WHAT DO HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER HOLDERS WANT?

UNDERSTANDING RESIDENTIAL PREFERENCES AND EXPERIENCES

April 2026

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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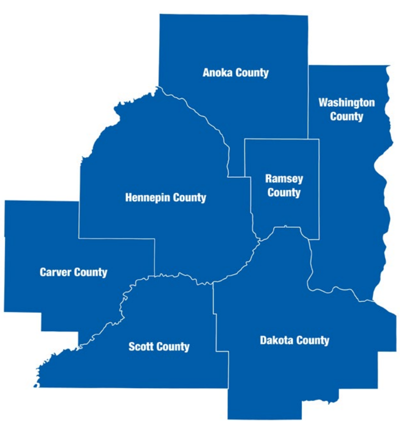

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Executive Summary

Background

The Housing Choice Voucher program provides federally funded rent subsidies to private property owners on behalf of low-income renters. It aims to help voucher holders find rental units in locations they prefer. The locational preferences of voucher holders and the factors that shape their residential choices determine where voucher holders locate.

Broadly speaking, there are two views of HCV program goals: a “place-centered” view and a “people-centered” view. A place-centered view defines success as moving to a “high-opportunity” area, where “opportunity” is defined by researchers as a unidimensional, high-to-low scale based on neighborhood characteristics. In a people-centered view, voucher holders succeed if they obtain what they are looking for. From voucher holders’ perspectives, opportunity is multidimensional: different places have different kinds of opportunities.

In this study, we examine the housing and neighborhood preferences, outcomes, and satisfaction of households who receive HCV assistance. We sent surveys to a random sample of voucher holders living in Minneapolis and surrounding counties. The survey included both closed-ended questions (like rating the importance of various characteristics on a five-point scale) and open-ended questions (like describing what they like or dislike about their living situation). This enabled a mixed-method analysis that understands voucher holders’ situations in their own words while using statistical techniques to generalize to all voucher holders.

Findings

The survey analysis found:

- Voucher holders expressed a wide variety of preferences for both neighborhoods (particularly safety, grocery stores, and medical services) and homes (especially affordable rent, good physical condition, and space). When asked to select the three most important things to them, they generally prioritized home characteristics over neighborhood characteristics. Living in a “high-income area” was generally seen as unimportant.
- Most voucher holders reported that they were able to find at least some of what they were looking for in homes and neighborhoods, but it was often difficult for them to do so. 90% of voucher holders reported experiencing at least one difficulty in their most recent housing search. The most frequently reported barriers were finding properties that accept vouchers, and whose rents fall within the limits set by housing authorities, within the HCV program’s 90-day housing search period.
- About two-thirds of voucher holders were happy with their homes and/or neighborhoods. Somali voucher holders were especially satisfied with both their homes and neighborhoods; neighborhood satisfaction was higher for Metro HRA voucher holders and those with a vehicle.
- Voucher holders' overall satisfaction was most strongly influenced by the quality and condition of their housing unit, property management practices, and neighborhood safety and amenities.

- Voucher holders' desire for safety is multifaceted, not just about crime and violence. They also value "peace and quiet," the absence of traffic and environmental hazards, good neighbors, and the general physical condition of their neighborhoods.

Recommendations

These findings argue for the adoption of a people-centered approach in Housing Choice Voucher program administration. Preferences, priorities, and needs among voucher holders are not one-size-fits-all. Voucher holders in the Twin Cities care about many different things, not just living in a "high-opportunity area," and most of them see home characteristics as very important. Though some voucher holders in low-income neighborhoods want to live in higher-income areas and deserve to be supported in their efforts, many voucher holders in "high-opportunity areas" choose to move out of them, generally due to discrimination or to be closer to social networks. While we do not want to establish false dichotomies between place-centered and people-centered approaches, our evidence suggests that Housing Choice Voucher programs need to hear from voucher holders themselves about what is important to them to help them get what they need.

Based on the findings of this study, we believe the following resources would help voucher holders:

- More targeted assistance to diverse voucher holders, especially:
    - Resources for finding properties that accept vouchers
    - Financial help with application fees and deposits
- A wider array of information to empower voucher holders, such as:
    - Many kinds of neighborhood amenities, not just one-dimensional measures of "opportunity areas"
    - Easier ways to find the characteristics of homes, such as age, condition, and rental licensing history
    - Interactive tools where voucher holders can figure out how much they would pay for a given rental unit
- Programmatic and systemic changes, like:
    - More landlords and property managers accepting vouchers
    - Additional funds to increase per-voucher subsidies and/or the number of vouchers
    - Bans on discrimination against voucher holders with effective enforcement

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Introduction

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is one of the main sources of housing assistance for low-income renters. While such assistance often comes in the form of specific housing units that are restricted to low-income households and have lower rents, people with a voucher can find any unit to rent, with rent capped at 30% of their monthly income. The program's goal is to expand housing options for low-income renters who would otherwise be more constrained by their limited budget.

When evaluating the program's success, research typically examines the socioeconomic conditions in voucher holders' neighborhoods as compared to others; neighborhoods with higher socioeconomic status are seen as the ideal.[1] For example, if a typical low-income renter lives in a place with a 20% poverty rate, while a typical voucher holder lives in a neighborhood with only a 10% poverty rate, this is seen as success. In reality, though, poverty rates in voucher holders' neighborhoods are often similar to those of other low-income renters (Armstrong et al., 2024). This leads to assertions that the program is not meeting its goal of promoting housing choice.

This view of program success, designated "place-centered" in this report, rests on the assumption that voucher holders care primarily about neighborhood socioeconomic status and would move to low-poverty areas if they could. It follows from this assumption that the goal of the HCV program should be to help voucher holders move to certain neighborhoods – "opportunity areas" identified with criteria such as poverty rates, socioeconomic outcomes of children, or school test scores. Regardless of the criteria, these areas tend to be higher-income, which often becomes a proxy for "high-opportunity."[2]

When the research team at the Met Council engaged with housing authority staff in the region, more complex characterizations of voucher holder preferences emerged. Research about residential preferences backs this up. When looking for a place to rent, many voucher holders prioritize neighborhood safety (Lens et al., 2011; Skobba & Goetz, 2013) or proximity to family and friends (Galvez, 2010; Gillespie, 2022) over poverty rates. Voucher holders who move to "opportunity areas" often experience discrimination in their new neighborhoods and schools (Kurwa, 2015) and move to be closer to their previous neighborhoods. Furthermore, many voucher holders are more focused on finding housing units with certain characteristics; for them, the location of a home is less important than the unit itself (Galvez, 2010; Wood, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2019).

Because of that complexity, this report advocates a more "people-centered" view of success, which sees the goal of the HCV program as improving the lives of voucher holders as determined by voucher holders themselves (Jaramillo et al., 2020). Some households achieve that by moving to higher-income "opportunity areas" (DeLuca et al., 2023), but other households have different ideas about "opportunity" and prefer different characteristics of

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[1] Examples include Armstrong et al. (2024), Basolo (2013), Galvez (2010), Pendall (2000), and Rosenblatt and DeLuca (2012).

[2] We have concerns about how "opportunity" is defined and measured for the purpose of identifying desirable neighborhoods. This involves indices that reduce the concept of "opportunity" to a single (low-to-high) dimension, while others contend that opportunities are present in different forms in different places. These indices also largely reflect the characteristics of neighborhoods' residents, such that "opportunity areas" become shorthand for "areas with people who have lots of opportunities." For more details, see Appendix 3.

neighborhoods and homes (Shelby, 2017). This study finds that voucher holders express many different kinds of preferences and do not focus exclusively on neighborhood income levels in their housing searches (Kleit, 2013).

Overview of place-centered and people-centered lenses

Question	Place-centered lens	People-centered lens
What do voucher holders want?	Live in a high-opportunity (usually higher-income) neighborhood	Meet their unique and individualized needs for a variety of both housing and neighborhood factors
What should be the goal of the HCV program?	Encourage and help voucher holders to move to high-opportunity neighborhoods	Make sure residents live in the kinds of homes and neighborhoods they want
How do we know whether the program is succeeding?	Examine characteristics of voucher holders' neighborhoods as compared to those of all low-income renters	Talk with residents to see whether they have what they want and need

Put simply, housing authorities can serve voucher holders better by deepening understanding of voucher holders' preferences. To do that, we surveyed voucher holders in the spring of 2024 to get their perspectives on three main questions:

- What is important to you in a place to live?
- Do you have what is important to you?
- How satisfied are you with where you live?

In this report, we provide more background on the HCV program, then discuss each of these three questions in turn. For each, we provide relevant background from the research literature and present results from both open-ended and close-ended questions. Finally, we highlight some implications of our analysis for the agencies that administer the HCV program.

The Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program

HCV program description

While ultimately overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the HCV program is administered on the local level by more than 2,100 housing authorities around the United States. Unlike other public assistance programs, vouchers are not an entitlement program available to everyone who qualifies. Rather, people apply to join waiting lists administered by housing authorities. Getting onto waiting lists is a matter of chance. Housing authorities accept applications for their lists only at certain times, and only a limited number of applicants are randomly selected to join the wait list. While people may apply for multiple wait lists, they must submit a separate application for each.

If someone is lucky enough to get on a waiting list at a housing authority, they may wait years for an available voucher. Vouchers also cover only a certain amount of rent. These limits, called "payment standards," are set by each housing authority and vary by the number of people in a household as well as the location of the housing unit. Voucher holders may choose a unit whose rent exceeds the payment standard, but they must pay the extra amount themselves. As a result, voucher holders often struggle to find housing.

Furthermore, many landlords do not participate in the program, which further restricts the number of housing units prospective voucher holders can rent. Making matters even more difficult, voucher holders have only a certain length of time to find a home. If they are unsuccessful, they are dropped from the program.[3]

Voucher holders in the Twin Cities region

This study surveyed participants in voucher programs run by the two largest housing authorities in the Twin Cities region:[4]

- Metro HRA (formally known as the Metropolitan Council Housing and Redevelopment Authority) covers Anoka County, Carver County, Ramsey County (except for Saint Paul), and most of suburban Hennepin County.[5] It served about 7,300 voucher holders as of Jan. 1, 2024, when the survey respondents were selected.
- The Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) covers the entire city of Minneapolis. It served about 5,100 voucher holders as of Jan. 1, 2024.

[3] When deciding on discretionary policies like payment standards and search length, housing authorities face difficult choices, because a tension exists between how many people they serve and how much assistance they can provide. When they set payment standards, for example, higher standards will expand the number of units that a voucher holder could potentially rent, but the extra expense limits how many vouchers they can issue. And allowing longer search lengths helps people find a place they can use their voucher, but it also means that the voucher goes unused for a longer period, delaying assistance for people still on the waiting list.

[4] The "Twin Cities region" as defined here comprises seven counties: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington.

[5] Aside from Minneapolis, four other cities in Hennepin County administer their own voucher programs: Bloomington, Plymouth, Richfield, and St. Louis Park.

Taken together, our study area covers 53% of the Twin Cities region's population, 55% of the region's cities, and 53% of the region's voucher holders.[6] It includes a wide variety of neighborhoods in suburban and urban areas. These communities vary in housing unit types, demographics, neighborhood safety, and proximity to amenities.

Voucher holders in the study area tend to have larger households and are more likely to have children compared to the general population, but they are also more likely to live alone.[7] They are younger on average, and disabilities are more prevalent. Most of them live in apartment buildings, but they are more likely to live in single-family detached homes than other renters are. While most voucher holders are people of color, there are also more than 2,700 white voucher holders (22% of the total). Voucher holders in our study area have an average income of slightly under $23,000. Many voucher holders are employed but still in poverty, while others (primarily those with a disability and older adults) receive most of their income from Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Importantly, these figures were drawn from one point in time (early 2024), and there is considerable flux in the voucher holder population. In a typical year, between 10% and 15% of voucher holders exit the program or transfer their voucher to a different housing authority ("port out"). Among voucher holders in the program in 2019 (the first year of complete data in both agencies), only 59% of Minneapolis voucher holders and 51% of Metro HRA voucher holders were still in their respective housing authorities' programs.

Moves are also relatively infrequent. Only 10% of voucher holders move in a typical year. Across all years of administrative data to which we had access (2016-onward for Metro HRA; 2019-onward for Minneapolis PHA), the shares of voucher holders who moved at any point were just 39% (Metro HRA) and 31% (Minneapolis PHA), and most of these households moved only once.

About the survey and analysis

In early 2024, 1,500 voucher holders were invited to complete a survey describing their preferences and experiences in housing searches. (See Appendix 1 for a full description of how the survey was developed and administered.) The survey was completed by 454 voucher holders (a 30.3% response rate).

The survey included both closed-ended questions (for example, rating the importance of various characteristics on a five-point Likert-type scale) and open-ended questions (describing what they liked or disliked about their living situation). The two types of questions were analyzed independently to understand voucher holder satisfaction in their own words (open-ended or qualitative data) while using statistical techniques to generalize to all voucher holders (closed-ended or quantitative data). This allowed us to validate and corroborate the results, as well as see differences between the two response types.

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[6] According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's *Picture of Subsidized Households* data, which is based on reports submitted by housing authorities, the seven-county Twin Cities region had a total of 23,549 voucher holders on December 31, 2023.

[7] All information in this paragraph comes from anonymized administrative data provided by the two housing authorities. See Appendix 2 for more detail on voucher holders.

To identify additional patterns and insights in the survey data, we held two story session focus groups with housing authority staff, who have in-depth knowledge of program operations as well as knowledge of voucher holders' lived experiences.[8] Their reflections on the quantitative survey analysis provided additional context for interpreting the results.

Since survey responses were provided by real people who navigate the challenges of finding adequate housing, this report uses direct quotes throughout to emphasize the personal, lived experiences of voucher holders. We present both qualitative and quantitative evidence to humanize data and understand how respondents draw from their experiences to prioritize the stories that matter. Direct quotes in this report have been lightly edited for readability.

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[8] Story sessions are 90-minute conversations with relevant stakeholders about quantitative data to connect the data to the grounded, contextualized stories that matter. We also wanted to hold additional conversations with voucher holders themselves. However, housing authority staff were uncertain they could programmatically respond to the study results due to HCV funding and program continuity concerns. Given this, it did not seem appropriate to ask voucher holders to dedicate time and energy providing input that could not be fully considered.

1. Voucher Holders' Housing Searches

Many barriers in the Housing Choice Voucher program prevent recipients from satisfying their housing and neighborhood preferences. These barriers include programmatic rules, administrative and structural obstacles, source-of-income discrimination, and financial and psychological costs. Some of these are faced by all low-income renters, while others are specific to participants in the HCV program.

Prior research on the difficulties of HCV program participation

HCV program rules create programmatic barriers for voucher holders. Housing assistance process structures and parameters often pose an inherent barrier to the housing search process (DeLuca et al., 2013). Voucher holders have only a limited amount of time to find a unit to rent – 90 days is common – or they will lose their voucher. This is often not enough time to conduct planned, intentional housing searches (Tegeler, 2020).

The program has a lengthy, rule-intensive administrative process and requires many applications throughout the registration and housing search processes. This can be inaccessible and difficult for voucher holders to navigate (Basolo & Nguyen, 2005; DeLuca et al. 2023). The cumbersome administrative process is "opaque and unpredictable" (DeLuca et al. 2023, p. 192), and decisions about which households receive vouchers are not fully transparent (DeLuca et al., 2013; Rosen, 2020). Once families are deemed eligible for a voucher, prospective voucher holders must go through several background checks that require extensive documentation, which can take a very long time and require ongoing labor from both public housing staff and prospective voucher holders. Voucher holders often have limited time and resources to devote to housing searches on top of their work or personal responsibilities (Carillo et al 2016; DeLuca et al. 2019). The program includes compliance, learning, time, effort, and psychological costs that voucher holders must navigate concurrently with finding housing.

Voucher holders experience psychological and personal barriers while navigating the HCV program. The search process using a voucher can be psychologically and emotionally taxing (DeLuca et al. 2023). Burdens from the HCV program are often compounded by other life priorities, resulting in psychological stress from the entirety of the housing search process (Rosen 2017). Voucher holders experience "psychological and social structural constraints," such as preexisting health issues in households, experiences with domestic violence, previous evictions, and experiences with homelessness (Bergman et al., 2023, p. 6). Repeated housing application rejections are demoralizing and cause a lack of confidence and desire to proceed with the program. Moreover, societal stigma around social services and existing mistrust of government can prevent households from engaging with the voucher program entirely (DeLuca et al., 2023).

Many property owners refuse to accept vouchers for rent payment. This is a frequently faced barrier despite source-of-income protections designed to prevent discrimination against voucher holders (Basolo & Nguyen, 2005; Briggs, 2005; Cunningham et al., 2018; DeLuca et al., 2023; Fisher et al., 2014; Galvez & Knudsen, 2024; Rosen, 2014; Tegeler, 2020; Tighe et al., 2017). Voucher holders also experience high levels of discrimination on the basis of race, income, and credit (Reosti, 2021). Property owners themselves have to clear bureaucratic hurdles to rent to voucher holders, which leads to fewer landlords wanting to be in the program and can result in failed leases (DeLuca et al., 2013).

While the HCV program is intended to provide more stability and agency to low-income households, voucher holders still encounter many barriers that impact their experiences, well-being, and housing outcomes. The voucher program was designed to expand choice, yet it also creates additional constraints. The voucher program barriers are compounded with barriers low-income households generally face during a housing search, which include time constraints, transportation time and monetary costs, and limited resources to support housing searches, such as access to computers. When these are added to the lack of available affordable units in housing markets facing all renters (Basolo & Nguyen, 2005; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012), voucher holders face challenges in locating rentable properties. Administrative fees prevent voucher holders from submitting rental applications (Tegeler, 2020), and issues with credit can result in application rejections (Bergman et al., 2023).

Result: Almost all voucher holders faced barriers in their housing searches

To find out how prevalent these difficulties are in the Twin Cities context, we compiled a list based on the research described above as well as conversations with housing agency staff. We asked respondents to select the ones they had experienced in their most recent housing search. As shown in Figure 1, barriers were quite common – particularly those that are specific to voucher holders. Only 10% of voucher holders responded that they had experienced none of the barriers; 90% had encountered at least one.[9]

More than one-third (35%) of voucher holders had trouble paying for application fees and/or security deposits, and nearly 20% reported that their application was rejected. About one in every eight voucher holders (13%) had trouble finding the time and/or transportation to search for housing. Many of these barriers are faced by all low-income renters.

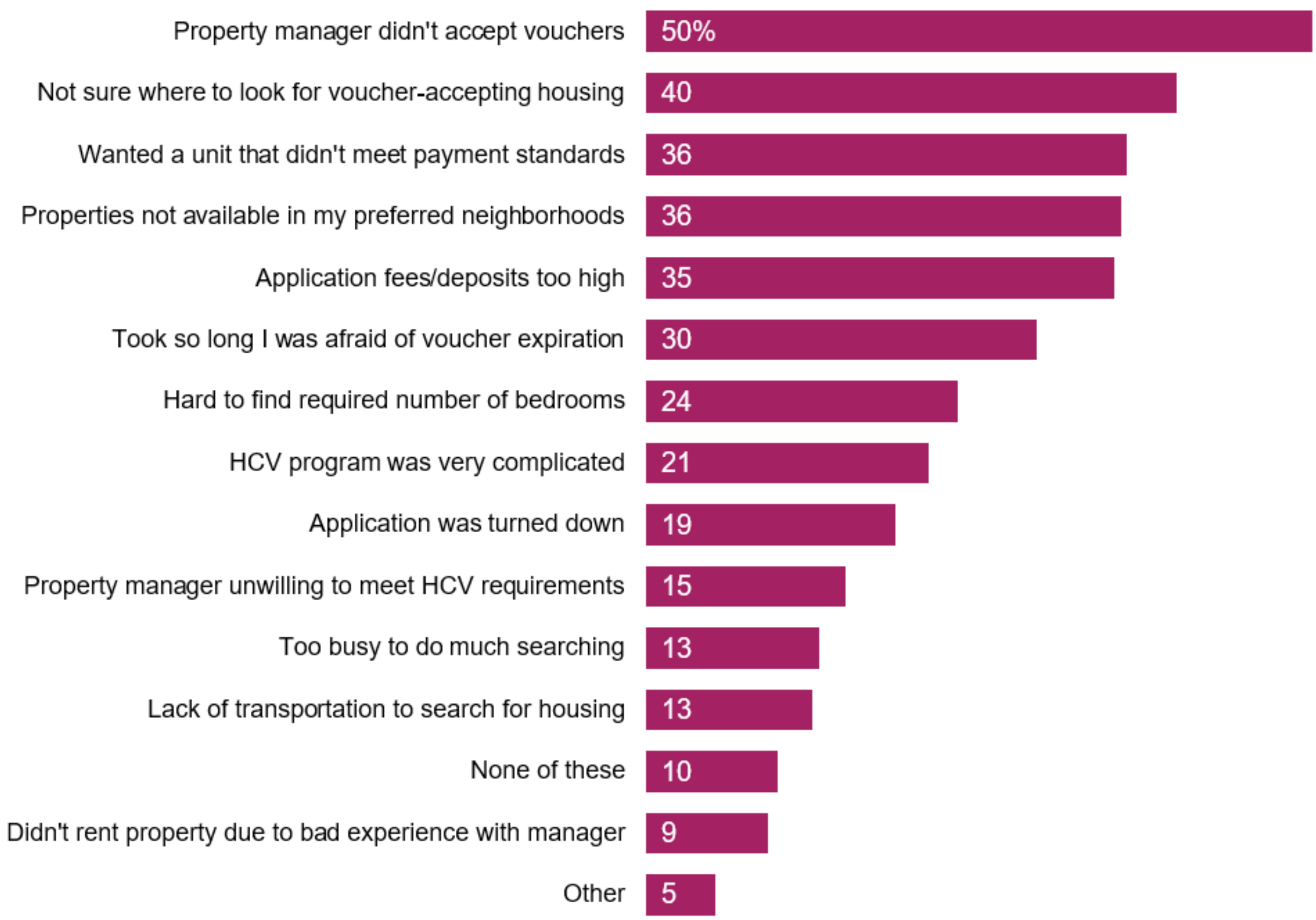
More common, though, are barriers that only voucher holders face. Half of voucher holders reported a property manager not accepting their voucher, while 40% said that they were not even sure where to look for places that accept vouchers. Around one-third of voucher holders wanted a unit that did not meet their housing authority's payment standards (36%) or were concerned that they would lose their voucher because their search took such a long time (30%).[10] Program regulations were also an issue: 24% of voucher holders reported that it was hard to find a unit with the approved number of bedrooms; 21% said the program was complicated; and 15% encountered a property manager who was unwilling to meet the requirements of the program after having already agreed to rent to them.

