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Agencies   | <a href="http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/help">http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/help</a>   |
| Directory of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Agencies   | <a href="http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/map.htm">http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/outreach/map.htm</a>   |
| US Department of Veterans Affairs National Service Directory   | <a href="https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/nrd">https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits/nrd</a>   |
| Directory of HUD-approved Housing Counseling Agencies  | <a href="http://www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor/">http://www.consumerfinance.gov/find-a-housing-counselor/</a>   |
| Directory of Credit Counseling Agencies by the US Department of Justice  | <a href="https://www.justice.gov/ust/list-credit-counseling-agencies-approved-pursuant-11-usc-111">https://www.justice.gov/ust/list-credit-counseling-agencies-approved-pursuant-11-usc-111</a>   |
| US Department of Treasury Financial Literacy Resource Directory  | <a href="http://www.occ.gov/topics/community-affairs/resource-directories/financial-literacy/index-financial-literacy.html">http://www.occ.gov/topics/community-affairs/resource-directories/financial-literacy/index-financial-literacy.html</a> |
| America’s Literacy Directory – Directory of Adult Basic Education, Literacy, and English as a Second Language programs | <a href="https://www.literacydirectory.org/">https://www.literacydirectory.org/</a>   |
| 211 Directory - United Way Directory for Social Services   | <a href="http://www.211.org/">http://www.211.org/</a>   |
| Aunt Bertha - Social service directory searchable by zip code  | <a href="https://www.auntbertha.com/">https://www.auntbertha.com/</a>   |

## HUD Sponsored Research on the FSS Program

| Name   | Website   |
|--|---|
| “Evaluation of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program: Prospective Study” (2011), Lalith de Silva et al, prepared for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.                                | <a href="https://www.huduser.gov/Publications/pdf/FamilySelfSufficiency.pdf">https://www.huduser.gov/Publications/pdf/FamilySelfSufficiency.pdf</a> |
| “Evaluation of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program: Retrospective Analysis, 1996 to 2000” (2004), Robert C. Fiske and Andrea Piesse, prepared for the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. | <a href="https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/selfsufficiency.pdf">https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/selfsufficiency.pdf</a>       |

## Resources on Working with Low-Income Families

| Name  | Website   |
|---|---|
| US Department of Health and Human Services Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse  | <a href="https://www.opressrc.org/">https://www.opressrc.org/</a>   |
| Center for Policy and Budget Priorities Directory of Executive Function resources   | <a href="http://www.buildingbetterprograms.org/category/executive-function/">http://www.buildingbetterprograms.org/category/executive-function/</a>   |
| “Using Brain Science to Design New Pathways out of Poverty” (2014), Elisabeth D. Babcock, Crittenton Women's Union.   | <a href="http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research_and_tools/reports_and_publications/EF_Report">http://www.liveworkthrive.org/research_and_tools/reports_and_publications/EF_Report</a>   |
| “Effective Case Management Key Elements and Practices from the Field” (2011), Elizabeth Laird and Pamela Holcomb, Mathematica Policy Issue Brief.   | <a href="http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/effective-case-management-key-elements-and-practices-from-the-field">http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/effective-case-management-key-elements-and-practices-from-the-field</a>   |
| “Strengthening Economic Self-Sufficiency Programs: How Housing Authorities Can Use Behavioral and Cognitive Science to Improve Programs” (2014), Maya Brennan, Center for Housing Policy. | <a href="http://media.wix.com/ugd/19cfbe_4fec5da477fa44e2a87cdaec937804e6.pdf">http://media.wix.com/ugd/19cfbe_4fec5da477fa44e2a87cdaec937804e6.pdf</a>   |
| “More Than a Roof: Case Studies of Public Housing Agency Initiatives to Increase Residents’ Economic Security” (2012), Maya Brennan and Jeffrey Lubell, Center for Housing Policy.        | <a href="http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/learn/housing/more-than-a-roof-case-studies-of-public-housing-agency-initiatives-to-increase-residents-economic-security-2012-aarp.pdf">http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/learn/housing/more-than-a-roof-case-studies-of-public-housing-agency-initiatives-to-increase-residents-economic-security-2012-aarp.pdf</a>   |
| “Reflections of the Experience of Launching an Asset Building Model for the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program” (2015), Compass Working Capital.                                       | <a href="http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54749c39e4b0712a5b6a8d96/t/5644ef39e4b0197f17bb8949/1447358265437/Compass+Working+Capital.Reflections+on+the+Experience+of+Launching+an+Asset+Building+and+Financial+Capability+Model+for+the+Family+Self-Sufficiency+Program.November+2015.pdf">http://static1.squarespace.com/static/54749c39e4b0712a5b6a8d96/t/5644ef39e4b0197f17bb8949/1447358265437/Compass+Working+Capital.Reflections+on+the+Experience+of+Launching+an+Asset+Building+and+Financial+Capability+Model+for+the+Family+Self-Sufficiency+Program.November+2015.pdf</a> |
| “The Family Self-Sufficiency Program: HUD’s Best Kept Secret For Promoting Employment And Asset Growth” (2001), Barbara Sard, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.                     | <a href="http://www.cbpp.org/archiveSite/4-12-01hou.pdf">http://www.cbpp.org/archiveSite/4-12-01hou.pdf</a>   |