[9] Margins of error for the percentages are available in Appendix Table A-1.

[10] Losing one's voucher because of a housing search that took too long is not limited to new voucher holders. Those who want to move must give 60 days' notice and find a unit within that time.

Figure 1. Almost all voucher holders experienced one or more barriers during their housing search

Share of voucher holders who experienced each of the following barriers during their most recent housing search



Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Respondents could select more than one item. Most margins of error are between 3 and 6 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Many respondents also mentioned search-related difficulties in their open-ended responses, especially discrimination and a lack of properties accepting vouchers:

- *“People and landlords see us as less having Section 8. A lot of apartments won’t rent to us.”*
- *“I would stress that it’s important for landlords not to discriminate because of race or people having housing assistance.”*
- *“Find willing participant owners and landlords and properly and professionally educate them about the program to gain more willing participants.”*

Other open-ended responses show how each barrier compounds the others. The use of third-party vendors, the lack of necessary technology, and lack of integration between social service offices all contributed to the challenges faced by different research participants:

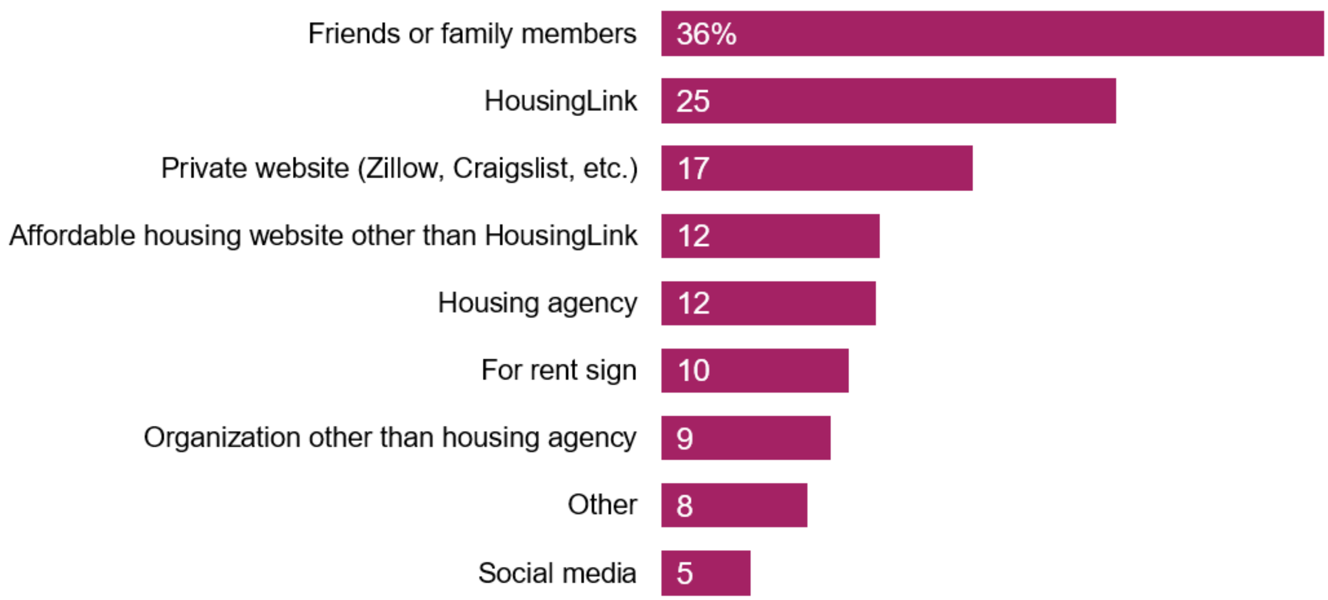
- *“We found our new home from being at the shelter for a year, while we waited to get approval into Metro HRA through a third-party vendor who delayed our enrollment into Section 8 with lack of follow up. The turnaround for my application was made by me directly. The case worker at the Section 8 helped speed up the process due to no longer needing to wait on the third party anymore.”*
- *“The search process is very difficult to navigate if you do not own a laptop. It is nearly impossible to search out a zip code, looking for acceptable areas with a cell phone. It gets difficult and makes you not as excited to search with the responsibility of verifying if an address is in the appropriate area for the program. This program would have worked better if housing was located or somewhat of a list of properties or landlords willing to work with the program. Having the tenants ask if a property would work with a program that I can't accurately describe is Insane!”*
- *“Having to go to a library to use the search tools is too much! As it cannot be done on a cell phone properly. Adding that to children and a full time job, leaves no desire to search for a unit sure to the inconvenience.”*
- *“I am currently homeless because my worker hasn't processed my case after my house burned down.”*

Result: Voucher holders commonly find housing via word of mouth and the Internet

Despite these difficulties, the voucher holders in our survey were still able to find a unit to rent. More than one-third of them heard about their home from friends or family members, as shown in Figure 2. Internet sources were also common, like HousingLink (25%), other affordable housing websites focused on affordable housing (12%), or other general websites (17%). Just 12% of voucher holders heard about their home from their housing agency, though this was more common for Minneapolis voucher holders (16%) than for Metro HRA voucher holders (7%).

Figure 2. Friends, families and websites are the most common way that voucher holders find housing

Share of voucher holders who heard about their current home from each of the following sources during their most recent housing search



Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Respondents could select more than one item. Most margins of error are between 3 and 5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

2. Residential Preferences and Priorities

Understanding how barriers affect voucher holders' housing searches is critical to supporting them during their time in the HCV program. But if the HCV program is to help residents find housing that satisfies their needs, preferences, and priorities, we also need to understand what those are in the first place.

Prior research to understand voucher holder priorities in housing

Securing affordable housing using a Housing Choice Voucher is difficult (Sims et al., 2024), but voucher holders seek to meet preferences and needs within the choices available and existing constraints (Wang, 2018). Previous research has identified preference types, how voucher holders prioritize amenities, and the importance of considering context and voucher holder diversity in understanding these issues.

Voucher holders consider many housing unit characteristics when deciding where to live, including home size, building type, and home condition (Wang, 2018). As voucher holders choose a home to live in, they also consider the neighborhood characteristics in which the unit is located. Wang (2018, p. 307) defines neighborhood preference as "a subset of choice (neighborhood + unit)." Neighborhood quality is one of several criteria in determining where to live (Kleit, 2013). Safety from violence is an important identified neighborhood preference (Galvez, 2010; Rosen, 2017; Wang, 2018; Wood, 2014). Others include cleanliness and quietness (Galvez, 2010), neighborhood physical condition (Wang, 2018), proximity to social networks (Goetz, 2000), quality of schools, a sense of community, and long-term stability (Teater, 2009; Varady & Walker, 2007). Amenities also matter, such as transportation to work, adult education opportunities, grocery stores and medical center proximity, afterschool activities for children, and neighborhood and school diversity (DeLuca et al., 2023).

In addition to identifying prioritized residential preferences, the *diversity* of preferences among voucher holders is an important consideration for Housing Choice Voucher program implementation. Voucher holder preferences vary on an individual household basis, and "not every family has the same need" (DeLuca et al., 2023, p. 206). Preferences are "shaped and formed by structural factors" (Rosen, 2017, p. 272). Different factors include family size and gender (Desmond, 2012), an individual or household's culture around understanding and materializing safety and security (Rosen, 2017), past experiences and life events (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Ewick and Silbey, 2003; Small et al., 2010; Somers, 1994). Simultaneously, other research finds that certain characteristics are consistent across familial conditions, such as proximity to children's schools, transportation, social networks, and stability (Fisher et al., 2014).

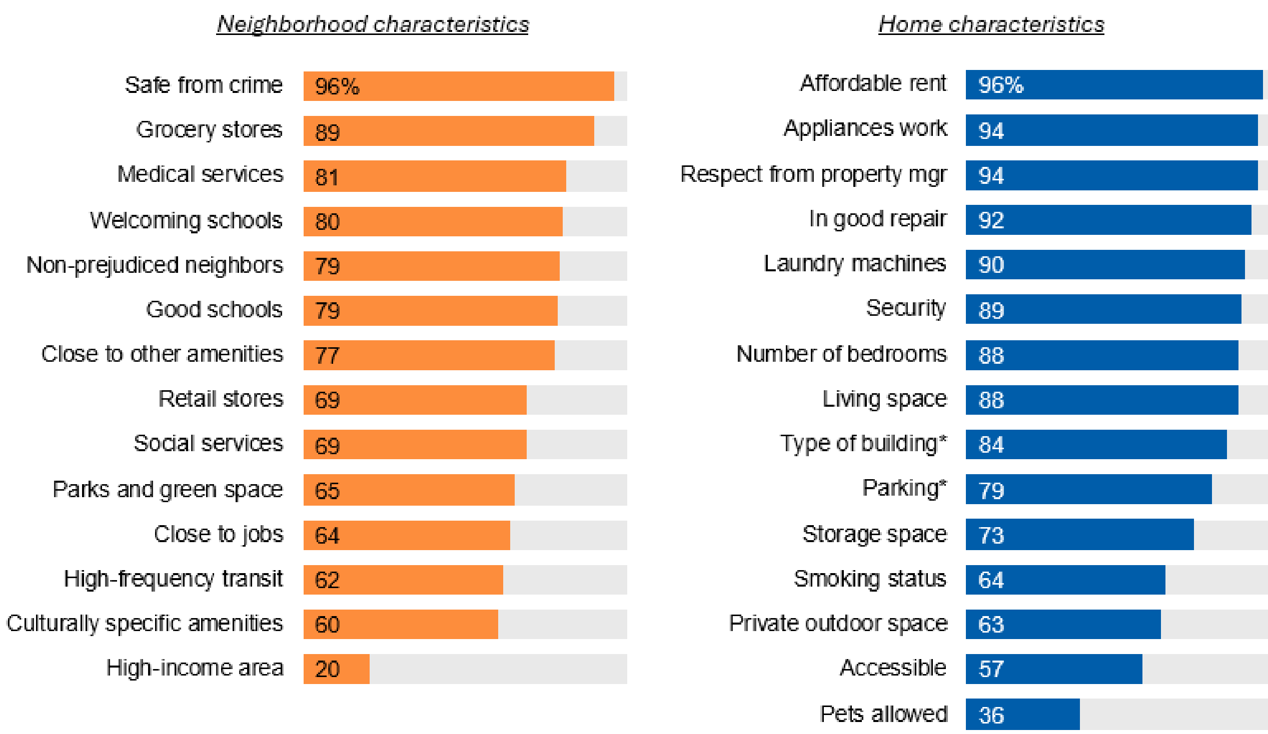
Preferences and priorities may adapt based on changing circumstances, and "should be approached with situational fluidity" (Rosen, 2017, p. 274). Existing literature finds that generally, housing characteristic preferences take precedence over neighborhood preferences (Galvez, 2010; Karsten, 2007; Kleit et al., 2016; Wang, 2018; Wood, 2014). Wang (2018, p. 324) finds that "high preferences for location attributes are overshadowed by stronger priorities for housing unit characteristics," a finding substantiated by other researchers (Chatman et al., 2013; DeLuca et al., 2013; Rosenblatt & DeLuca, 2012). We now turn to the results of the present study.

Result: Many housing and neighborhood characteristics are important

To find out what Twin Cities voucher holders want most in their living situations, we asked them to rate the importance of 29 characteristics of neighborhoods and homes on Likert-type items running from "extremely unimportant" to "extremely important." We found that most of the 29 characteristics are highly valued. Figure 3 shows the share of voucher holders who rated each item "very important" or "extremely important."[11] Orange bars show characteristics of neighborhoods; blue ones show properties of homes. Seven of the 14 neighborhood items, and 10 of the 15 home characteristics, were rated as "very important" or "extremely important" by at least three-quarters of voucher holders.

Figure 3. Voucher holders care about many aspects of neighborhoods and homes

Share of voucher holders rating each of the following neighborhood/home characteristics as "very important" or "extremely important"



*** - "Type of building" and "Parking" appeared in the online survey only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.**

Note: Most margins of error are 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

[11] Margins of error for these percentages can be found in Appendix Tables A-3a and A-3b, along with the full distribution of ratings.

Feeling safe from crime was a high priority for almost everyone, as were grocery stores and medical services. Schools also ranked highly, and voucher holders consider schools that are welcoming to be just as important as those that offer a quality education. That the school characteristics were not even higher on the list may stem from the fact that not all respondents had school-age children.

Living in a “high-income” neighborhood, in contrast, was by far the lowest priority for voucher holders; only 20% of voucher holders rated this as “very” or “extremely” important. The gap between this item and other neighborhood characteristics strongly suggests that most voucher holders’ preferences about neighborhoods are for safety and specific amenities rather than neighborhood income in itself, echoing previous research (Wang, 2018). To be sure, some of the highly rated characteristics are more likely to be found in higher-income areas (like lower crime rates), but neighborhood affluence is neither necessary nor sufficient for identifying such areas. Housing agency staff also cautioned that other important characteristics are less likely to be found in higher-income neighborhoods, like welcoming schools and neighbors who are not prejudiced (see also Kurwa, 2015). Neighborhood socioeconomic status should not be used as a proxy for deciding where voucher holders ought to live.

Overall, though, voucher holders seem to place even more importance on housing characteristics than on neighborhood properties, as research in other locales has demonstrated (DeLuca et al., 2019; Galvez, 2010; Wood, 2014). Five characteristics – affordable rent, working appliances, respect from the property manager, a unit in good repair, and available laundry machines – were rated as “very” or “extremely” important by at least 90% of voucher holders, a level exceeded by only one neighborhood characteristic (safety from crime).[12] Space was also a priority, as indicated by the high ratings for living space, number of bedrooms, and building type.

Result: Voucher holders generally prioritize homes over neighborhoods

Rating the overall importance of each characteristic in isolation is informative, but real housing searches are not like this. Very few people can get everything they want in a home and neighborhood, and that is even more difficult for voucher holders, who must contend with program deadlines, discrimination, and other barriers. So we also asked respondents about what they would prioritize if they had to choose only those characteristics that are most important to them.

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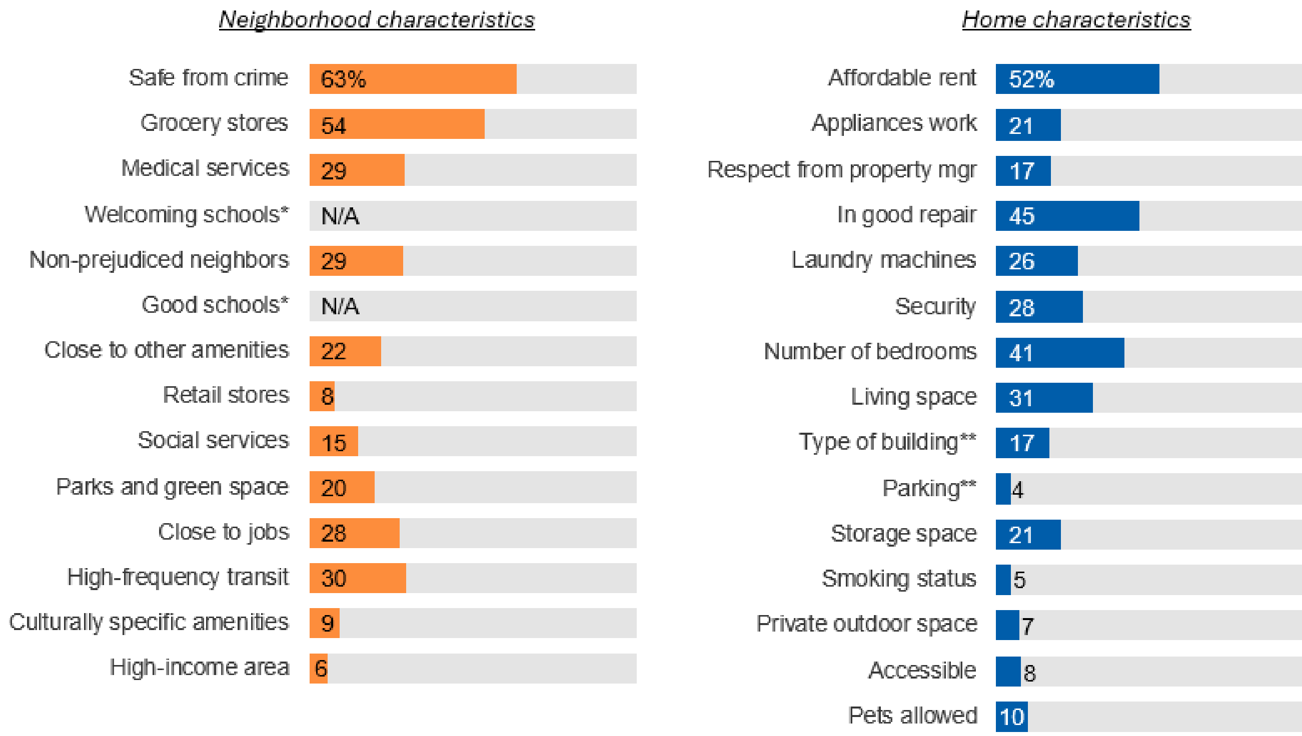
[12] Such a strong preference for affordable rent may strike some as odd, because vouchers are designed to make housing “affordable” by definition: in theory, no voucher holder should be cost burdened (where housing costs are at least 30% of household income). But, as noted above, housing authority contributions are limited by the payment standards they set, so if voucher holders want a unit that exceeds those standards (or simply cannot find a unit that falls within them), they will pay more than 30% of their income. Furthermore, each additional dollar they pay in rent is a dollar that cannot go toward other necessities whose cost is *not* tied to their income. For these reasons, the amount of rent is still an important consideration.

Tradeoffs for home and neighborhood characteristics

We asked respondents to select up to four neighborhood items and four home items that were most important to them.[13] Figure 4 reports the share of voucher holders who placed each item in their top four.[14] These characteristics are sorted the same way as in Figure 2, so that it is easier to see the differences from the overall importance questions.

Figure 4. When voucher holders are asked to pick their most important neighborhood and home preferences, a few aspects rise to the top

Share of voucher holders selecting each item as one of their four most important home or neighborhood characteristics



*** - Due to a glitch in the online survey, “good schools” and “welcoming schools” were not presented as options for this question.**

**** - "Type of building" and "Parking" appeared in the online survey only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.**

Notes: Items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who rated each item “very” or “extremely” important (Figure 3). Most margins of error are 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Unsurprisingly given the previous findings, feeling safe from crime is a high priority, as 63% of respondents selected this as one of their top four neighborhood characteristics. Grocery stores (54%), medical services (29%), and non-prejudiced neighbors (29%) were also frequently chosen. Interestingly, some characteristics that were rated as “very” or “extremely” important

[13] When doing this, respondents were presented with a list of all characteristics they had rated as “moderately,” “very,” or “extremely” important. Unfortunately, a glitch in the online survey prevented the school items from being presented in this list.

[14] Margins of error for these percentages are in Appendix Tables A-4a and A-4b.

by relatively low shares of voucher holders – including high-frequency transit and proximity to jobs – were among the items respondents most frequently selected for their top four (30% and 28% respectively).[15] High-income areas, however, were the least prioritized of any neighborhood characteristic, selected by just 6% of voucher holders.

Among housing characteristics, affordable rent, good repair, and number of bedrooms rose to the top, chosen by 52%, 45%, and 41% of voucher holders respectively. Living space, laundry machines, and security constitute a second tier in the 26%-31% range, while accessibility, private outdoor space, smoking status, and parking availability ranked as the least important (chosen by less than 10% of voucher holders).

Tradeoffs across all characteristics

This tells us about the most important neighborhood characteristics and the most important home characteristics. One of the central questions animating this research, though, was the relative importance of home and neighborhood characteristics. So, we also asked voucher holders to choose just three items from their lists of most important home and neighborhood characteristics.

Figure 5 displays these results for each item as the share of voucher holders who chose it for their top three.[16] Voucher holders' priorities are clear: if they have to choose, they choose home characteristics.[17] Of the seven characteristics selected as most important by at least 10% of voucher holders, six are home characteristics: affordability (42%), number of bedrooms (24%), good repair (21%), living space (13%), laundry machines (12%), and home security (11%). The lone neighborhood item is feeling safe from crime, chosen by 34% of voucher holders.

Each of the major categories of voucher holders we examined gave similar rankings. Across agencies, household types and sizes, races, homelessness status at admission, and households with and without vehicles, almost all groups had affordable rent and safety from crime as their top home/neighborhood characteristics, and each had the number of bedrooms and good repair as their third or fourth most important characteristic.

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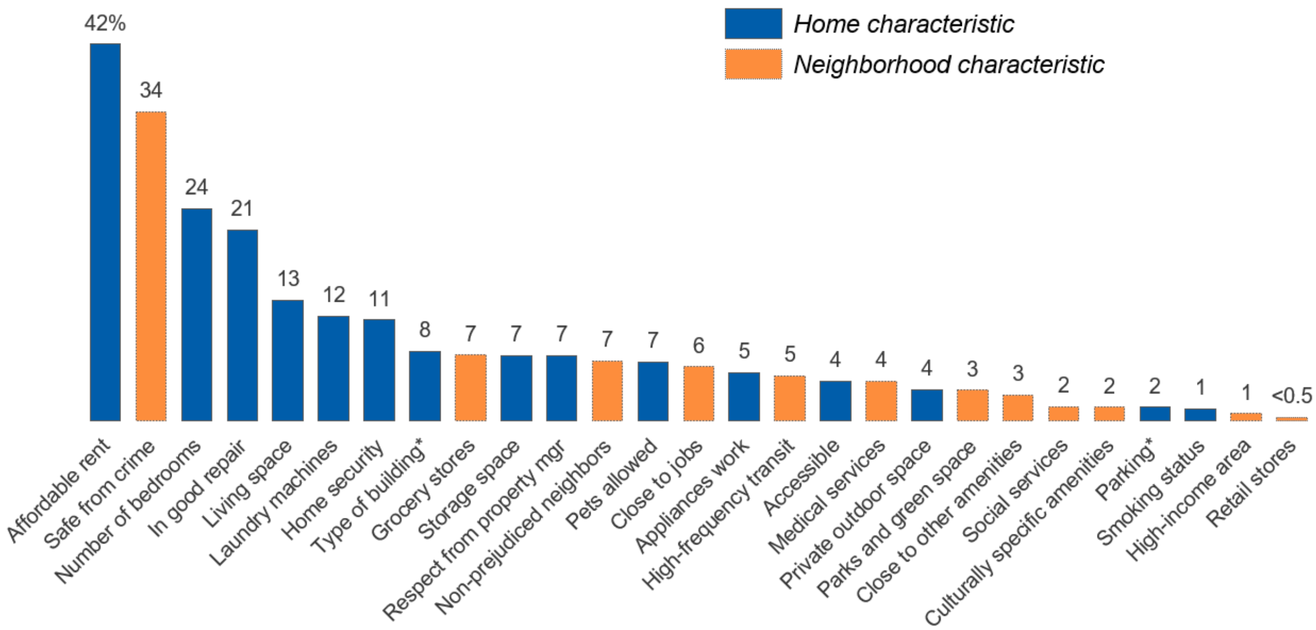
[15] Some readers may be surprised that only 30% of voucher holders selected high-frequency public transportation for their top four neighborhood characteristics, but it is important to remember that 70% of voucher holders have a vehicle.

[16] Margins of error for these percentages are in Appendix Tables A-4a and A-4b.

[17] As we discuss below, the general prioritization of housing characteristics should not be seen as a pattern inherent to all low-income households.

Figure 5. When asked to pick their three most important preferences overall, voucher holders generally prioritized home characteristics, but all items were selected by some households

Share of voucher holders selecting each item as one of their three most important characteristics overall



*** - "Type of building" and "Parking" appeared in the online survey only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.**

Notes: Due to a glitch in the online survey, "good schools" and "welcoming schools" were not presented as options for this question. These items are omitted from the figure. Most margins of error are 1-4 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Result: Voucher holders have diverse needs

At first glance, this might seem like voucher holder preferences are widely shared and that we should simply focus on helping voucher holders find affordable, spacious homes that have the right number of bedrooms and are also located in safe neighborhoods.[18] This is not the case. Substantial variation exists in voucher holders' preferences, but it does not break down along the lines of these major groups we looked at.

Consider the other items in Figure 5, most of which were selected by less than 10% of voucher holders. While it may be tempting to overlook them in favor of the more commonly selected characteristics, we would argue that they are still important considerations. Put differently, the width of this chart is just as important as its height. While the percentages are relatively small, most characteristics were selected by a non-negligible share of voucher holders. Nearly all voucher holders rated affordable rent and safety from crime as "very" or "extremely" important, yet only 42% and 34% respectively chose them for their top three. Conversely, accessibility and whether pets are allowed received some of the lowest general importance ratings (see

[18] The number of bedrooms for which a household is approved is a policy decision made by each individual housing authority.

Figure 3) but are in the middle of the pack in this chart. While a minority of voucher holders have a disability and/or pets, they care a lot about those features of homes. As voucher holders weigh all the items, many different characteristics rise to the top. There simply is no consensus about the most important ones. Different voucher holders have different priorities, which are shaped by their past and present experiences and can change over the course of their lives (Rosen, 2017).

In short, voucher holders' preferences and priorities are as diverse as their lived experiences, values, and needs. Preferences and priorities are not a one-size-fits-all set of considerations; voucher holders experience them differently and should be accommodated accordingly.

In open-ended comments, voucher holders describe tradeoffs they made in securing their living situation. The qualitative data further demonstrates that voucher holders have diverse priorities and sometimes make tradeoffs in determining which priorities they want to fulfill. This diversity offers further support for adopting a people-centered view in policies to support voucher holders in their housing searches.

Table 1: Voucher holders describe tradeoffs they made in their living situations

Tradeoffs in characteristics	Quotes shared by voucher holders about tradeoff decisions they made
Home	"I have lived here for almost 6 yrs, every time the weather gets warm the shooting begins. I love my duplex, hate the neighborhood. Looking to move soon so my 2-yr.old grandson can play outside."
Neighborhood	"I like the neighborhood, but the house is not big enough for our family. Finding a four-bedroom house in a nice neighborhood with big square feet with the price range is very difficult. This house specifically is too small and finding another one with the same price is very hard. Majority of the time you find old house that's broken, have mold, or in a bad neighborhood for the price that Metro HRA has listed according to the zip code. This house I currently live in, the landlord doesn't care about any of my complaints, especially when it comes to marijuana growing in my yard by the previous tenant. I have kids, I don't know how to handle this situation. I want to move but it's hard to find a decent house with a good price. I wish we weren't limited when it comes to the budget because it's limiting us from finding a nice house for our kids."

3. Extent To Which Preferences and Priorities Are Met

Evaluating the extent to which voucher holders' preferences and priorities are met is critical for assessing the effectiveness and success of a voucher program. It is important to understand which needs are or are not being met as well as what is causing any gaps between their preferences and their realities.

Prior research on attaining preferences and making tradeoffs in housing voucher home searches

Voucher holders struggle to find housing with characteristics they desire (Basolo and Nguyen, 2005; Wang, 2018) in neighborhoods they want to live in (Wang, 2018). Voucher holders often make tradeoffs in decision-making, choosing which preferences they want to satisfy and which can be left unmet (Ewick and Silbey, 2003; Gillespie, 2016; Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, according to Wang (2018, p. 324), "with limited search time and choices, HCV households have to make tradeoffs… some prioritize housing preference over neighborhood preferences." DeLuca et al. (2019, p. 557-558) found that "Parents prioritized dwelling over neighborhoods… in a strategic effort to provide a decedent home for their children when faced with trade-offs between housing cost and neighborhood quality." Some research describes voucher holders as "fixating first on finding a satisfactory unit and then assessing its surroundings" (Wood, 2014, p. 274). The existence of voucher holders having to make "tradeoffs" inherently means that in prioritizing certain characteristics, some preferences were not met as a result.

As previously described, the Housing Choice Voucher program contains many structural barriers that inherently affect voucher holder housing searches, and thus housing outcomes. These programmatic barriers constrain housing search processes and often result in outcomes that do not fully satisfy housing and locational preferences for voucher holders (DeLuca et al., 2023; Tegeler 2020; Wang, 2018).

The HCV 90-day housing search period coupled with the risk of losing the voucher often makes voucher holders feel like they must "use it or lose it" (DeLuca et al., 2023, p. 193). This understanding arises from programmatic and mental constraints experienced by voucher holders, is echoed in other existing literature (Aiken et al., 2023; DeLuca et al., 2013). With a short timeframe and other compounding life pressures, voucher holders may choose places to live that do not satisfy all their preferences (DeLuca et al., 2013; DeLuca et al., 2023, p. 193; Rosen, 2014; Wang, 2018; Wood, 2014). Resulting moves may replicate previous disadvantages experienced by voucher holders (DeLuca et al., 2013; Desmond et al., 2015; Rosen, 2017).

Many low-income families, including voucher holders, are forced into a "reactive move," a move that is a rushed response to significant disruptive events, such as evictions, violence, or other family conflicts (Bergman et al., 2023; Carrillo et al., 2016; DeLuca et al., 2019). DeLuca et al. (2019, p. 557) characterize reactive moves as "creat[ing] a housing search characterized by expediency… where [low-income households] stood a high chance or repeating the process." Reactive moves also do not provide voucher holders enough time to intentionally search for housing, given the short search period set by the voucher program, the availability of housing available to voucher holders, and limited housing search resources. This often results in moves that do not satisfy voucher holder preferences (DeLuca et al. 2019; DeLuca & Jang-Trettien, 2020). With the complex barriers and constraints, Wang (2018, p. 308) notes that "the preference-outcome relationship may be more complicated for voucher holders than for average households."

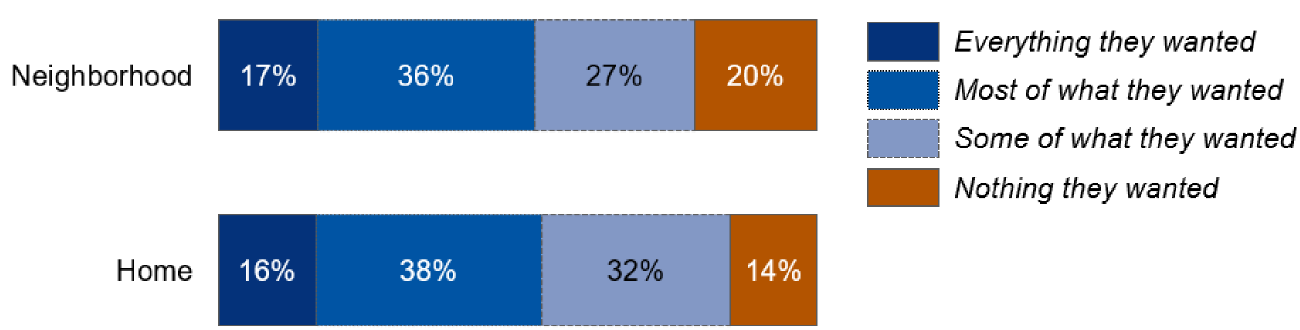
Housing Choice Voucher program success has previously been measured by whether housing outcomes align with voucher holder locational and accessibility preferences (Wang, 2018), or movement to a designated opportunity area (Bergman et al., p. 2023). Our research instead evaluates outcomes directly, asking voucher holders to self-assess the difficulty they had in meeting housing and neighborhood preferences. The self-assessment in the present study yields findings that somewhat align with existing research. Most voucher holder respondents were able to satisfy at least some of their preferences but had difficulty doing so. Our study cannot identify whether constraints identified in the literature are visible to voucher holders, but we emphasize the programmatic barriers that can influence outcomes, and thus satisfaction, for voucher holders.

Result: Most voucher holders were able to meet at least some preferences, but not easily

While most voucher holders were able to meet at least some of their preferences and priorities, it was not an easy process. The closed-ended questions asked respondents to select whether they had gotten none, some, most, or all of what they were looking for in homes and neighborhoods during their last housing search. Results are in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Most voucher holders were able to find something they were looking for

Share of voucher holders who reported getting everything, most of, some of, or none of what they wanted in their last housing search



Note: This question appeared in the online survey only.

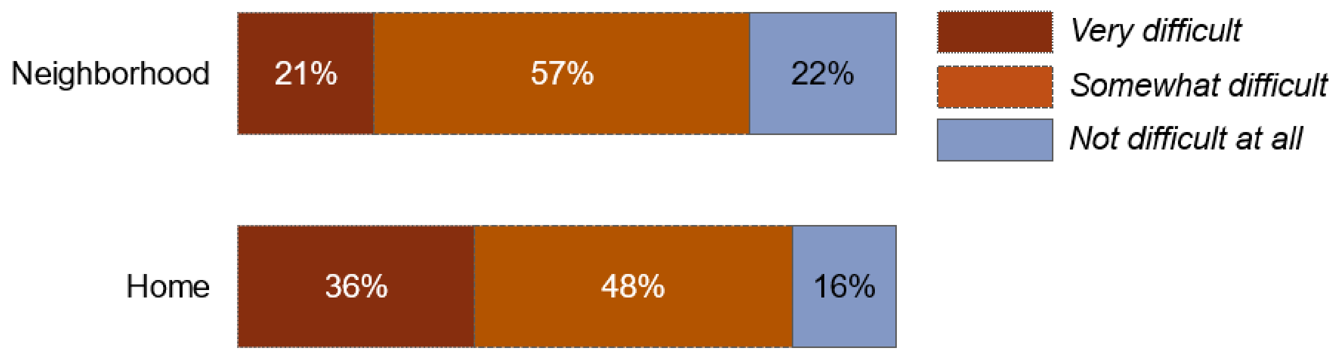
Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Most voucher holders were able to find at least something they were looking for. The shares who reported finding some, most, or all of what they wanted were 86% (home) and 80% (neighborhood). Furthermore, for both homes and neighborhoods, about half of voucher holders were able to find most or all of what they were looking for.

While the difference is relatively small (six percentage points), voucher holders are more likely to find something they are looking for in a home than they are in a neighborhood. Interestingly, though, they also reported more difficulty with that, as shown in Figure 7.[19]

Figure 7. Most voucher holders had trouble finding what they were looking for

Level of difficulty reported by voucher holders during their last housing search



Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. This chart excludes voucher holders who reported getting none of what they wanted in a home/neighborhood.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

More than one-third (36%) of voucher holders who found at least some of what they wanted in a home reported that it was very difficult. Comparatively, only 21% said it was difficult to find a neighborhood they wanted. Conversely, 22% of voucher holders who found at least some of what they wanted in a neighborhood reported no difficulty, compared with 16% of voucher holders who found something they wanted in a home.

That voucher holders are more likely to find what they are looking for in a home, even though they have pushed through more difficulties to do so, is consistent with previous findings about the prioritization of housing characteristics over neighborhood characteristics (Chun et al., 2020; Wood, 2014).

Some voucher holders had more success than others. Almost all older adults (98%), for example, reported getting some, most, or all of what they were looking for in a home. Others had less success. Only 77% of voucher holders without vehicles found something they were looking for in a home, and just 70% found something they were looking for in a neighborhood.

When invited to share stories about meeting tradeoffs and preferences in the housing search, respondents described diverse challenges. One noted the difficulty finding housing that was small enough to qualify for two persons but not "outdated." They feared losing housing altogether:

- *"Having a small family of 2. It is very difficult to find single family housing, that has 2 bedrooms. I can only find apartments. That are usually outdated. If they are modern they are the size of a box. Square footage for 1 adult usually. I am stuck without many*

[19] The full cross-tabulation of whether voucher holders got what they wanted and how difficult that was can be found in Appendix Tables A-5a and A-5b.

options. Also, if I put in notice to move and things go wrong, I will be homeless as my complex will not compromise if my unit is rented."

Another voucher holder, a parent, found the right neighborhood but the house was too small. Like the previous respondent, poor housing quality was an additional issue. The right housing simply could not be found in budget.:

- *"I like the neighborhood but the house is not big enough for our family. Finding a four-bedroom house in a nice neighborhood with big square feet with the price range it's very difficult. This house specifically it's too small and finding another one with the same price is very hard. Majority of the time you find old house that's broken, have molds, bad neighborhood for the price that metro HRA have listed according to the zip code. This house I currently live in the landlord doesn't care about any of my complaints especially when it comes to marijuana growing in my yard by the previous tenant. I have kids I don't know how to handle this situation. I want to move but it's hard to find a decent house with a good price. I wish we weren't limited when it comes to the budget because it's limiting us from finding a nice house for our kids."*

These stories demonstrate how all elements together result in complex tradeoffs. We now turn to the experiences with attainment of specific characteristics.

Result: Most voucher holders have home/neighborhood characteristics that are important to them

When examining which characteristics of homes and neighborhoods people have, other researchers have done this indirectly – that is, identifying the homes or geographic areas where people live and using data like the square footage of units or neighborhood crime rates to determine the extent to which voucher holders get what they say they want (Lens et al., 2011; Wang, 2018; Wang et al,. 2017). While this provides an important perspective, we are more interested in voucher holders' own assessments of their residential situations, which have been shown to be more related to satisfaction than census-based measures of neighborhood attributes (Buron & Patrabensh, 2008; Jaramillo et al., 2020; Oakley et al., 2013). Units with identical square footage might feel spacious to some and cramped to others, and people can still feel unsafe in neighborhoods with low crime rates. So, for each characteristic that voucher holders said was "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important to them, we asked whether they felt like they had it.[20] Results appear in Figure 8.[21]

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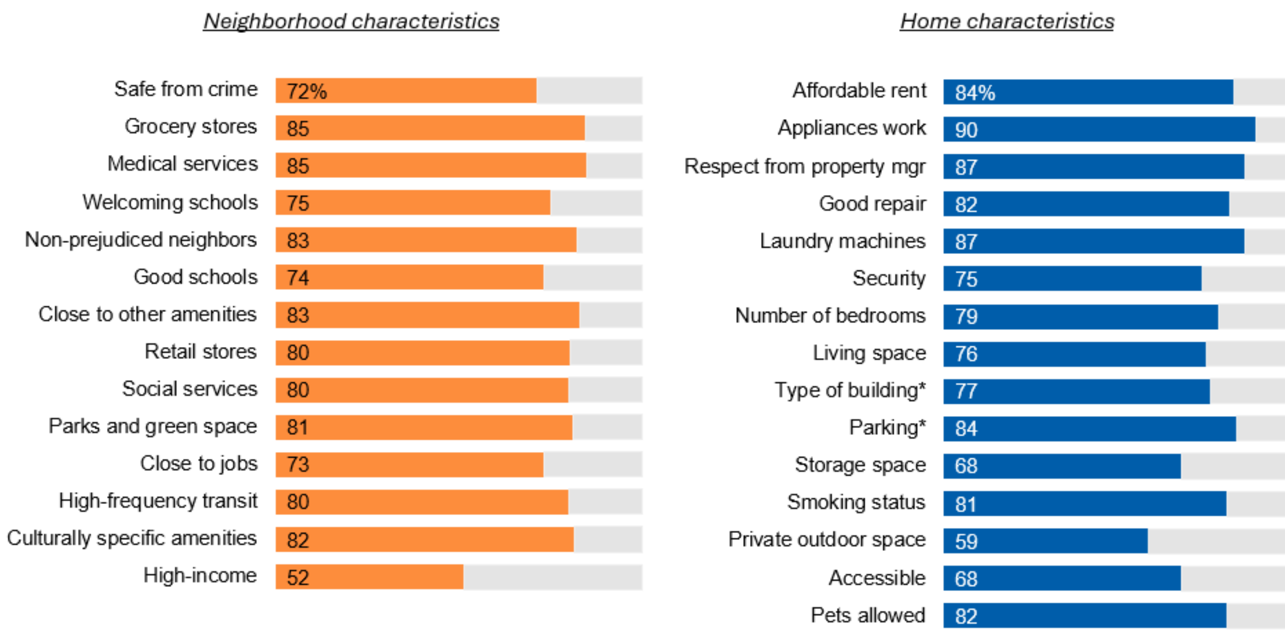
[20] In other analyses not shown, we limited the sample to those who placed each item in their top four home/neighborhood characteristics. The shares of these voucher holders who reported having them were not statistically different from the results shown in Figure 8.

[21] Margins of error for the percentages in Figure 8 can be found in Appendix Tables A-6a and A-6b.

Figure 8. Most voucher holders say they currently have most of the home and neighborhood characteristics that are important to them

Share of voucher holders who reported having each item in their current housing situation



*** - "Type of building" and "Parking" appeared in the online survey only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.**

Notes: For each item, this question was asked only of respondents who said that characteristic was "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important to them. For easier comparison to other results, items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was "very important" or "extremely important" (Figure 3). Most margins of error are between 2-5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Other characteristics, though, were reported by relatively lower shares of voucher holders. Of most concern, given the importance voucher holders place on it, is a feeling of safety: 72% reported feeling safe from crime, and 75% said their building had appropriate security.[22] Good and/or welcoming schools were also around the three-quarters mark, as were space considerations (number of bedrooms, living space, storage space).

These are opportunities for improving voucher holders' situations. Still, even with those characteristics, a clear majority of voucher holders reported having them. In general, voucher holders live in the kinds of homes and neighborhoods that they want.

[22] Relevant differences emerged here: 81% of Metro HRA voucher holders and 62% of Minneapolis voucher holders reported feeling safe from crime in their neighborhoods. Vehicle availability also made a difference (78% of those with a vehicle and 64% of those without a vehicle reported feeling safe).

4. Satisfaction Levels: Data on an Underexplored Topic

Understanding voucher holders' preferences and priorities, to what extent their preferences and priorities are met, and their experiences in the HCV process are important contextual factors to evaluating voucher holders' satisfaction, which this report argues is the ultimate goal of the HCV program. The above analysis of which characteristics voucher holders feel they have or don't have is indirect evidence of satisfaction levels, but it is also important to consider voucher holders' well-being more holistically. To our knowledge, though, only a few researchers have analyzed voucher holders' own sense of overall residential satisfaction as an important outcome in its own right.[23] They find that voucher holders are generally quite content (Buron & Patrabensh, 2008; Jaramillo et al., 2020; Ross et al. 2012).

Our research adds to this existing literature by examining how satisfied residents are with their current living situations and how it varies across voucher holders. To do so, we asked respondents to rate their general level of happiness with their homes and neighborhoods on a five-point Likert-type scale. Depending on their responses, they were asked to say more in their own words: those who reported being "somewhat" or "extremely" happy were asked why they were happy; those who said they were "somewhat" or "extremely" unhappy were asked about their concerns. Respondents who said they were "unsure" received both open-ended questions.

These closed-ended and open-ended questions were asked separately for homes and neighborhoods. Importantly, they were the first items that appeared in the survey, so answers were likely to tap into respondents' general sense of well-being rather than being influenced by prior considerations of which characteristics they did or did not have.

In the Twin Cities, voucher holders are largely satisfied with their homes and/or neighborhoods, but this sentiment is not universally shared among voucher holders. It is important to understand how different households evaluate and rate their satisfaction.

Result: Two-thirds of voucher holders were happy with their homes and/or neighborhoods.

About two-thirds of voucher holders expressed general satisfaction with homes and neighborhoods, split roughly evenly between those who said they were "somewhat happy" and those who said they were "extremely happy." The shares of voucher holders who reported being "extremely unhappy" were just 15% (homes) and 13% (neighborhoods). These levels of satisfaction are in line with previous research on the subject (Buron & Patrabensh, 2008; Jaramillo et al., 2020; Ross et al., 2012). Results appear in Figure 9; accompanying quotes are in Tables 2 and 3.