## Appendix B: Differences between the PIH and Multifamily Family Self-Sufficiency Programs

| Program Element                               | Public and Indian Housing   | Multifamily Housing   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Eligible Program Administrators</b>        | Public Housing Authorities  | Owners of privately-owned multifamily housing properties that receive project-based Section 8 rental subsidy  |
| <b>Source of Funding for FSS Coordinators</b> | HUD publishes an Annual NOFA making funds available for FSS program coordinators.   | Owners may apply to HUD to use funds from their Residual Receipts Account.  |
| <b>Program Coordinating Committee</b>         | Required  | Not required  |
| <b>Minimum Program Size</b>                   | Some PHAs have a minimum program size tied to prior allocations of Housing Choice Vouchers and Certificates.  | No minimum program size. The program is optional for owners of project-based Section 8 developments.  |
| <b>Participant Selection Preferences</b>      | <p>PHAs can establish selection preferences for up to 50% of FSS slots for families enrolled in or on waiting lists for FSS-related service programs.</p> <p>Families selected without preferences must be selected according to an objective system.</p> | All eligible families must be selected according to an objective system.  |
| <b>Development of FSS Action Plan</b>         | <p>Required to be developed in coordination with Program Coordinating Committee.</p> <p>Must be submitted 90 days after approval of FSS coordinator funding.</p>  | <p>May be developed in consultation with service provider partners.</p> <p>If owners wish to apply to use residual receipts, the request (HUD-9250 “Funds Authorization”) must be submitted with the FSS Action Plan.</p> |
| <b>Program Implementation Schedule</b>        | Mandatory FSS programs must begin operation within 12 months of award of FSS slots or funding. No deadline for voluntary programs.  | Owners using residual receipts to employ an FSS coordinator must begin operation within 9 months of the approval date to use residual receipts.   |

| Program Element   | Public and Indian Housing  | Multifamily Housing   |
|---|--|---|
| <b>Deadline for Full Enrollment and Service Delivery</b>                                | PHA must meet minimum program size enrollment and begin supportive service delivery within 2 years of approval of FSS award.   | No deadlines for full enrollment. Owners using residual receipts must maintain an acceptable coordinator to program participant ratio within 9 months of the residual receipts approval date. |
| <b>Consequences of Participant Noncompliance with the FSS Contract of Participation</b> | PHAs may withhold supportive services or terminate the family's participation in the FSS program.  | Owner may terminate family's participation in FSS and withhold any funds in the family's escrow account.  |
| <b>Participant Completion of the FSS Contract of Participation</b>                      | The CoP is considered completed when (1) the family has fulfilled all obligations in the CoP, or (2) 30% of the family's adjusted income equals or exceeds the area Fair Market Rent for their bedroom size. | The CoP is considered completed when the family has fulfilled all obligations in the CoP.   |