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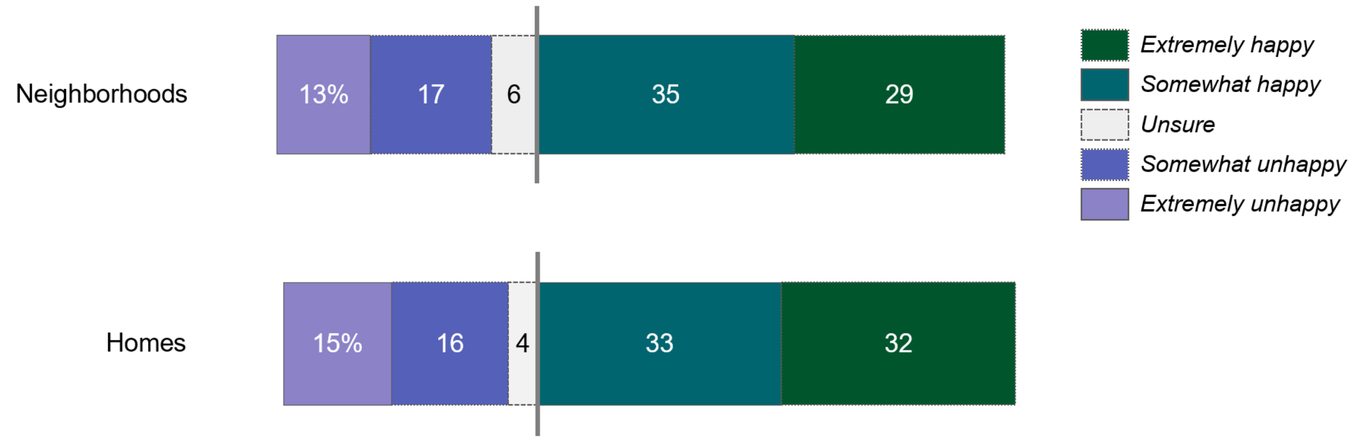
[23] Other articles (for example, Dawkins et al., 2015; Oakley et al., 2013) have examined satisfaction among low-income households who are not part of the HCV program.

Figure 9. Most voucher holders are happy with their residential situations

Level of satisfaction reported by voucher holders with their current neighborhoods and homes



Note: Question appeared in the online survey only.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

The quotes in Tables 2 and 3 illuminate the difference between degrees of satisfaction: respondents who said they were "somewhat happy" in the closed-ended question gave generally appreciative responses in their open-ended responses but mentioned some things that could be better.

Table 2: Open-ended responses about satisfaction with homes

Level of satisfaction with **homes**	**Open-ended responses about satisfaction with homes**
Happy	"It has all I need to remain independent. Laundry in unit is amazing! Apartment is clean and bright. Walk out gives feel of a town home. Staff have been wonderful to work with. Nice areas for walking."
Unsure	"The complex… in general and our apartment are decent overall. I like that our apartment was renovated before we moved in so the appliances, carpet, cabinet doors, etc. are new. There are some areas that have room for improvement including the water heating system (temperature surges happen while showering), the washing machine in the laundry room is older and doesn't have some features that we had at our last apartment, and it would be nice if we were allotted a little more space in the parking garage."
Unhappy	"This home is very out of date nothing barely works they won't fix anything it takes them months to fix things barely give notice the washer and dryers do not work they will be down for weeks one currently has been down for months loud disturbance."

Table 3: Open-ended responses about satisfaction with neighborhoods

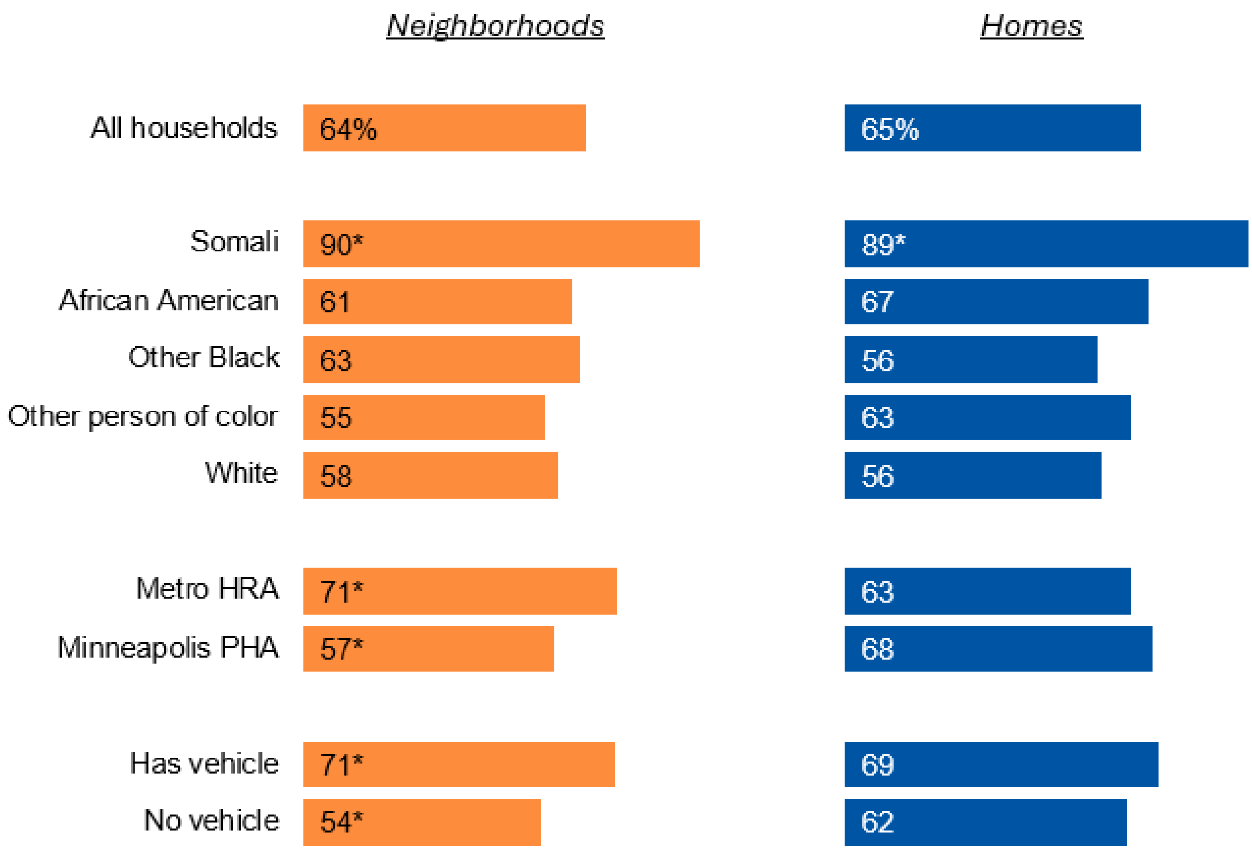
Level of satisfaction with neighborhoods	Open-ended responses about satisfaction with neighborhoods
Happy	"[I like my neighborhood] because it enables me to become a part of a productive community and make it a great place to live and raise my 12-yr old son who's autistic… I don't have to worry about the crime rate or safety." "We are close to my children's schools and in the same area as where my family lives down the street. It's a nice area and has lots of stores located close to my home."
Unsure	"My current neighborhood it's OK, but it's still not accessible for people with handicaps especially getting to public transportation and so forth like the neighborhood stores. It's not convenient not handicap accessible place." "This is North Minneapolis and is known for high crimes rate, my immediate neighborhood has its share of crime shootings, homicide, thefts, violence, drug addicts, drugs, domestic abuse, car thefts, loitering, gang activities, etc., but not nearly as much as the community at large. This is an overall very clean, quiet, peaceful neighborhood. Maintenance of buildings need to be better, like regular inside cleaning halls, carpet, walls, repair outside doors, patios, windowpanes, garages, and keep grounds maintained especially in the winter. There needs to be more stores in the immediate area to buy food and household supplies."
Unhappy	"Homeless encampments, drug dealers/users, open needles and syringes in my yard, murders, lots of loitering, trash is everywhere, gun violence and crime are in full force."

Differences across groups of voucher holders

A few interesting differences emerged across groups of voucher holders, as shown in Figure 10.[24]

Figure 10. Some groups are happier than others with their residential situations

Share of voucher holders who reported being "somewhat happy" or "extremely happy" with their homes/neighborhoods



Notes: Question appeared in the online survey only. Most margins of error are 5-10 percentage points (90% confidence level). Asterisks identify categories that are statistically different from the others in their group.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

The largest difference was across race groups. Almost all Somali voucher holders were happy with their homes (90%) and neighborhoods (89%), with more than half of them reporting that they were "extremely" happy. Housing authority staff attributed this to the uniquely challenging backgrounds many members of this group have experienced; with that frame of reference, even situations that would be unsatisfactory to others are improvements over their past. In-depth qualitative research would be necessary to fully explore this difference, though.

[24] Margins of error for the numbers in this chart can be found in Appendix Table A-7a and A-7b.

Other race groups were not statistically different from each other in their overall rates of satisfaction, though one difference did emerge in satisfaction levels: African Americans were more likely than other groups to say that they were "somewhat" happy rather than "extremely" happy.[25]

While a majority of voucher holders in each agency was at least somewhat happy with their neighborhoods, satisfaction was higher among Metro HRA residents than among Minneapolis PHA voucher holders (71% vs. 57%). And, as other research has shown (Dawkins et al. 2015), voucher holders with a vehicle were more likely than those without a vehicle to be happy with their neighborhoods (71% vs. 54%).[26] The difference among these groups in housing satisfaction, on the other hand, was not statistically meaningful. This probably stems from differences in safety; as noted previously, Metro HRA voucher holders and those with vehicles were more likely to report feeling safe in their neighborhoods.

We found no statistically meaningful differences for several other characteristics: whether respondents were homeless when they received their voucher, household size, household type, years since last move, and housing type.

Table 4: Somali voucher holders share their experiences with satisfaction

Type of characteristic	Open-ended responses shared by Somali voucher holders about their satisfaction
Home	"When I call maintenance for repairs they fix things quickly. The neighborhood is quiet. We are allowed companion dogs. I have a space in the connected garage so I don't have to go outside in bad weather. I have a private balcony that is screened in so no mosquito bites. I have a dishwasher which is very good because I'm disabled and cannot stand to long. And my apartment home is spacious."
Neighborhood	"[My neighborhood] is one of the best neighborhoods in this city, Mississippi River nearby, walking distance to Downtown, near the Blue Line and Green Line, and many Metro Transit bus routes, lots of services within walking distance. I can't think of a better neighborhood to live in."

Result: Tradeoffs become apparent in open-ended analysis

More can be learned about how voucher holders think about satisfaction by an in-depth analysis of the open-ended questions. These were stories told in respondents' own words, independently of the categories and pre-determined preferences listed as categories of important characteristics. This analysis shows the ways that tradeoffs affect satisfaction and

[25] This report discusses the unique, diverse, and vast experiences of voucher holders. The authors do not condone the use of our findings to perpetuate any harmful, xenophobic narratives against immigrants participating in public assistance programs.

[26] These two differences are independent: the greater satisfaction of Metro HRA residents is not simply because they are more likely to have vehicles.

how voucher holders face complex considerations in navigating towards the best housing outcome within the HCV program.

Tradeoffs are described, revealing complex feelings beyond "happiness"

Although we have treated "satisfaction" as a binary concept in the closed-ended analysis for the sake of simplicity, it is important to remember that most respondents expressed both likes and dislikes about their living situations. Few voucher holders are completely happy or unhappy. A grounding principle emerged throughout the qualitative analysis that is important context for understanding the quantitative results: One single voucher holder may be satisfied with one element of their living situation and dissatisfied with another. This demonstrates that satisfaction is widely not experienced in either complete satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Many described tradeoffs, which were often very difficult.

Among voucher holders, individual households have a diversity of criteria to evaluate their satisfaction, and evaluation criteria vary among different people. For example, one resident described in detail feeling unsafe and isolated from friends and family. These concerns were juxtaposed with appreciation for neighbors, housing unit amenities, and proximity to nature:

- *"My building entry security doors are always broken and do not lock, thus anyone can enter, and nonresidents/vagrants often come in and leave trash, use drugs (the smell from their smoking fentanyl makes me sick when it enters my unit through vents or under door), loiter, get dirt and blood on hall and stairway walls, the also try to break into my unit when I am gone, and have frightened my guests, including my grandchildren when entering or leaving my building.*

  It takes maintenance a long time to respond to my maintenance requests, and sometimes no response at all. Pests, especially mice, are an ongoing problem, I have never experienced having mice like this before, because I keep my apartment clean.

  I do not feel safe living here, because there is a lot of violence in units, and more outside of my building. Lots of shootings (including the homicide of a boy on or around my block) and need for police and EMT intervention outside. I feel isolated because my guests and family don't want to come to visit me due to dirty and smelly entry and hallways and feeling unsafe. I am also ashamed to invite guests over for the same reasons.

  Most of the staff are very professional and fair, but a few have been very rude and unprofessional in person and on the phone, there is a high turnover of staff and services here.

  I love so much about living here too, most residents are kind and maintain common spaces with pride and respect, my building size only 9 units and my corner unit, it is spacious, lots of sunlight and windows, has a sense of solitude and peace when inside with doors and windows locked, the scenery is amazing, nature at its best, amazing flowers and plants and gardens, green grass, a creek with natural habitats, a walking path, fantastic safe outside planned activities and events. But I often want to move because of the conditions of my building and safety issues."

As this story demonstrates, satisfaction cannot always be answered with one evaluation of "happy" or "unhappy." The reality of satisfaction is more nuanced and encompassing.

Furthermore, different voucher holders value different characteristics and experiences. There is no one-size-fits-all for voucher holder preferences, and thus no one-size-fits-all when measuring voucher holder satisfaction.

Result: Comparing open-ended answers for different satisfaction levels

The tables below illustrate the many factors that influence an individual voucher holder's satisfaction. In the tables, open-ended stories are grouped by answers to the first question stem of the survey, in which respondents were asked to use a 5-point Likert scale to rate how happy they were with their homes and neighborhoods regarding their current living situations. The narratives look different depending on the level of happiness reported in the closed-ended questions. This validates the importance of the people-centered approach. When specific needs are met, respondents report higher levels of happiness.

For example, Table 5 demonstrates what relationships with landlords look like for high, unsure, and low levels of satisfaction. These point to the importance of maintenance, responsiveness, and respect.

Table 5: Voucher holders describe varying levels of satisfaction in their experiences with their landlords

Level of satisfaction	Open-ended responses about satisfaction with landlords
Happy	"I am happy because I am now on the ground floor, and I no longer have to climb 15 stairs to get to my front door. Doing so with my PAD, (Peripheral Artery Disease), used to cause significant pain in my legs due to restricted blood flow. I am also happy as my new landlord and I get along great. Also, he takes care of this place well and responds quickly if and when any problems arise. He is a really good guy!"
Unsure	"I've lived in the building the longest and my unit is the only one not up to date so I feel like my landlord wants me out to update the place and get more than what I'm paying and I've asked for things or the status (pest control, new tub because of the rust hole) but am told it's hard to replace when a tenant lives here…"
Unhappy	"My landlord has not attempted to fix my running toilet or broken toilet. My water bill has reached $475 I don't have the funds for that being a single mother & working. It's becoming an issue because I have put in several notices about this issue."

Table 6 examines differences in satisfaction with space for respondents reporting high, unsure, and low levels of satisfaction. Adequate space, space in good repair, and affordability are important considerations.

Table 6: Voucher holders describe varying levels of satisfaction in their experiences with the space in their housing unit

Level of satisfaction	Open-ended responses from voucher holders about their satisfaction with space
Happy	“Very nice fit for my family. Lots of space and well-kept. Spacious and comfortable.”
Unsure	“Having a place of my own has made a huge difference for me. It's great! It's not perfect, a 1 bedroom would be even happier but the studio will do for now until they have something else available.”
Unhappy	“My apartment is currently a two bedroom and I can’t afford a two bedroom. That’s what I had when my kids were with me now I need to switch to a one bedroom and I cannot afford to do it because they want $2000 to switch to a one bedroom, and I’ve been trying to move out of this place, but I cannot find anybody in the area with a halfway decent place that will accept my voucher! Very frustrated”

Affordability in and of itself contributes to satisfaction, as demonstrated in Table 7. Notably, affordability includes rent but also utility costs.

Table 7: Voucher holders describe varying levels of satisfaction in their experiences with affordability

Level of satisfaction	Open-ended responses from voucher holders about their satisfaction with affordability
Happy	“Great price, quiet neighbors, safe, great neighbors”
Unsure	“I'm happy I have a place to live, but cannot afford the utilities every month”
Unhappy	“The cost of living is starting to be ridiculously too high in the area I'm living in. My rent keeps going up, and I might not be able to afford living in my home after being in it for 10+ years.”

Voucher holders with a disability described their particular considerations with their homes and neighborhoods; quotes are in Table 8:

Table 8: Voucher holders with a disability describe varying levels of satisfaction in their experiences with accessibility

Level of satisfaction	Open-ended responses from voucher holders with a disability about their satisfaction with accessibility in their living conditions
Happy	"I live next to a park with a wonderful trail system. I can cover a lot of ground on the trails in my power wheelchair. Being in nature is important to me (it eased my anxiety last summer, which I have not had in months). I enjoy seeing & petting dogs on walks in the park with their humans. I also live next to a library, which I frequent during warm weather (and read the books outside). Cub Foods and CVS are close, as well as other stores, my credit union, and restaurants."
Unsure	"My current neighborhood it's OK, but it's still not accessible for people with handicaps especially getting to public transportation and so forth like the neighborhood stores. It's not convenient not handicap accessible place."
Unhappy	"My home is very small. My home is not handicap accessible. I need a walk-in shower, which I don't have. I need other accessible handicap equipment that I don't have."

Result: Open-ended responses reveal satisfaction levels for home/neighborhood characteristics

Satisfaction with home and neighborhood characteristics

Home characteristics

Voucher holders who were satisfied with their homes described home characteristics that made them happy in the open-ended questions (see Table 9). Voucher holders were most satisfied with the quality of the unit, having enough space, good property management practices, unit cleanliness, and affordability. Direct quotes from the open-ended responses show how survey respondents think about these characteristics.

Table 9: Characteristics most often mentioned in open-ended questions about what respondents were happy with in their home

Home characteristics that voucher holders named being happy with in open-ended responses	Number of mentions
Quality of housing unit	140
Having enough space	36
Good property management practices	35
Clean unit	19
Cost/affordability	5

Quality and space of housing unit

Voucher holders were most satisfied with the overall quality of the physical unit and building. The quality and conditions of the housing described by voucher holders included having enough space for themselves and their families, working and up-to-date appliances, and ADA-compliant features.

Having enough space for themselves and their families was the most common positive housing unit quality characteristic that voucher holders shared in their open-ended responses.

- *"This is an awesome apartment complex, it's got great amenities, Sauna, Fitness Center, Classy Community Room, Rooftop Deck, Conference Room, every apartment has laundry machines inside, (This is the only place I have ever had with a Laundry Machine inside the apartment) Dishwasher, Kitchen Garbage Disposal Machine, the apartment is spacious, classic industrial architectural design, the building has very good weather insulation, and the apartment has an excellent HVAC system. Management is very professional, Maintenance most times handles work orders next business day, I have great neighbors in this building. I feel lucky to live in this complex, my living situation is in the top 5% best living situations for anyone at my socioeconomic level, I would like to see everyone with an MPHA voucher be able to live in places like this."*

Good property management practices

Voucher holders were satisfied with good property management practices, such as clear communication and timely maintenance repairs. Other factors described were ADA compliance throughout residential buildings, the ability to personalize the home, individual units offering voucher holders privacy, and property management allowing pets.

Voucher holders appreciated support from their respective Public Housing Authority agencies, as well as responsive and respectful communication with their landlords and property management.

- *"It's a nice apartment and maintenance is great."*
- *"[My home] has most of the necessary things a home needs. Housing assistance made sure that it is safe for me and my family to live in."*
- *"Plenty of space inside for my son to play. Maintenance if needed is fast."*

Other housing unit characteristics: Clean unit and affordability

Voucher holders were satisfied with the cleanliness of their housing unit. This included the unit having clean carpets, walls, and infrastructure, as well as not having mold, rodent or insect infestations. Voucher holders also shared that they were pleased with how affordable their units were.

- *"My home is comfortable and it's affordable for me and my family."*
- *"There are no rodents or bugs. It appears that considering the challenges, management here really tries to make my place of residence decent for all tenants."*
- *"I'm happy with my current home since it's neat and its realtors are very reasonable. Everything is clean and neat..."*

Neighborhood characteristics

Voucher holders who were satisfied with their neighborhoods detailed characteristics that made them happy (see Table 10). Voucher holders were most satisfied with their neighborhood's proximity to amenities, living in a safe area, their social networks and having good relationships with neighbors, their familiarity or stability in the area, and finally living in a clean neighborhood. Direct quotes from the open-ended responses show how survey respondents think about these issues.

Table 10: Characteristics most often mentioned in open-ended questions about what respondents were happy with in their neighborhoods

Neighborhood characteristics that voucher holders named being happy with in open-ended responses	Number of mentions
Proximity to amenities	148
Safe area/peace and quiet	140
Social networks and relationships with neighbors	80
Familiarity or stability in area	16
Clean neighborhood	12

Proximity to amenities

Voucher holders were most satisfied with their neighborhoods' proximity to amenities. Specific amenities were grocery and retail stores, green and natural spaces, transportation, children's schools, medical centers, jobs, places of worship, and social networks.

- *"Location, location, location. This is central to everything important to me. Work, child needs, groceries, shopping and retail and highways."*
- *"[I like my neighborhood] because it is located in a quiet, safe place. It is close to a park that I can walk to or hang out with my neighbors in. It is also close my favorite mosque, which I go to every day. Sometimes I get there by walking!"*
- *"We are close to my children's schools and in the same area as where my family lives down the street. It's a nice area and has lots of stores located close to my home."*
- *"Clean, quiet and school district is great. Stores and shops are close, bus line right in front of apartment."*

Safety

Voucher holders commonly used the phrase "peace and quiet" and cited little to no violence or crime as well as clean spaces when detailing characteristics that made them feel safe in their neighborhoods. Voucher holders described being happy with their area's safety as a response to questions about housing characteristics. Safety is commonly understood as a place-based neighborhood characteristic in policymaking spaces, though open-ended responses indicate voucher holders may not all view safety in that way.

Similarly, Rosen (2017) described how different people understood safety for themselves depending on their culture, personal experiences, values, and family composition. Some voucher holders understood safety as having close interpersonal networks with neighbors, whereas others created safety for themselves by keeping themselves and their children in their apartment units. This demonstrates that voucher holders have different ways of keeping themselves and their families safe. Rosen's (2017) research, in conjunction with our research, implies that when discussing their preferences, some voucher holders may not approach housing and neighborhood characteristics as separate entities. Rather, voucher holders sometimes combined housing and neighborhood characteristics while at other times seeing them as distinct. Research that separates housing and neighborhood characteristics should include the caveat that not all residents see this distinction in their daily lived experience.

- *"[I like my neighborhood] because it enables me to become a part of a productive community and make it a great place to live and raise my 12-yr old son who's autistic… I don't have to worry about the crime rate or safety."*
- *"I love that I can raise my children in a safe environment."*
- *"I love my area. [It's] very convenient and has less violence, and I love the school district."*

Other neighborhood characteristics: Social networks and neighborhood culture

Respondents offered additional desired neighborhood characteristics in open-ended responses. Good relationships with friendly neighbors, a sense of community, familiarity with or feeling stable in the area, and identifying with the culture of a neighborhood are characteristics that made them happy with their current neighborhoods.

Neighborhood characteristics include more than physical places, such as the people who inhabit them and the relationships built within neighborhoods. When voucher holders describe positive aspects of their neighborhood, they are not just talking about the tangible characteristics they like, they are also describing the value they place on interpersonal relationships with the people, culture, and history in the neighborhood. Neighbors and social connections play a strong role in preferences and choices among voucher holders (Ellen et al., 2017). Voucher holders expressed appreciation for their communities, as well as their relationships with their neighbors and land they live on.

- *"It's a really nice and mostly safe neighborhood with good schools, parks, and lots of things to do nearby. It's also fairly diverse"*
- *"I've lived here 22 years. I like the location I'm close to so many things and don't have to drive far. Because I raised my son here and lived here for so long, it feels like home."*
- *"I love the east side of St. Paul and it has been my home since childhood. Lots of historic history and access to everything."*
- *"The location is ideal. The area is very nice. I grew up right down the street from where I am now so it's all very familiar and comfortable."*
- *"It is a quiet residential neighborhood with large trees, and no environmental hazards."*

Dissatisfaction with home and neighborhood characteristics

Home characteristics

Respondents who said they were unhappy with their homes were asked to describe their concerns in their open-ended responses. Voucher holders were most dissatisfied with poor property management practices, poor maintenance and upkeep of units, not having enough space, lack of hygiene and cleanliness, and the units being unaffordable (see Table 11). Because fewer respondents were dissatisfied, the total number of open-ended responses about concerns was less than the previous open-ended comments about positive attributes.

Table 11: Characteristics most often mentioned in open-ended questions that asked respondents what they were concerned with in their housing units

Home characteristics that voucher holders named being dissatisfied with in open-ended responses	Number of mentions
Poor property management practices	63
Poor maintenance and upkeep	38
Too small/not enough space for self and family	35
Hygiene and cleanliness	18
Cost/unaffordable	14

Poor property management practices

Voucher holders largely expressed concerns with poor property management practices in their living situations. Poor property management practices included poor maintenance and lack of upkeep, untimely or unresponsive communication from property management, and disrespect from landlords.

- *"Management is always quitting or getting fired. Probably 6 office employees in the last year. Too small, not enough closets, too many unsavory tenants, too many unnecessary inspections. They treat everyone like a criminal because the property places most residents from local shelters. They never disclosed this, when moving in. School district is below average."*
- *"Maintenance request not handled in a timely manner. Landlords allowed to hold tenants responsible for things [the landlords] should be responsible for."*

Not enough space

Many voucher holders found their units were too small or lacking space for themselves, their families, and their belongings. Lack of space made it difficult to live in the unit. Voucher holder concerns specific to children not having enough space will be discussed in further detail in a later section.

- *“The problem is, having 3 teenagers and 2 school age children makes it hard to live in this house as it is only 3 small bedrooms. The basement isn't an option as a bedroom due to the windows. And there is only one bathroom. Those are my main concerns.”*
- *“Not enough closet space, no storage, tons of restrictions with amenities that were offered in the beginning, and parking is terrible.”*

Poor maintenance and upkeep

Voucher holders were dissatisfied with the quality of their housing unit. This included old or worn-out spaces, appliances not working, or the building not having enough appliances for the number of residents. Residents expressed frustration with unmet maintenance requests for physical property upkeep.

- *“This home is very out of date. Nothing works, they won’t fix anything, it takes them months to fix things, they barely give notice. The washer and dryers do not work; they will be down for weeks. One currently has been down for months...”*
- *“I have been living in a place where there are roaches and other pest like bed bugs and spiders. I report it and the problem still exists… A lot of times I can’t take a bath or clean up because the water is always cold, the dishwasher stopped working years ago, the unit has cracks in the foundation everywhere and it’s outdated. I been looking for a bigger home, but it is extremely difficult with the payment scale; for better areas, the rent is higher.”*
- *“Not too sure how it passed inspection, but balcony is unsafe, lil bit a mice problem and I’m clean. Long time for maintenance to respond and come. Bad downstairs neighbor.”*

Hygiene and cleanliness

Respondents had problems with mice, bug, and cockroach infestations, as well as mold in their units. Some mentioned concerns with unclean shared hallways and outdoor spaces, specifically citing cigarette smells, dog urine and feces, and litter.

- *“When I first moved into my house it wasn't cleaned the carpet was never shampooed, the appliances are old and starting to break. I feel like my landlord will raise the rent because of that, also bugs.”*
- *“My section 8 home is very, very old, like 130 years old, there's mice, roaches and the house is infested with black mold and it's slanting.”*
- *“I have lived here over 20 years, and everything was old then and cabinets, floors, appliances have never been replaced. We have to fog the house every six months for spiders and mice. Also, when we moved in it was roach infested, we had to get rid of them!”*

Cost

Some voucher holders expressed concerns with housing costs encroaching on affordability. Continuously rising rental rates made some worry that soon they would not be able to afford a previously affordable rental unit. Other respondents worried about utility bills, which add a substantial amount of financial burden to already housing cost-burdened households. Some landlords added unexpected costs to bills with little to no prior communication or transparency.

- *"I am disabled but still required to keep up the lawn and remove the snow. I pay my own electric and gas AND am billed additionally an electric, gas and water/sewer bills by the owner. I am responsible for up to $100 for any maintenance issues. It is just not a happy home."*
- *"Management keeps increasing my rent every year. I feel the company that owns the apartment building cares more about profit than improving the resident experience. The staff is rarely here. My apartment is due to be renovated. I've asked several times about when. Only to be told, "not this year". I was told that my apartment was slated to be updated over two years ago."*
- *"My landlord has not attempted to fix my running toilet or broken toilet. My water bill have reached $475 I don't have the funds for that being a single mother & working. It's becoming an issue because I have put in several notices about this issue."*

Neighborhood characteristics

Voucher holders who were dissatisfied shared their concerns with their neighborhood characteristics in their open-ended responses (see Table 12). Living in an unsafe area was voucher holders' top concern, followed by having unpleasant neighbors, then a lack of amenities in the area, and finally living in an unclean neighborhood.

Table 12: Characteristics most often mentioned in open-ended questions that asked respondents what they were concerned with in their neighborhoods

Neighborhood characteristics that voucher holders named being dissatisfied with in open-ended responses	Number of responses
Unsafe area	107
Unpleasant neighbors	21
Lack of area amenities	16
Unclean neighborhood	9

Unsafe area

Respondents' top concern with their neighborhood was feeling unsafe. They frequently described where they live as an "unsafe area", specifically home and car break-ins and theft, crime and disorder, and gun violence. See page 41 for further analysis of how voucher holders described safety or feeling unsafe in open-ended comments.

- *"I'm feeling unhappy and concerned because of the safety risks in my current home, especially since I have children. There have been frequent instances of gunshots in the vicinity, which is deeply troubling."*
- *"Numerous people kept breaking into the apartments from breaking into garages. There is constant gang violence, my house got broken into twice, people just speed through the parking lots… I get harassed by men all the time when I go outside my apartment."*

Unpleasant neighbors

Voucher holders also detailed concerns about unpleasant neighbors. Respondents cited violence, harassment, and racism from neighbors, as well as neighbors being loud and disturbing, and leaving garbage and pet waste in shared living spaces.

- *"The neighbor below me makes me feel nervous and uncomfortable in my apartment."*
- *"One neighbor is very rude and I feel [like they are] racist, always complaining to my landlord about something."*
- *"There is a problem with the homeless stealing from yards, stores, etc. I myself do not hardly go outside out of fear. Neighbors let their dogs run loose."*

Lack of amenities in neighborhood

Voucher holders were concerned with the lack of amenities in their neighborhoods. Voucher holders named having few to no grocery stores, retail and grocery stores that closed early, a lack of public transportation and infrequent bus lines, and poor school districts.

- *"It is not near groceries, and the bus lines aren't that frequent."*
- *"This is North Minneapolis and is known for high crimes rate, my immediate neighborhood has its share of crime shootings, homicide, thefts, violence, drug addicts, drugs, domestic abuse, car thefts, loitering, gang activities, etc. but not nearly as much as the community at large. This is an overall very clean, quiet, peaceful neighborhood. Maintenance of buildings needs to be better, like regular inside cleaning halls, carpet, walls, repair outside doors, patios, windowpanes, garages, and keep grounds maintained especially in the winter. There needs to be more stores in the immediate area to buy food and household supplies."*
- *"My current neighborhood it's OK, but it's still not accessible for people with handicaps especially getting to public transportation and so forth like the neighborhood stores. It's not convenient and not a handicap accessible place."*
- *"It's over north Minneapolis and not a lot of things to do for teens."*

Unclean neighborhood

Voucher holders described being concerned with how unclean their neighborhoods were. Specific examples shared by voucher holders include fecal matter, litter, and hazardous waste such as drug and substance use materials.

- *“Trash is being left on the sidewalks, and parking lots. Someone put nails in the parking area. The neighbors let their kids run in the hallways stomping and yelling. People are yelling/arguing in their unit, and you can hear them from your own.”*
- *“I worry about my safety because of the crime around. The cleanliness of the neighborhood is weary. My landlord doesn’t clean snow off the property and seems to think people on section-8 illiterate and deserve sub-par living conditions.”*
- *“There are not enough trash cans, so I am being fined for [my neighbors] putting piles of trash by the trash cans. I was told that there's was no animals allowed, there's a dog here that poops in the yard and my kids’ steps in it, the smell is horrible, they don't clean up the dog poop at all… I'm just really confused on what am I supposed to do because I've been trying to contact the landlord and have not got anything back.”*

5. Open-ended analysis yielded additional findings

Additional findings emerged from the open-ended analysis that demonstrated how voucher holders create housing priorities, as well as nuances in how they considered the top-ranked preference of “safety.” In this section, we present insights around safety, living in a shared building, and preferences and priorities shaped by children and social identity.

Result: Voucher holders describe feeling safe

Open-ended comments revealed that safety has several dimensions. The phrase “peace and quiet”, or some similar variation, was mentioned 72 times in the open-ended responses. Respondents generalized their neighborhood/area of residence as “a safe area”, citing peace and quiet, lack of violence and crime, feeling safe for children to play outside, and having good relationships with neighbors/feeling integrated in a social network. Voucher holders shared many elements as to what makes them feel safe in their neighborhoods. There are multiple dimensions of safety, as detailed by respondents.

Table 13: Open-ended responses showed the multidimensional aspects of safety and feeling safe

Dimensions of safety shared by voucher holders	Open-ended responses from voucher holders about why they feel safe
Living in an environment with peace and quiet	“There’s no noise, people are kind and peaceful. My neighbors are kind and respectful. It’s not loud so I enjoy the serene environment.” “The neighborhood is quiet and I generally have not had any issues as far as safety.” “I don’t have to hear gunshots and people fighting.”
Social networks, sense of community and connection within neighborhood	“I moved to a safe neighborhood and love my community.” “It’s a really nice and mostly safe neighborhood with good schools, parks, and lots of things to do nearby. It’s also fairly diverse.”
Living in a clean neighborhood	“It’s clean and safe.” “This area is clean and safe.”
Meeting children’s safety needs	“The environment here feels safer for my family, especially for having an infant to raise. This neighborhood is quieter, more secluded and less hustle and bustle coming from a main street.” “I like that my neighborhood is low crime, and I don’t fear my children being harmed from just playing outdoors.” “It has a low crime rate and a good school district.”

Result: Voucher holders describe feeling unsafe

Feeling unsafe also presented different dimensions. The most named was crime and disorder, such as vandalism, public disturbances, litter, and general violence, followed by gun violence, and break-ins and/or theft. Respondents described loud commotion and concerns about their neighbors' activities/general area activities as contributing towards feeling unsafe. Both Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA residents had concerns with feeling unsafe, with Metro HRA respondents having more concerns with property crimes like package theft and less concern with violence and disorder.

Residents in both agencies shared about feeling unsafe in their open-ended responses. Metro HRA voucher holders primarily shared safety concerns around traffic, the area being loud or crowded, commotion or disturbances from neighbors, environmental concerns such as mold or bug/rodent infestations, pet waste in communal spaces, and smoking in non-smoking areas. Minneapolis PHA voucher holders shared safety concerns around general crime, gun violence and murders, robberies, break-ins, drug usage and paraphernalia in public spaces, and sex offenders.

Both Metro HRA and MPHA voucher holders shared feeling unsafe from gun violence and shootings in their neighborhoods. Nineteen respondents in MPHA and two respondents in Metro HRA specified that they felt unsafe in their neighborhoods due to gun violence and shootings.

Table 14: Open-ended responses from Metro HRA voucher holders about why they feel unsafe

Dimensions of feeling unsafe expressed by Metro HRA voucher holders	Open-ended responses from Metro HRA voucher holders about why they feel unsafe
• **Shootings** • **Marijuana use** • **Non-residents staying in the residential building** • **Hazardous biowaste** • **Threats to child safety**	"Someone shot at my 17-year-old son trying to steal his car. Teens smoke in the stairwell and it always smells like weed when I go out to walk my dog. Sometimes homeless people get into the building and sleep in random places. I've also seen human poop on the stairway. And after notifying the office took them until the next day to clean it up. But the smell is still there."
• **Theft** • **Environmental concerns** • **Traffic**	"Safety, conditions, Theft, traffic, water, air, etc."
• **Loud commotion and disturbances**	"Loud, noisy, unsafe, overpopulated"

Table 15: Open-ended responses from Minneapolis PHA voucher holders about why they feel unsafe

Dimensions of feeling unsafe expressed by MPHA voucher holders	Open-ended responses from Minneapolis PHA voucher holders about why they feel unsafe
• General violence • Shootings • Threats to children's safety • Feeling unable to go outside	"The violence, I don't even walk around the corner to the store… hearing gunshots in my sleep really messed with my anxiety. I'm so concerned about the daycare. My son goes to a window with shot out a couple of months ago. I'm also concerned about just going on an evening walk with my son getting robbed or getting caught in crossfire."
• Homicide • Gun violence • Robberies	"My neighborhood where I used to live is nice, but you have gun violence and robberies, taking place. I live in the highs of north Minneapolis. There isn't a lot of crime right where I am but it's definitely all around my family and I… just a few weeks ago and young man got killed an alley over from us… It just doesn't feel safe."
• General crime • Feeling watched by strangers • Hazardous biowaste • Shootings	"High crime, unsafe to walk around the park. Someone urinated outside of my kitchen window I don't know if that person was looking in at me, this was 5 am. Shootings at the basketball area."
• Crime • Noise pollution	"Too much noise pollution and an increase in crime."

Result: Shared buildings influence voucher holder satisfaction and their perceptions on the distinction between housing units and neighborhoods

Analysis of open-ended comments revealed findings not captured in questions where respondents selected from a list. One prominent finding that emerged from open-ended analysis was the importance of shared multifamily buildings in voucher holder satisfaction.

Most voucher holders live in a multifamily building, such as an apartment complex, and the building itself heavily influences voucher holders' overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Residents in a shared building may have their own individual units but still share space and communal amenities with other occupants. Voucher holders described shared-building characteristics when responding to questions regarding both housing and neighborhood categories, demonstrating that a shared building influences voucher holder satisfaction of both home and neighborhood characteristics.

Within their shared buildings, voucher holders liked having social networks and connections with neighbors, high-quality property management practices, such as communication and transparency with leasing offices and landlords. Voucher holders also described being satisfied with building maintenance and upkeep.

Within shared buildings, voucher holders did not like unclean communal areas, specifically citing stairwells, elevators and common areas that smelled like cigarettes or urine, or had graffiti or litter. Respondents shared that in shared buildings, they disliked having unpleasant neighbors that caused disturbances, poor-quality property management practices, such as disrespect or lack of transparency from leasing offices and landlords. Voucher holders also described being unsatisfied with a lack of privacy and ability to hear neighbors through walls, as well as inadequate amenities such as not having enough washing machines for building tenants.

Table 16: Open-ended responses display what voucher holders like about their shared buildings

Voucher holders say **what they like about their shared buildings**	**Open-ended responses from voucher holders about their shared buildings**
Social networks and connection with neighbors	"There are quite friendly families and singles in my building, and we know and respect each other."
High quality property management practices	"The apartment staff and neighbors are friendly! I like my apartment building!
Building maintenance and upkeep	"People are friendly and quiet, glad to be in a no smoking building!!" "I have been living in my current home for almost 8 years and have seen all the positive changes that have been made to improve the complex."

Table 17: Open-ended responses display what voucher holders do not like about their shared buildings

Voucher holders share what they dislike about their shared buildings	**Open-ended responses from voucher holders about their shared buildings**
Unclean communal areas	"Says there is an onsite manager where there rarely is one. Don't know if they even have one at all. The trash [chute] is full of large trash blocking the way or making it smell, making it hard to throw stuff away. The elevator smells like someone had urinated in it many times… or it has other bad smells. During the wintertime the unit gets really, really, really cold even when the heat is at 77-80."
Poor quality property management practices	"Having problems with people getting into the building without using security and packages being taken when UPS and the Post Office deliver them. …I would rather be in a 55 plus building with more handicap features. The front office does not return calls, and maintenance is slow to fix things."
Unpleasant neighbors	"Trash is being left on the sidewalks and parking lots. Someone put nails in the parking area. The neighbors let their kids run in the hallways, stomping and yelling. People are yelling/arguing in their unit, and you can hear them from your own unit."

Inadequate amenities in building	"My laundry area has 3 washers and 3 dryers which are always not working. Especially the washers. People break into cars."
Theft and lack of safety in shared building	"…A lot of my neighbors steal my packages. There is a lot of domestic disturbance in my building. The locks on the door have been compromised, and people have broken the security camera system. I don't feel that safe."

Result: Voucher holders with children prioritize their children's needs

Voucher holders with children prioritized their children's needs, particularly their children's safety. Wang (2018, pp. 323-324) found that families with children are "less likely to match their accessibility [travel time] preferences than other voucher holders." They are also faced with tradeoffs, and "tend to sacrifice [transportation] accessibility to move to places with high opportunity."

Table 18 displays how voucher holder satisfaction was influenced by their living conditions meeting children's needs. Table 19 displays how voucher holder dissatisfaction was influenced by their concerns with meeting children's needs.

Table 18: Open-ended comments display how children's needs were met in living conditions

Ways that children's needs were met	Open-ended responses express satisfaction about meeting their children's needs
Children have access to housing	"For the first time in my entire life my house feels like a home. It is a clean environment and safe for my children." "Just having somewhere for my kids to be safe and warm [makes me happy]."
Children have enough space in housing unit	"Having somewhere for me and my son to live [makes me happy]. Him having his own room and space is a blessing."
Children are safe	"Home is in a good place and area for children to play without worrying about crime or violence." "I love that I can raise my children in a safe environment."
Children's schools are close and/or good quality	"It's a nice, quiet neighborhood… Safe, quiet, and close to my kids' schools." "I like the housing but I wish I could move to an area that has a good school programs, for my kids."

Table 19: Open-ended responses display concerns about how children's needs are not met in living conditions

Ways that children's needs were not met	Open-ended responses express dissatisfaction about meeting their children's needs
Children do not have enough space in housing unit	"My kids have accidentally overflowed the tub many times and the water leaks into one of the bedrooms. Besides that, we need more space since my kids are getting older and growing more curious about their bodies. The oldest being a teen boy, he especially needs his own room from his younger sister, a pre-teen, and little brother. It would be nice to have a big enough space to accommodate our growing needs, including me being an aspiring entrepreneur."
Children are exposed to or susceptible to violence in the neighborhood/ surrounding area	"I'm feeling unhappy and concerned because of the safety risks in my current home, especially since I have children. There have been frequent instances of gunshots in the vicinity, which is deeply troubling."
Children have poor quality schools nearby	"I like the housing, but I wish I could move to an area that has good school programs for my kids."
Children are threatened by traffic in area	"High traffic from neighborhood, continuous noise and loud system speaker music, fast driving in back alleys, and kids stealing my kids' belongings out my front yard."

Result: Voucher holders' social identities informed their satisfaction

Several survey respondents specifically named aspects of their identity or demographics that shaped their preferences. Voucher holders' social identities, lived experiences, and cultures influence how they approach making decisions and evaluating satisfaction.

Table 20: Open-ended responses display that social identities can inform satisfaction

Social identities as described by voucher holder (number of responses)	Open-ended responses about voucher holder identities influencing satisfaction
Have children (48)	"I'm happy at my home, because I have a place to lay my head and raise my children without violence."
Disabled (13)	"I'm happy with my current home because I am disabled and it has an elevator, and it has a washer and dryer in the unit. I have my own bathroom off my bedroom, it makes it easier for me to do laundry and to get around my house. The views around my house are beautiful."
Previous experiences with homelessness (12)	"I'm happy because it's above living under a bridge or in a shelter I am very appreciative, it's the acceptance of people coming from transitional housing that seems to be hard to swallow for a lot of "professionals" like it seems because you have experienced homeless you've actually taken on a lower political status."

Social identities as described by voucher holder (number of responses)	Open-ended responses about voucher holder identities influencing satisfaction
Race/ethnicity (7)	“The biggest concern we have is encountering a couple of incidents of racism. Other than that, it would be nice to get my kids into a nicer school system.”
Elders (5)	“I am happy because this is a very good place for elders.”
Multigenerational households (2)	“I’m living with someone and there’s not enough space for me, my daughter, and granddaughter.”
Single mothers (2)	“VERY sketchy and unsafe!! Police are always here on the street I live on. A lot of drug users/sellers and gang affiliated people. I feel very unsafe in the area I live being a single mom with a young child.”

Discussion

Summary of findings

Our research yields three main findings. First, voucher holders in the Twin Cities care about many different things, not just living in a “high-opportunity area.” For almost all the 29 characteristics we asked them to rate, a strong majority of voucher holders said they were "very" or "extremely" important, with particularly high importance ratings given to affordable rent, safety from crime, and physical condition of housing units. The emphasis on safety and home condition tracks closely with previous research (Galvez, 2010; Rosen, 2017; Wang, 2018; Wood, 2014), while we are not aware of other research that has asked about affordability. When asked to choose only a few items, though, voucher holders typically focused on characteristics of housing units, in line with other researchers' findings that low-income households prioritize features of homes while finding a "good-enough" neighborhood (Galvez, 2010; Kleit et al., 2016; Wang, 2018; Wood, 2014).

This general pattern is not universal, though. Most of the 29 characteristics were very important to at least some voucher holders, reflecting diverse households and experiences (DeLuca et al., 2023; Rosen, 2017). Furthermore, respondents' open-ended answers point to the importance of other home and neighborhood characteristics that have not been featured prominently in past research, including health and environmental safety, clean and secure shared buildings, and accessibility to people with disabilities.

Second, voucher holders generally feel like they were able to get what they wanted. This is a useful counterbalance to using only quantitative neighborhood indicators to infer the presence or absence of voucher holders' desired characteristics (Galvez, 2011; Wang, 2018). Existing research using that framework has typically found that voucher holders cannot satisfy their preferences, but when voucher holders speak for themselves, they generally report having what they need (see also Jaramillo et al., 2020). Nevertheless, this does not mean that it was easy. Like previous research (DeLuca et al., 2023), we found that almost all voucher holders experienced some difficulty with their housing search, especially in finding a unit that was available to rent with a voucher.

Finally, voucher holders, particularly Somali households, are generally satisfied with their homes and neighborhoods. We do not know exactly where the survey respondents live – that information was removed from the anonymized data to protect respondents' identities – but we know that they do not all live in "high-opportunity" areas. As others have found, "disadvantaged" neighborhoods can still be satisfactory if people feel safe (Jaramillo et al., 2020; Sharp, 2018). We would also note that unhappiness with one's location does not have to be resolved by moving away. Another option is staying in one's neighborhood and trying to make it better (Shelby, 2017).

The importance of mixed methods

The mixed-method approach provides a way to validate results, understand nuance, and examine the need for additional data.

- We found consistent core preferences and a diversity of priorities across quantitative and qualitative analysis, supporting the people-centered view.
- Trade-offs and constraints are central themes. Quantitative analysis shows that it wasn't easy to find what was wanted. When asked to express satisfaction factors in their own words, voucher holders describe specific trade-offs.
- Voucher holders think holistically about satisfaction. They saw many items on the forced choice list as being important and mentioned many home and neighborhood amenities in open-ended responses. Child well-being, freedom from racism, nice neighbors, and high-quality multifamily buildings were important for well-being.
- Home and neighborhood characteristics show up differently in quantitative and qualitative data. Closed-ended responses asked about preferences and priorities, but we cannot assume that these are static hierarchies. Instead, they are contextualized in the lived experiences of voucher holders. Of the characteristics to choose from, besides safety from crime (the second-most frequently selected response), housing unit characteristics emerged as preferences.
- Open-ended questions asked about happiness and concerns with current homes. Responses to these open-ended questions often elicited responses to neighborhood characteristics. Additionally, respondents mentioned things not asked about in the closed-ended questions, such as social networks and familiarity with the area. Voucher holders may consider some characteristics of homes, like security features, as part of creating safety from crime, and some neighborhood characteristics, like proximity to parks, as creating amenities available in housing units, such as space.

The closed-ended responses showed that housing characteristics are often a higher priority for voucher holders than neighborhood characteristics. However, open-ended responses showed that when asked about overall satisfaction, voucher holders do not always draw a hard-and-fast distinction between housing and neighborhood characteristics. Open-ended responses demonstrate that voucher holders think about their environments holistically. Respondents frequently cited aspects of neighborhood characteristics in response to questions about their housing unit characteristics, particularly aspects of safety. Furthermore, 96% of voucher holders stated affordability was "very" or "extremely" important in the closed-ended responses. However, only 19 respondents in the open-ended analysis noted that affordability was a source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This could be because affordability is taken as a given, so housing costs did not emerge as prominently in the open-ended responses.

In all other respects, the closed-ended and open-ended responses complemented each other. Safety emerged as a top priority and influenced satisfaction in both open-ended and closed-ended responses. Nearly all respondents (96%) rated safety as "very" or "extremely" important in the closed-ended responses, and 175 open-ended responses identified safety as a priority and leading contributing factor towards satisfaction. Additional areas of confluence between closed-ended and open-ended responses were that voucher holders value social networks and their relationships with neighbors as well as housing unit maintenance, quality, and space. Approximately two-thirds of respondents in the closed-ended responses indicated they were "somewhat" or "extremely" happy, which aligns with 659 total open-ended comments describing their satisfaction. Conversely, one-third of respondents in the closed-ended responses said they were unhappy, complementing the 339 open-ended responses describing dissatisfaction.

Future considerations and extensions

We recommend some cautions when interpreting the results. First, the relationship between housing preferences and residential outcomes is reciprocal: people's preferences certainly influence where they live, but their broader set of life experiences (including residential location) also affects their preferences in return (Darrah and DeLuca, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2019). It would be interesting to track respondents' expressed preferences over time as their life situations change, as long as their identities remain confidential.

Second, while this research design has the advantage of reflecting real-world housing searches, where voucher holders must pick just a few things that they will prioritize above all others, it is also tied to the options we gave them. If we repeated this study, we would ask about other things voucher holders mentioned in their open-ended responses, like apartment building characteristics, the physical appearance of neighborhoods, and social ties with their neighbors/family/friends. While respondents were able to add additional items to rate, having them as part of the standard menu would yield better comparisons across characteristics.

Third, an intriguing difference between our results and Wang's (2018) analysis suggests that voucher holders' views of neighborhood income are nuanced. While respondents to Wang's survey rated neighborhood income as the least important item (as our respondents did), they placed it in the top two importance categories at a considerably higher rate (55%) than ours (20%). We believe this can be explained most convincingly by different operationalizations of neighborhood income: Wang used "low poverty" rather than "high income." The former includes middle-income neighborhoods; the latter does not. One possible interpretation of this pattern is that voucher holders want to avoid whatever problems they associate with high-poverty neighborhoods more than they actively want whatever benefits they associate with high-income neighborhoods. Put differently, perhaps they are simply looking for a "good-enough" neighborhood, as previous research has found (Wood, 2014). If true, this possibility has important implications for the definition of "opportunity neighborhoods" in mobility programs as well as in the popular imagination. To delve into the nuances of this distinction, future studies might consider a split-question design, where respondents are randomly selected to rate either "low-poverty area" or "high-income area."

Fourth and finally, the term "neighborhood" leaves considerable room for interpretation. While neighborhoods are typically operationalized as census tracts (which average about 4,000 people in the Twin Cities region), residents often have smaller areas in mind (Coulton et al., 2013), and conceptions of neighborhoods vary considerably by people's social locations (Guest & Lee, 1984; Shelton & Poorthuis, 2019). One study even found that low-income households in Baltimore focus mostly on their own block (Wood, 2014). It is impossible to know exactly what our survey respondents were thinking of when they considered their neighborhood preferences or satisfaction, so it would be interesting to identify the scale of the "neighborhoods" they are evaluating. A voucher holder could potentially be happy with their own block but unhappy with the area surrounding it.

Conclusion

The importance of a people-centered lens

Our findings highlight the need for a "people-centered" lens in the Housing Choice Voucher program to help voucher holders get what they need. A people-centered approach better understands and meets the holistic preferences of voucher holder households. Considering both homes and neighborhoods as important factors in satisfaction can help avoid a one-size-fits-all approach in working with voucher holders. Variations in housing and neighborhood preferences argue against measuring opportunity and evaluating voucher holders' needs with universal, unidimensional scales. Adopting a people-centered view of program outcomes broadens understandings of "opportunity," affords more agency to voucher holders, and strengthens the "choice" aspect of a Housing Choice Voucher.

Implications for housing authorities

This study was not intended to be a formal program evaluation, and we did not examine how well housing authority policies and practices are meeting voucher holders' needs. Still, the findings have obvious implications for the important work that housing authorities do.[27] We asked voucher holders what would be most helpful to them; based on those results (Figure 11) as well as other findings, we believe the following resources would help further reduce the gap between what voucher holders want and what they have.

First, voucher holders need targeted assistance, which has been found to make a large difference in people's ability to find and remain in housing (DeLuca et al., 2023). This assistance is sorely needed when so few property owners accept vouchers. As shown in Figure 11, a majority of respondents to our survey said that a list of landlords or property managers who accept vouchers would be very helpful to them.[28] Financial help with application fees and security deposits is another need identified in the survey results.[29]

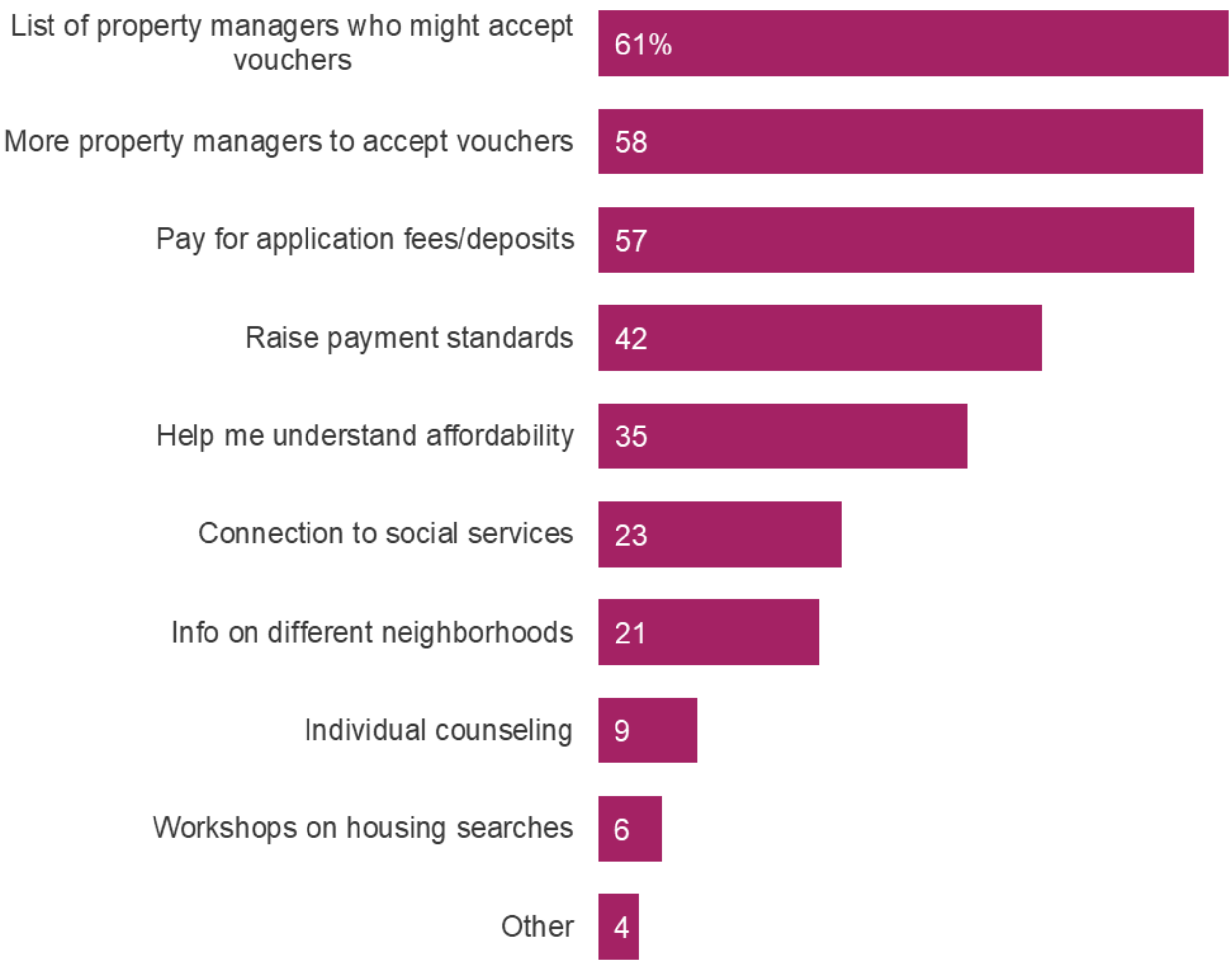
[27] These recommendations were created with collaboration and feedback from various stakeholders. After concluding a first round of mixed-methods analysis, researchers facilitated "story sessions" with Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA staff. In the story sessions, researchers presented preliminary research results with program staff. Housing authority staff were asked to share thoughts, and reflections about the data, which helped contextualize results and the implications of results. Researchers incorporated story session-generated insights into this report.

[28] Housing authority staff identified a tension between these two items. Providing a list of voucher-accepting landlords can help voucher holders as individuals, but a high number of calls could also burden landlords enough that they withdraw from the program, harming voucher holders as a collective. Asking landlords to identify specific units that are available might resolve this.

[29] Margins of error can be found in Table A-8.

Figure 11. Housing availability and financial assistance are key ways housing authorities can help

Share of voucher holders who reported that each item would be helpful to them in future housing searches



Notes: Question appeared in the online survey only. Respondents could select up to four items. Most margins of error are between 2.5 and 5.5 percentage points (95% confidence level).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Many of these resources already exist. Mobility programs provide many of them to voucher holders who are searching for housing in "opportunity areas," so making them available to all voucher holders regardless of where they want to live would be helpful, although it can be expensive.

Second, voucher holders could use additional information that empowers them. Many respondents expressed a desire for more information on neighborhoods, which makes sense given the wide variety of neighborhood characteristics that they prioritize. Parks and green space, proximity to amenities, and others can be found in low-income and high-income areas alike.[30] Beyond information on neighborhoods, data on homes – affordability, condition, space – would also seem useful, given their importance to voucher holders. They might appreciate having a way to quickly look up information on a given property (year built, square footage, rental licensing history, etc.). More than one-third of voucher holders would like more help understanding what they can afford, which is determined by the complex interaction of income, ZIP codes, payment standards, and utility allowances. A website where they could enter information on a given property and see exactly how much they would pay could be a low-cost way to ease the search process and reduce the burden on housing authority staff who would otherwise be doing these calculations themselves.

Third and finally, targeted assistance and additional information are no substitute for systemic solutions. These have been discussed in numerous venues,[31] and a full accounting is beyond the scope of this report, but it is worth noting that voucher holders themselves perceive a need for programmatic change. A majority of voucher holders in our survey would like to see more efforts by housing authorities to expand the pool of landlords and property managers who accept vouchers, which is already being done in "opportunity areas" as a component of mobility programs. Our survey respondents also named an increase in payment standards as another useful change, though housing authorities have already increased payment standards in areas with higher housing costs. Without more funding for the program, an increase in rent subsidies per voucher will need to be offset by issuing fewer vouchers.

Other systemic changes go beyond what housing authorities can do, but collaborating with cities could potentially leverage other resources. For example, a growing number of cities are making it illegal to reject rental applications solely because a voucher will help pay the rent; more ordinances banning source-of-income discrimination and effective enforcement of those bans could increase the supply of properties that accept vouchers. Cities' rental licensing programs could also improve the condition of the rental housing stock. Finally, the in-depth knowledge that housing authorities have about their voucher holders' experiences can be important perspectives for local staff and elected officials as they make decisions that affect the condition and affordability of homes in their jurisdictions. Applying a people-centered lens would help all agencies deliver personalized services to support voucher holders as they try to meet their needs in a challenging housing market.

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[30] If housing authorities provide information from the Opportunity Atlas, which provides the incomes in adulthood of children who grow up in different neighborhoods and is often used to define "high-opportunity areas," we urge them to supply the race-specific income data that is the foundation of the overall opportunity index (see Appendix 3 for details). At least in the Twin Cities, the Opportunity Atlas-based opportunity index reflects primarily the outcomes of white children and may not be predictive of how children of color might fare in a given area. The Opportunity Atlas also has data on other outcomes like future incarceration and giving birth as a teen that voucher holders might also find useful; money is not the only outcome that matters.

[31] The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recently devoted an entire issue of its research journal to this subject (*Cityscape* volume 26, issue 2).

Researcher Contact Information

Zhu Gong, Qualitative Researcher, Community Development-Research
Zhu.Gong@metc.state.mn.us

Matt Schroeder, Principal Researcher, Community Development-Research
Matt.Schroeder@metc.state.mn.us

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology

Survey development

Because voucher holders depend on their housing authorities for assistance, we wanted to prioritize their privacy and safety when asking them to respond to a survey. Housing agency staff had told us that while many voucher holders would value the opportunity to share their perspectives, others could be wary that their voucher status could hinge on their survey participation or response content. To protect and reassure participants, we engaged a consultant (ACET) to help design and administer the survey, creating some separation between housing authorities and the survey.

Following a fall 2023 survey pilot, we developed online and paper versions of the final survey. While it was available only in English and Somali, respondents could call a number to be surveyed over the phone in any language. We also created a paper version of the survey – available in English, Somali, and Hmong – to accommodate respondents with limited Internet skills or those who simply prefer physical surveys. This mailing included a copy of the survey in each of the three languages, which made the envelopes very full. To avoid making the paper survey seem too overwhelming and lower the response rate, ACET recommended asking only a core set of questions. These were importance ratings of the 29 home and neighborhood characteristics discussed in the report (including write-in "other" responses) as well as respondents' top choices and indications of whether they had them. We also included a question about vehicle availability, as this is not available in housing authority administrative data.

The survey sample

Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA staff provided the consultant with a complete list of voucher holders, including a small number of former voucher holders and those that have since moved out of their housing authority's service area. From this list, the consultant developed a stratified sample of 1,500 households, selecting approximately 11% of voucher holders from each of 30 groups (strata) to obtain a more representative sample (see below for details). These groups were defined by three characteristics that were readily available in agency administrative data and that we expected would be related to residential preferences:

- Agency (Metro HRA, Minneapolis PHA)
- Household size (1 person, 2 people, 3+ people)
- Householder race (white, Black, Asian, American Indian, multiracial)

Survey administration

The consultant sent the online survey link to all sample households in March 2024. Households who did not complete the survey after multiple reminders were mailed the paper version of the survey in April 2024. Following additional electronic and paper reminders, the survey closed at the end of May 2024. In all communications with respondents, we emphasized that their responses would be anonymized and that their housing authorities would not know whether they had responded. Respondents who completed the survey could choose to receive a $10 gift card for either Amazon or Walmart.

We received 454 complete responses (364 online, 90 paper), which yielded a response rate of 30.3%. An additional 39 households (2.6% of the sample) started the survey but did not complete it.

For the online survey, about 90% of respondents (326) reported completing the survey with no assistance. Another 6% said that someone had read the survey for them, 1% said that someone else had recorded their answers, and 3% said that someone else had read the survey to them and recorded their answers.

Analysis

This mixed-method study sheds light on what preferences and priorities voucher holders have while also exploring the reasons behind these preferences. The separate analysis of closed-ended (quantitative) and open-ended (qualitative) data allows us to confirm findings across analyses, add context, and create comprehensive understanding.

Quantitative data analysis

The analysis was completed with weights applied for household size, race, and housing agency. Because different groups of people respond to surveys at different rates, sample data from a survey usually does not look exactly like the population. This one was no exception. To take one simple example, white voucher holders had a higher response rate than Black voucher holders, constituting 26% of the sample despite being only 19% of all voucher holders. This means that all estimates based on this sample could be more reflective of white voucher holders than they should be. To the extent that white and Black voucher holders gave different responses to the survey questions, our estimates for voucher holders as a whole would be biased.

Fortunately, we can use what we know about the sample and voucher holder demographics to assign different weights to survey respondents. Continuing with the example of race differences in response rates, we can place less weight on white responses and more weight on Black responses. This reduces the bias in the estimates. Adding other race groups, agencies, and household size to the weighting groups (strata) further reduces bias to the extent that these characteristics are related to our survey topics. In general, the difference between weighted and unweighted estimates is less than one percentage point.

Weighting reduces the precision of the estimates. Bigger gaps in response rates and strata with fewer people increase the statistical uncertainty. To mitigate this, we analyzed the data using fewer strata. Across the two agencies, about 91% of voucher holders are white or Black, so the number of responses in strata with Asian, American Indian, and multiracial voucher holders was quite small. Accordingly, we collapsed all sampling strata for those three race groups within agencies. We also combined white households in Minneapolis with two members and those with three or more members, as these strata were small to begin with and had relatively few responses. This yielded 15 analytic strata, each of which contained at least ten sample households. All survey estimates are weighted to be representative with respect to these strata, and all margins of error in this report reflect the complex sample design.

Qualitative data analysis

This report uses qualitative data in three ways. First, direct quotes illuminate quantitative analysis to humanize the results, offering a useful reminder that survey responses were provided by real human beings with lived experiences. Second, qualitative data provides additional insight into patterns in experience such as tradeoffs and most valued characteristics. Finally, the qualitative data produced important information that merits reporting for the nuance it provides.

The analysis was created through an iterative, collaborative process of developing and applying codes in the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO. We imported open-ended questions and responses into NVIVO. One researcher independently developed codes derived from the primary research questions and survey questions. These codes included desired amenities, prioritization of amenities, and levels of satisfaction.

The first researcher designed thematic codes to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic codes were categories of one to three words that were created to reflect on meanings observed in the data. These helped identify patterns in the data. There are two kinds of thematic codes:

- Project-driven codes that are tied to the closed-ended questions as well as codes grounded in the thoughts expressed in the answers themselves
- Open-ended, grounded coding that identified topics and patterns respondents discussed that had a less direct connection to the closed-ended question categories

Next, a second researcher used the first researcher’s codes to analyze the open-ended data. Upon completion, the two researchers discussed differences in their coding outcomes, as well as additional codes the second researcher identified. This helped refine the initial analysis and developed additional, more nuanced interpretations of the data. Together, the two researchers jointly revised codes and recoded data to reflect understandings that emerged from separate data analyses.

Finally, researchers developed themes from coding and analysis. Themes are extended phrases that explain the analysis created from the data. Researchers categorized themes as “patterns” based on numeric frequency, “insights” (themes that rose to high level of importance regardless of frequency), and “supporting quotes” used to illustrate quantitative results.

Limitations

There are two shortcomings of the survey instrument:

- "Type of building" and "parking" were inadvertently omitted from the paper survey's list of characteristics, so paper respondents did not rate the importance of those characteristics. All analyses of these home characteristics use online responses only. Recall that results are weighted to be representative of all voucher holders with respect to household size, householder race, and agency, so this should not bias our estimates appreciably unless there are systematic differences in building type and/or parking preferences between online respondents and paper respondents within strata (combinations of householder race, household size, and agency).
- Due to a glitch in the online survey programming, "good schools" and "welcoming schools" were not included in the list of neighborhood characteristics from which respondents selected their top items. While we could have analyzed those items using only the paper responses, in the same way we analyzed "type of building" and "parking" using only the online responses, we decided the sample was not large enough to yield reliable data and suppressed these results.

We want to stress that these results cannot describe the preferences of all low-income renters. The households in our sample (a) applied for a voucher and (b) were able to find a place to live using their voucher.[32] Their preferences might differ from those of households who did not apply for a voucher, or those who were unable to use their voucher within the allotted time.

This analysis also cannot be generalized to all voucher holders across the country, because Twin Cities voucher holders are different in a few ways. Relative to other midsized agencies, voucher holders in the Twin Cities are more likely to have wages as their primary source of income and are less likely to be elderly. They also have some of the highest average household sizes as well as shares of households who are married couples with children.[33]

Despite these caveats, our analysis did not identify much statistically meaningful variation in preferences and outcomes across households of different sizes and types. This suggests that on the whole, the overall patterns we describe would probably not differ substantially from what we would have found if households in these two agencies looked more like those in other regions of the country.

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[32] They also were selected for the waiting list *and* made it off the waiting list to receive a voucher, but these dynamics are random, so their preferences would probably be quite similar to people who applied for a voucher but were not selected for the waiting list, or those who are still on the waiting list.

[33] We examined the characteristics of Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA voucher holders and compared them to all other midsized housing agencies in the country (those serving between 5,000 and 9,999 voucher holders) using HUD's Picture of Subsidized Households data.

Appendix 2: Profile of voucher holders

To examine who voucher holders are, we analyzed administrative data from Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA. This data comes from the 50058 forms submitted by housing authorities to HUD, which include a complete household roster and various pieces of information on each member of voucher holders' households. The housing authorities aggregated all information to the household level and removed names and addresses from the data they gave us to keep voucher holders' identities confidential.

Demographics

Appendix tables A-9a through A-9h provide detail on the demographic characteristics of voucher holders' households. Briefly:

- Overall, voucher holders are younger than the general population of householders (Table A-9a).[34] In each agency, around 45% of voucher holders are younger than 45 years old (compared to 41% of all householders in the study area), about one-third are between 45 and 61 years old, and about one-fifth are at least 62 years old. In the study area as a whole, though, more than 30% of householders are age 62+.
- Voucher holders' households tend to be larger than non-voucher households (Table A-9b). Metro HRA's average household size is 2.93 people per household; MPHA's is 2.73; and the study area overall is only 2.33. The size distribution is more dispersed as well. The share of households with only one person is higher among voucher holders than in the general population, and the share of households with five or more people is also higher. About one-fifth of Metro HRA and MPHA households contain five or more people, compared to less than one-tenth of all households in the study area.
- Underlying the difference in household size is an important difference in household types (Table A-9c). Voucher households are much more likely to have children than the study area's households overall. About half of voucher holders in each agency have children; less than 30% of the study area's households do. Voucher holders are also less likely to have a spouse or partner living with them.
- Voucher holders are more likely to have a disability than the general population (Table A-9d). Nearly half of voucher households have at least one person with a disability, compared to just one-fifth of all the study area's households.
- Voucher holders are disproportionately Black and American Indian (Table A-9e): 63% of Metro HRA voucher holders and 78% of Minneapolis voucher holders are Black, compared to 10% of all householders in the study area. And, while just 0.2% of the study area's householders identify as American Indian, 1.5% of Metro HRA voucher holders and 2.7% of MPHA voucher holders do. Members of other race groups are underrepresented among voucher holders, though note that more than 2,700 households across the two agencies have a white, non-Latino householder.
- A substantial proportion of new voucher holders were homeless when they were admitted to the program (Table A-9f). It is possible to examine homeless status only for

[34] The geographic area reflected in the "general population" described in this section is identical to the study area except that it includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park (which could not be identified separately in the data source).

new admissions to the program, but for voucher holders admitted sometime in the previous 12 months, more than one-third of Metro HRA voucher holders and nearly three-fifths of MPHA voucher holders had been homeless.

- Although most voucher holders live in apartment buildings, voucher holders are slightly more likely to live in single-family units than other renter households (Table A-9g). About 11% of Metro HRA voucher holders, and 16% of Minneapolis voucher holders, live in single-family detached homes (versus 9% of all renter households in the study area). Duplexes are also relatively common among Minneapolis voucher holders, 20% of whom live in two-unit buildings, compared to 7% in the Metro HRA service area and 20% in Minneapolis.

Housing costs

Voucher holders' housing costs (Table A-9h) are also interesting. On average, Metro HRA voucher holders rent units that cost an average of $1,584 per month (rent + utilities), to which they contribute $565 on average. Minneapolis PHA voucher holders' rent and utility costs average $1,477 per month, and they also contribute almost $500. This compares to an average gross rent of $1,512 for all renters in the study area. On average, then, voucher holders' rents are comparable to or lower than what other units cost, and they contribute a substantial portion of that rent.

Income

Examining voucher holder incomes in more detail, three main conclusions emerge. As shown in Figures A-1 and A-2:

- A large share of voucher holders are the "working poor." In both agencies, work (including self-employment) is the primary source of income for about 40% of voucher households overall, and for more than two-thirds of voucher households who are working-age and where no one has a disability.[35] Average annual incomes from employment were around $28,000 (Metro HRA) and $33,000 (Minneapolis) – equivalent to about $13.56 (Metro HRA) and $15.74 (Minneapolis) for full-time work.
- Many voucher holders are sustained by Social Security and SSI. For about 40% of Metro HRA and Minneapolis voucher holders, Social Security or SSI is the primary source of income. This share rises to around 85% for older voucher holders (age 62+). The amount of money from these sources is relatively low, however. Among households receiving Social Security payments, the average annual totals are around $13,500 (Metro HRA) and $12,000 (MPHA). These amounts are half or less the average Social Security income for all households in the study area receiving Social Security payments (nearly $27,000).
- Other forms of public assistance are a relatively small component of voucher holders' income. Public assistance programs like General Assistance (GA) and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) are the primary income source for just 7% of

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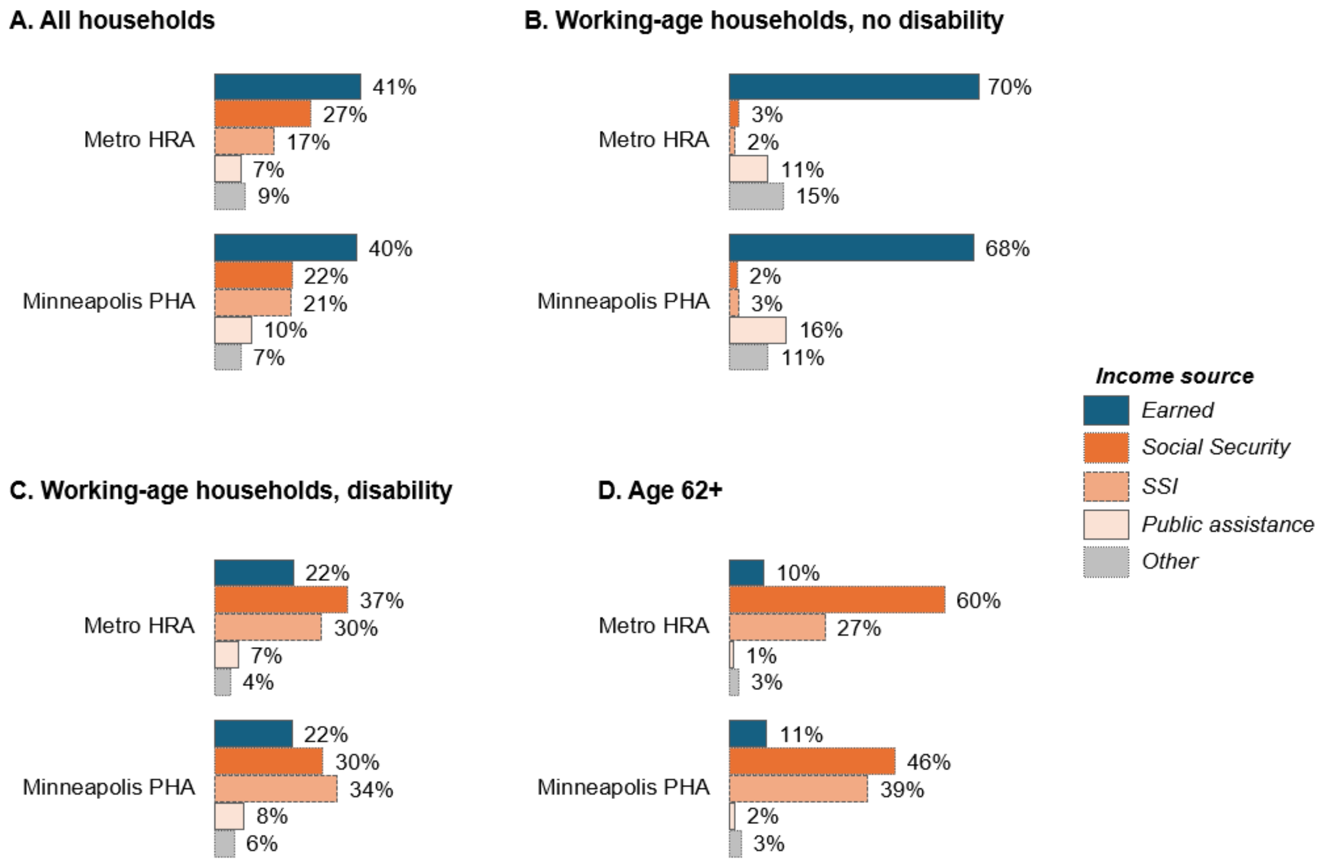
[35] Some may wonder why the share of working-age voucher households where no one has a disability and receive any wage income is less than 70%. The reason: there are many conditions that are not categorized as disabilities but nevertheless prevent someone from working (Brucker & Helms, 2017).

Metro HRA voucher holders and 10% of Minneapolis PHA voucher holders. The average amounts received were about $4,000 – a few hundred dollars per month.

Figure A-1: Many voucher holders earn most of their income

Voucher holders by primary source of income and household type

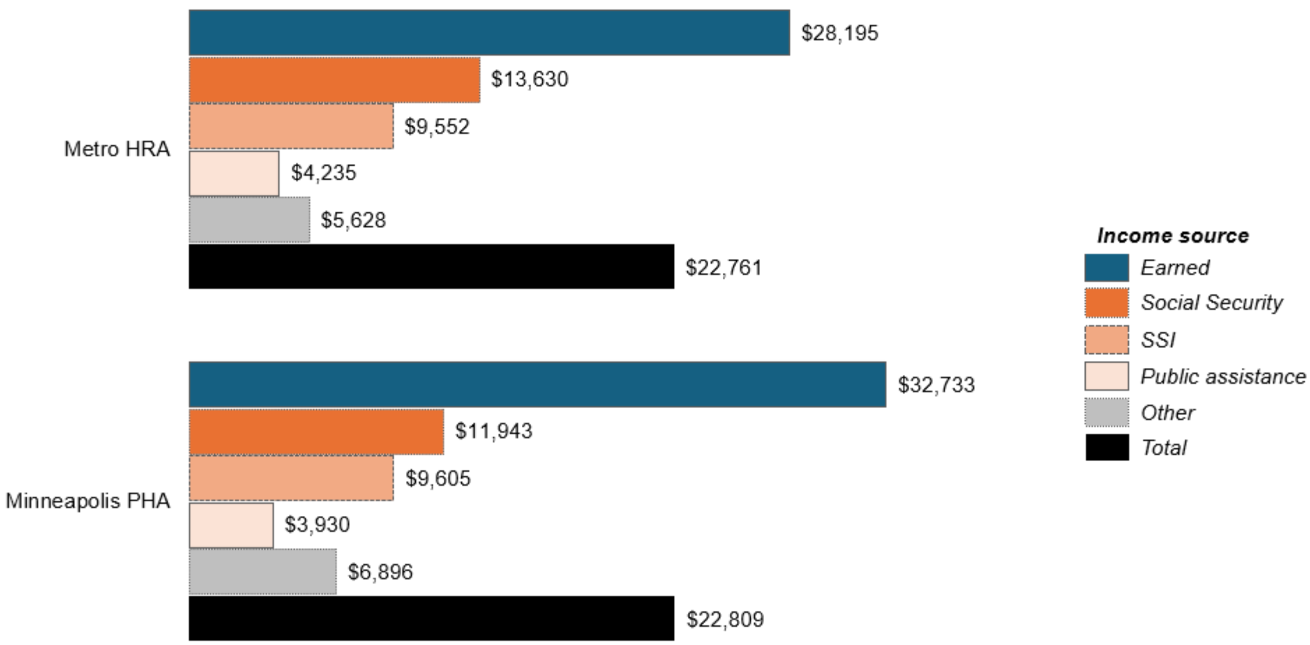


Notes: Average amounts are limited to households who have the given income source. Working-age households are those where the voucher holder is less than 62 years old. Households with a disability are those where *any* household member has a disability.

Source: Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024

Figure A-2: Many voucher holders are the "working poor"

Average amount of income by source



Note: Average amounts are limited to households who have the given income source.

Source: Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024

Appendix 3: Opportunity indices: Place-centered or people-centered?

Perhaps the primary rationale for adopting a place-centered view of voucher holder success is research pointing to the benefits of “high-opportunity areas” for children who grow up in them. Because these are seen as ideal neighborhoods for voucher holders, mobility programs across the country encourage voucher holders to move to these areas and provide extra resources for those who want to look for housing there. The measurement of “opportunity” therefore becomes critically important for determining which places receive this designation.

Measuring opportunity properly requires understanding that differences in outcomes across neighborhoods reflect both the causal (contextual) effects of neighborhoods and the characteristics of the people who live in those neighborhoods. For example, suppose that kids who grew up in Neighborhood A have higher incomes in early adulthood than kids who grew up in Neighborhood B. Perhaps these income differences are due to neighborhood characteristics. For example, A could have schools that offer a better education than the ones in B. Or maybe the income differences exist simply because Neighborhood A has wealthier families than Neighborhood B, and kids who start out with money tend to earn more in early adulthood. In the first scenario, we could speak of “opportunity neighborhoods” because the neighborhood produces opportunity. In the second scenario, we could speak only of “neighborhoods whose residents have lots of opportunity.”

In reality, differences across neighborhoods in socioeconomic outcomes come from a mix of these two. The challenge is to identify the portion of the income differences that is truly due to the causal effect of the neighborhoods, not the composition of their residents. Two “opportunity indices” claim to do this: the Opportunity Atlas and the Child Opportunity Index.

Opportunity Atlas

The Opportunity Atlas (Chetty et al. 2026) tracks children born between 1978 and 1983 over subsequent decades. Through this impressive feat of data-gathering and analysis, the research team was able to account for the influence of people’s race, gender, parental income, and other characteristics in childhood, thereby estimating the causal effect of neighborhoods on income in early adulthood. For each census tract, they created separate estimates of outcomes for children of different race and sex groups. They then combined these separate estimates into a single measure of opportunity for each tract, focusing on the early adulthood incomes of children who grew up in households at the 25th percentile of household income.

This single index of opportunity, though, conflates causal neighborhood effects with the demographic composition of neighborhoods, thus replicating the original problem it was trying to solve. This is because the Opportunity Atlas research team formed the combined, quasi-official opportunity index by averaging the separate race-specific estimates, weighting by each race group’s share of the tract population. Consequently, two census tracts could have identical race-specific mobility profiles (the actual causal effect) but have very different overall opportunity indices (the apparent causal effect). Using only two race groups for a simple example, suppose that among lower-income kids who grew up in tracts A and B, white kids make $50,000 in early adulthood, while Black kids make just $30,000. If Tract A was 75% white and 25% Black, the weighted average income in early adulthood would be $45,000. If tract B was 25% white and 75% Black, the weighted average would be just $35,000. The predominantly white tract would therefore have a higher overall opportunity index than the predominantly Black tract, even though the causal effects of the tracts are the same.

This matters because the overall Opportunity Index is often used to identify "high-opportunity neighborhoods" for use in HCV mobility programs. Because the Twin Cities region was about 90% white in 1980 (which is roughly when the children whom the opportunity estimates reflect were born), this essentially applies mobility estimates developed from a mostly white population to the voucher holders who are predominantly people of color. The opportunities that were available to white children in the past may not be available to today's voucher holders.

We have concerns, then, about this practice of using the overall Opportunity Index for identifying preferred neighborhoods for voucher holders. Using the original race-specific mobility estimates would be more appropriate, but there are some important caveats:

- Race-specific mobility estimates can vary widely. Tracts that show high mobility rates for some groups show relatively low mobility rates for other groups. "Opportunity" cannot be adequately measured with a "one-size-fits-all" index.
- Classifying some neighborhoods as "high-opportunity" and others as "not high-opportunity" ignores the statistical uncertainty around the mobility estimates.
- Many tracts had too few members of certain race groups to produce reliable mobility estimates for them.
- The opportunity index is based on kids whose family income was at the 25th percentile of the national income distribution. Voucher holders' incomes are considerably lower than that.
- It reduces the concept of "opportunity" to income in early adulthood. Income is certainly very important, but different households may think of "opportunity" in additional or different ways. For example, the researchers also examined differences across neighborhoods in incarceration rates, and some of the tracts that produced high mobility for Black children also showed high incarceration rates. This may be an important consideration for some households.

Child Opportunity Index

The Child Opportunity Index (diversitydatakids.org, 2025) attempts to get around this problem by using data on neighborhoods as they exist today, not decades ago. It also includes a wide array of inputs – not just measures of neighborhoods' socioeconomic composition, but also information on things like schools and environmental hazards. This comes closer than other indices[36] to measuring the characteristics of places, not just the characteristics of the people who live in those places. But again, the combination of these various characteristics into a single overall measure of opportunity conflates neighborhood amenities with neighborhood demographics. This is because the overall Child Opportunity Index is a weighted average of all the data inputs, and the weights are developed by examining each input's relationship with two data sources: Opportunity Atlas measures of economic mobility, and PLACES health data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

[36] Examples include the Social Vulnerability Index and the Area Deprivation Index.

This weighting data is heavily influenced by the social and economic composition of census tracts.[37] Characteristics that have stronger relationships with those two data sources (and therefore the demographic composition of census tracts) exert more leverage on the composite Child Opportunity Index. Consider, for example, the four measures of educational resources that go into the overall index. Two of these, teacher experience and child enrichment-related nonprofits, are characteristics of places. The other two – school poverty and adult educational attainment – reflect characteristics of people living in those places. The characteristics of people have three times the influence on the composite index that the truly place-based characteristics have.

None of this argues against using measures of opportunity in conversations with voucher holders. The opportunity data conveys important information that many voucher holders want to consider in deciding where to search for housing. But we believe they should be only one part of the set of neighborhood characteristics presented to voucher holders, not presented as the primary measure of "opportunity" or used to restrict where voucher holders can receive additional supports. A place-centered lens alone is not enough to support voucher holders in satisfying their preferences and meeting their needs. A people-centered lens that includes place-based data, though, can support voucher holders in locating desired places and communities to live.

[37] The Opportunity Atlas measures of mobility are influenced by the racial composition of census tracts (as discussed above). The CDC PLACES dataset also depends heavily on the characteristics of people in census tracts. Because data on health outcomes is not available at the census tract level, the CDC estimates them: it uses national-level data to calculate the relationships between sociodemographic characteristics and health outcomes, then applies those relationships to the sociodemographic characteristics of census tracts to estimate health outcomes. Because white people and higher-income people tend to be healthier, tracts with high shares of white people and higher-income people appear to foster better health outcomes. The CDC PLACES dataset was designed to describe health outcomes in neighborhoods, not to analyze neighborhood effects on those outcomes.

Appendix 4: Detailed tables

Table A-1. Share of voucher holders who experienced each of the following barriers during their most recent housing search

Barrier	Estimate	Margin of error
Property manager didn't accept vouchers	50.3%	± 5.7
Not sure where to look for voucher-accepting housing	40.0%	± 5.5
Wanted a unit that didn't meet payment standards	36.3%	± 5.3
Properties not available in my preferred neighborhoods	35.9%	± 5.5
Application fees/deposits too high	35.3%	± 5.3
Took so long I was afraid of voucher expiration	29.5%	± 5.1
Hard to find required number of bedrooms	23.5%	± 4.5
HCV program was very complicated	21.3%	± 4.5
Application was turned down	18.8%	± 4.5
Property manager unwilling to meet HCV requirements	15.0%	± 4.1
Too busy to do much searching	13.1%	± 3.9
Lack of transportation to search for housing	12.5%	± 3.7
None of these	9.9%	± 3.3
Didn't rent property due to bad experience with manager	9.2%	± 3.3
Other	5.2%	± 2.7

Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; contact the authors for more information.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-2. Share of voucher holders who heard about their current home from each of the following sources during their most recent housing search

Source of information about home	Estimate	Margin of error
Friends or family members	35.7%	± 5.7
HousingLink	24.5%	± 5.2
Private website (Zillow, Craigslist, etc.)	16.8%	± 4.5
Affordable housing website other than HousingLink	11.8%	± 4.2
Housing agency	11.6%	± 4.3
For rent sign	10.1%	± 4.1
Organization other than housing agency	9.1%	± 3.8
Other	7.9%	± 3.3
Social media	4.8%	± 3.2

Notes: This question appeared in only the online survey only. Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; contact the authors for more information.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-3a. Importance of neighborhood characteristics

Neighborhood characteristic	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	% “very” or “extremely” important	Margin of error
Safe from crime	0.2%	1.2%	2.8%	22.0%	73.8%	95.7%	± 2.0
Grocery stores	1.5%	1.9%	7.2%	35.3%	54.1%	89.4%	± 2.9
Medical services	2.0%	4.8%	12.3%	33.9%	47.0%	80.9%	± 3.9
Welcoming schools	14.2%	2.0%	3.8%	11.7%	68.3%	80.0%	± 3.5
Non-prejudiced neighbors	6.2%	5.1%	9.8%	30.8%	48.1%	78.9%	± 3.9
Good schools	15.2%	2.3%	3.9%	16.1%	62.5%	78.6%	± 3.5
Close to other amenities	2.4%	3.5%	16.7%	36.3%	41.0%	77.4%	± 3.9
Retail stores	2.9%	6.7%	21.6%	34.0%	34.8%	68.8%	± 4.5
Social services	4.1%	9.1%	18.0%	34.4%	34.4%	68.7%	± 4.5
Parks and green space	6.6%	8.3%	19.8%	33.7%	31.6%	65.3%	± 4.7
Close to jobs	12.2%	9.0%	15.0%	31.5%	32.2%	63.8%	± 4.7
High-frequency transit	12.2%	10.0%	16.1%	31.8%	29.9%	61.7%	± 4.7
Culturally specific amenities	7.4%	9.1%	23.3%	32.8%	27.4%	60.2%	± 4.7
High-income area	34.5%	16.6%	28.5%	11.4%	9.0%	20.4%	± 4.1

Notes: Items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was “very important” or “extremely important.” Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; contact the authors for more information.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-3b. Importance of home characteristics

Home characteristic	Not at all important	Slightly important	Moderately important	Very important	Extremely important	% “very” or “extremely” important	Margin of error
Affordable rent	0.6%	0.0%	3.4%	21.6%	74.4%	96.0%	± 1.8
Appliances work	0.5%	2.3%	2.9%	24.4%	69.8%	94.3%	± 2.4
Respect from property manager	0.6%	1.4%	4.0%	29.6%	64.4%	94.0%	± 2.4
Good repair	0.6%	0.5%	6.8%	27.2%	64.8%	92.0%	± 2.7
Laundry machines	2.1%	2.9%	4.9%	28.4%	61.6%	90.1%	± 2.9
Security	2.7%	3.3%	5.2%	26.8%	61.9%	88.7%	± 3.1
Number of bedrooms	1.8%	2.4%	8.1%	31.7%	56.0%	87.7%	± 2.9
Living space	0.4%	1.3%	10.8%	40.6%	46.9%	87.5%	± 3.1
Type of building*	2.4%	2.9%	10.7%	30.8%	53.2%	84.0%	± 3.9
Parking*	6.3%	5.6%	8.7%	29.6%	49.8%	79.4%	± 4.1
Storage space	1.4%	4.9%	20.3%	34.6%	38.8%	73.4%	± 4.1
Smoking status	17.2%	5.9%	12.5%	21.5%	42.8%	64.3%	± 4.7
Private outdoor space	7.1%	10.4%	19.8%	30.2%	32.6%	62.8%	± 4.5
Accessible	14.0%	11.7%	17.3%	24.5%	32.4%	56.9%	± 4.7
Pets allowed	33.5%	13.4%	16.8%	15.3%	21.0%	36.4%	± 4.5

* - Item not asked in online survey; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.

Notes: Items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was “very important” or “extremely important.” Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; contact the authors for more information.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-4a. Tradeoffs with neighborhood characteristics

Neighborhood characteristic	% "very" or "extremely" important	Margin of error	% listing in top four neighborhood items	Margin of error	% listing in top 3 home or neighborhood items	Margin of error
Safe from crime	95.7%	± 2.0	63.4%	± 4.7	34.3%	± 4.5
Grocery stores	89.4%	± 2.9	53.5%	± 4.7	7.3%	± 2.5
Medical services	80.9%	± 3.9	29.3%	± 4.3	4.4%	± 1.8
Welcoming schools*	80.0%	± 3.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Non-prejudiced neighbors	78.9%	± 3.9	28.7%	± 4.3	6.6%	± 2.5
Good schools*	78.6%	± 3.5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Close to other amenities	77.4%	± 3.9	21.9%	± 3.9	2.9%	± 1.6
Retail stores	68.8%	± 4.5	7.8%	± 2.7	0.4%	± 0.6
Social services	68.7%	± 4.5	15.2%	± 3.5	1.6%	± 1.4
Parks and green space	65.3%	± 4.7	19.9%	± 3.7	3.4%	± 1.8
Close to jobs	63.8%	± 4.7	27.7%	± 4.3	6.0%	± 2.4
High-frequency transit	61.7%	± 4.7	29.8%	± 4.3	5.0%	± 2.2
Culturally specific amenities	60.2%	± 4.7	9.4%	± 2.9	1.5%	± 1.2
High-income area	20.4%	± 4.1	5.9%	± 2.4	0.8%	± 0.8

***- Due to a glitch in the online survey, these characteristics were not presented as options when respondents selected their top characteristics. This does not affect the overall importance level.**

Notes: Items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was "very important" or "extremely important" (Table A-3a). Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-4b. Tradeoffs with home characteristics

Home characteristic	% “very” or “extremely” important	Margin of error	% listing in top four neighborhood items	Margin of error	% listing in top 3 home or neighborhood items	Margin of error
Affordable rent	96.0%	± 1.8	52.2%	± 4.7	41.8%	± 4.5
Appliances work	94.3%	± 2.4	20.7%	± 3.9	5.3%	± 2.2
Respect from property mgr.	94.0%	± 2.4	17.3%	± 3.5	7.2%	± 2.4
Good repair	92.0%	± 2.7	45.4%	± 4.7	21.2%	± 3.9
Laundry machines	90.1%	± 2.9	25.7%	± 4.1	11.6%	± 3.1
Security	88.7%	± 3.1	27.7%	± 4.3	11.2%	± 2.9
Number of bedrooms	87.7%	± 2.9	40.6%	± 4.5	23.5%	± 3.9
Living space	87.5%	± 3.1	30.8%	± 4.5	13.4%	± 3.3
Type of building**	84.0%	± 3.9	16.7%	± 3.9	7.7%	± 2.7
Parking**	79.4%	± 4.1	4.3%	± 2.0	1.5%	± 1.4
Storage space	73.4%	± 4.1	20.7%	± 3.9	7.2%	± 2.4
Smoking status	64.3%	± 4.7	4.8%	± 2.0	1.3%	± 0.8
Private outdoor space	62.8%	± 4.5	7.3%	± 2.5	3.5%	± 2.0
Accessible	56.9%	± 4.7	7.5%	± 2.4	4.4%	± 2.0
Pets allowed	36.4%	± 4.5	9.7%	± 2.5	6.5%	± 2.2

** - Asked of online respondents only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.

Notes: Items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was “very important” or “extremely important” (Table A-3b). Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-5a. Results of housing searches for neighborhoods

Level of search success	Search was not at all difficult	Search was somewhat difficult	Search was very difficult	N/A (found nothing they were looking for)	Total
Found all they were looking for	7.5%	6.3%	2.9%	0.0%	16.7%
Found most of what they were looking for	7.4%	23.8%	4.9%	0.0%	36.1%
Found some of what they were looking for	2.7%	15.3%	8.7%	0.0%	26.7%
Found nothing they were looking for	N/A	N/A	N/A	20.5%	20.5%
Total	17.6%	45.4%	16.5%	20.5%	100.0%

Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Values in the table are cell percentages – that is, each cell's share of *all* voucher holders. Using these instead of row/column percentages makes it easier to create combined categories. For example, the share of voucher holders who reported that they got most or all of what they wanted in a neighborhood but found it somewhat or very difficult is 37.9% (6.3% + 23.8% + 2.9% + 4.9%).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-5b. Results of housing searches for homes

Level of search success	Search was not at all difficult	Search was somewhat difficult	Search was very difficult	N/A (found nothing they were looking for)	Total
Found all they were looking for	5.9%	8.4%	2.1%	0.0%	16.4%
Found most of what they were looking for	6.7%	19.4%	11.5%	0.0%	37.6%
Found some of what they were looking for	0.9%	13.5%	17.1%	0.0%	31.5%
Found nothing they were looking for	N/A	N/A	N/A	14.5%	14.5%
Total	13.5%	41.3%	30.7%	14.5%	100.0%

Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Values in the table are cell percentages – that is, each cell's share of *all* voucher holders. Using these instead of row/column percentages makes it easier to create combined categories. For example, the share of voucher holders who reported that they got most or all of what they wanted in a home and found it somewhat or not at all difficult is 40.4% (5.9% + 6.7% + 8.4% + 19.4%).

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-6a. Which neighborhood characteristics voucher holders report having (or not having)

Neighborhood characteristic	% rating as "very" or "extremely" important (Table A-3a)	Margin of error	% indicating that they have each characteristic	Margin of error
Safe from crime	95.7%	± 2.0	71.5%	± 4.5
Grocery stores	89.4%	± 2.9	84.8%	± 3.7
Medical services	80.9%	± 3.9	85.0%	± 3.7
Welcoming schools	80.0%	± 3.5	75.2%	± 5.3
Non-prejudiced neighbors	78.9%	± 3.9	82.5%	± 3.9
Good schools	78.6%	± 3.5	73.5%	± 5.3
Close to other amenities	77.4%	± 3.9	83.3%	± 3.7
Retail stores	68.8%	± 4.5	80.3%	± 4.1
Social services	68.7%	± 4.5	80.2%	± 4.1
Parks and green space	65.3%	± 4.7	81.2%	± 4.1
Close to jobs	63.8%	± 4.7	73.3%	± 5.1
High-frequency transit	61.7%	± 4.7	80.2%	± 4.3
Culturally specific amenities	60.2%	± 4.7	81.5%	± 4.3
High-income area	20.4%	± 4.1	51.6%	± 7.3

Notes: For each item, this question was asked only of respondents who said that characteristic was "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important to them. For easier comparison to other tables, items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was "very important" or "extremely important" (Table A-3a). Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-6b. Which home characteristics voucher holders report having (or not having)

Home characteristic	% rating as "very" or "extremely" important (Table A-3a)	Margin of error	% indicating that they have each characteristic	Margin of error
Affordable rent	96.0%	± 1.8	83.6%	± 3.5
Appliances work	94.3%	± 2.4	89.7%	± 2.9
Respect from property mgr	94.0%	± 2.4	86.7%	± 3.1
Good repair	92.0%	± 2.7	82.2%	± 3.7
Laundry machines	90.1%	± 2.9	86.6%	± 3.5
Security	88.7%	± 3.1	74.5%	± 4.3
Number of bedrooms	87.7%	± 2.9	79.0%	± 3.9
Living space	87.5%	± 3.1	75.7%	± 4.1
Type of building*	84.0%	± 3.9	76.9%	± 4.7
Parking*	79.4%	± 4.1	84.4%	± 4.1
Storage space	73.4%	± 4.1	68.4%	± 4.5
Smoking status	64.3%	± 4.7	81.3%	± 4.3
Private outdoor space	62.8%	± 4.5	59.0%	± 5.3
Accessible	56.9%	± 4.7	68.2%	± 5.1
Pets allowed	36.4%	± 4.5	81.6%	± 5.1

*** - Item appeared in online survey only; different weights were applied to represent all voucher holders.**

Notes: For each item, this question was asked only of respondents who said that characteristic was "moderately," "very," or "extremely" important to them. For easier comparison to other tables, items are sorted in descending order of the share of voucher holders who indicated that each characteristic was "very important" or "extremely important" (Table A-3a). Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-7a. Overall satisfaction with neighborhoods

Group	Extremely unhappy	Somewhat unhappy	Unsure	Somewhat happy	Extremely happy	% “somewhat” or “extremely” happy	Margin of error
All voucher holders	12.9%	16.6%	6.3%	35.4%	28.9%	64.3%	± 5.1
Agency: Metro HRA*	11.0%	12.9%	5.0%	34.8%	36.2%	71.1%	± 5.3
Agency: Minneapolis PHA*	14.8%	20.4%	7.6%	35.9%	21.3%	57.2%	± 6.7
Race: White, non-Latino	15.5%	19.1%	7.5%	28.0%	29.9%	57.9%	± 9.7
Race: African American	16.0%	18.4%	4.5%	40.2%	20.8%	61.1%	± 7.4
Race: Somali*	2.7%	7.4%	0.0%	36.4%	53.6%	90.0%	± 7.9
Race: Other African or Black unspecified	12.2%	14.4%	10.7%	34.9%	27.8%	62.7%	± 9.9
Race: Other people of color	11.3%	22.7%	11.3%	29.5%	25.2%	54.7%	± 12.2
Households with a vehicle*	9.8%	14.7%	4.8%	37.5%	33.2%	70.7%	± 5.1
Households with no vehicle*	20.4%	19.1%	6.4%	32.5%	21.6%	54.0%	± 9.0

*** - Category is statistically different from the other(s) in its group ($p < 0.10$).**

Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Margins of error yield a 90% confidence interval (95% confidence interval for “all voucher holders”); they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.645 (1.96 for “all voucher holders”). For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-7b. Overall satisfaction with homes

Group	Extremely unhappy	Somewhat unhappy	Unsure	Somewhat happy	Extremely happy	% “somewhat” or “extremely” happy	Margin of error
All voucher holders	14.7%	16.0%	4.0%	33.3%	32.0%	65.3%	± 5.1
Agency: Metro HRA	16.5%	17.1%	3.5%	31.6%	31.4%	62.9%	± 5.6
Agency: Minneapolis PHA	12.9%	14.9%	4.4%	35.1%	32.7%	67.8%	± 6.4
Race: White, non-Latino	22.0%	14.4%	7.3%	27.3%	29.0%	56.4%	± 9.7
Race: African American	13.0%	18.5%	1.7%	44.5%	22.2%	66.7%	± 7.2
Race: Somali*	7.7%	1.8%	1.8%	30.8%	58.0%	88.8%	± 7.1
Race: Other African or Black unspecified	19.5%	21.4%	3.4%	24.3%	31.4%	55.8%	± 10.0
Race: Other people of color	6.3%	19.5%	11.3%	22.0%	40.9%	62.9%	± 11.8
Households with a vehicle	13.4%	13.2%	4.6%	33.1%	35.7%	68.8%	± 5.1
Households with no vehicle	15.9%	19.0%	3.0%	36.2%	26.0%	62.1%	± 8.9

*** - Category is statistically different from the other(s) in its group ($p < 0.10$).**

Notes: This question appeared in the online survey only. Margins of error yield a 90% confidence interval (95% confidence interval for “all voucher holders”); they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.645 (1.96 for “all voucher holders”). For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; for actual confidence intervals, contact the authors.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-8. Share of voucher holders who reported that the following items would help them in future housing searches

Item	Estimate	Margin of error
List of property mgrs who might accept voucher	61.1%	± 5.5
More property mgrs to accept vouchers	57.7%	± 5.7
Pay for application fees/deposits	56.9%	± 5.5
Raise payment standards	42.4%	± 5.5
Help me understand affordability	35.2%	± 5.5
Connection to social services	23.2%	± 4.7
Info on different neighborhoods	21.0%	± 4.7
Individual counseling	9.4%	± 3.3
Workshops on housing searches	6.0%	± 2.7
Other	3.8%	± 2.2

Notes: This question appeared in only the online survey only. Margins of error yield a 95% confidence interval; they are calculated as the standard error multiplied by 1.96. For percentages that are close to 0% or 100%, the margins of error may not produce accurate confidence intervals; contact the authors for more information.

Source: Metropolitan Council survey of Housing Choice Voucher holders

Table A-9a: Age of voucher holders

Age of householder	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Under 25	157	2.1%	95	2.0%	3.9%
25 to 44	3,185	43.5%	1,984	42.2%	37.0%
45 to 61	2,392	32.6%	1,608	34.2%	28.2%
62 or older	1,594	21.8%	1,017	21.6%	30.8%

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9b: Size of voucher households

Household size	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
One person	2,725	37.2%	1,917	40.8%	32.3%
Two people	1,305	17.8%	797	16.9%	34.9%
Three or four people	1,699	23.2%	1,122	23.9%	25.0%
Five or more people	1,599	21.8%	868	18.5%	7.9%
Average	2.93	N/A	2.73	N/A	2.33

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9c: Household type of voucher households

Household type	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Live alone	2,725	37.2%	1,917	40.8%	32.3%
Married/partnered with kids	708	9.7%	375	8.0%	21.8%
Married/partnered without kids	155	2.1%	75	1.6%	32.1%
Unmarried/unpartnered with kids	3,148	43.0%	1,974	42.0%	6.2%
Other	592	8.1%	363	7.7%	7.7%

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9d: Disability status of voucher households

Disability status	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
At least one household member has a disability	3,609	49.2%	2,322	49.4%	19.9%
No household member has a disability	3,719	50.8%	2,382	50.6%	80.1%

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9e: Race of voucher holders

Race	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
White, non-Latino	2,092	28.5%	616	13.1%	75.7%
Black, non-Latino	4,637	63.3%	3,661	77.8%	9.5%
Asian, non-Latino	97	1.3%	39	0.8%	6.0%
Hispanic or Latino	164	2.2%	111	2.4%	4.4%
American Indian, non-Latino	107	1.5%	134	2.8%	0.2%
More than one race, non-Latino	231	3.2%	143	3.0%	4.1%

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area.

Sources*: Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9f: Homeless status upon admission of voucher holders

Homeless status upon admission	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**N/A**
Received voucher in last year, homeless	138	1.9%	245	5.2%	N/A
Received voucher in last year, not homeless	248	3.4%	172	3.7%	N/A
Had voucher already	6,942	94.7%	4,287	91.1%	N/A

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. Homelessness status was available only for voucher holders admitted to the program in the previous year. This information does not apply to the study area as a whole.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9g: Type of voucher holders' housing units

Type of housing unit	Metro HRA (#)	Metro HRA (%)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (%)	Study area (%)
Total	**7,328**	**100.0%**	**4,704**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Single-family detached	833	11.4%	740	15.7%	9.2%
Townhome	873	11.9%	47	1.0%	6.5%
Duplex	523	7.1%	922	19.6%	5.4%
Apartment	5,092	69.5%	2,982	63.4%	78.2%
Manufactured home	7	0.1%	0	0.0%	0.7%
Unknown	0	0.0%	13	0.3%	0.0%

Notes: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100.0%. The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area. Study area data reflects only rental housing units.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

Table A-9h: Average housing costs of voucher holders

Type of housing cost	Metro HRA (#)	Minneapolis PHA (#)	Study area (%)
Contract rent	$1,452	$1,361	$1,428
Tenant-paid utilities	$132	$116	$151
Gross rent (contract rent + tenant-paid utilities)	$1,584	$1,477	$1,579
Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	$1,019	$979	N/A
Portion of gross rent paid by voucher holder	$565	$498	N/A
30% of voucher holder's income	*$487*	*$489*	*N/A*
Extra amount paid to live in a unit more expensive than the allowable rent	*$78*	*$9*	*N/A*

Definitions:

- **Contract rent is rent paid to the landlord.**
- **Tenant-paid utilities are whatever utilities are not included in contract rent. For Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA households, these amounts are utility allowances, which are basically reasonable utility costs given housing unit characteristics like number of bedrooms, type of unit, and heating fuel type.**
- **Gross rent is the sum of contract rent and tenant-paid utilities.**
- **Housing Assistance Payment is the subsidy paid by the housing authority. For each voucher holder, the Housing Assistance Payment represents the difference between (a) 30% of the voucher holder's income and (b) the housing unit's gross rent or the allowable gross rent set by the housing authority (payment standard), whichever is less.**
- **Portion of gross rent paid by voucher holder is the difference between gross rent and the Housing Assistance Payment. It has two components:**
  - **30% of the voucher holder's income**
  - **Any amount by which the unit's gross rent exceeds the allowable gross rent set by the housing authority (payment standard).**

Notes: The data source for the study area data has limited geographic detail, so the "study area" reflected in these numbers includes the cities of Plymouth and St. Louis Park even though these communities are not part of the Metro HRA service area. Study area data reflects only renter households.

Sources*:* Metro HRA and Minneapolis PHA anonymized data on Housing Choice Voucher holders as of January 1, 2024; U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey one-year Public Use Microdata Sample (study area).

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390 Robert Street North
Saint Paul, MN 55101-1805

651-602-1000
TTY 651-291-0904
public.info@metc.state.mn.us
metrocouncil.org

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