

## THE ACCESS · HOUSING

# Landing an affordable unit in NYC

*What applicants and property managers both need to get through the process clean.*

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**6M**APPLICATIONS FOR ~10,000  
UNITS LAST YEAR<sup>1</sup>**~16,000**AVERAGE APPLICATIONS  
PER NEW DEVELOPMENT<sup>1</sup>**1.4%**CITYWIDE RENTAL  
VACANCY RATE<sup>2</sup>**109**AVERAGE DAYS FROM  
SELECTION TO LEASE<sup>3</sup>

The hardest part of landing an affordable unit in New York is not luck. It is paperwork.

Most people treat the housing lottery like a coin flip, and the odds explain why. Last year NYC Housing Connect drew roughly 6 million applications for about 10,000 available homes, and a single new development now averages around 16,000 applicants.<sup>1</sup> With citywide rental vacancy sitting near 1.4 percent, the pressure is not letting up.<sup>2</sup> But the lottery rewards readiness more than luck. The applicants who reach the finish line are the ones whose files are clean before anyone asks to see them.

## Know your AMI band before you apply

Affordable units are tied to Area Median Income, and most lotteries set bands somewhere between 30 and 130 percent of AMI.<sup>4</sup> If your household income falls outside the range, the application stops there. Read the income chart on each listing and apply only to the ones you actually qualify for. Scattershot applications waste the one thing the process rewards, which is a real match.

## Get your documents in order early

Two years of tax returns, recent pay stubs, ID for every adult, and bank statements.<sup>5</sup> Your income is verified when you are selected, not when you apply, so a clean folder turns a stressful scramble into a formality. The applicants who lose their spot are rarely unqualified. They are unprepared. Build the folder now, before your number comes up.

## **Expect the wait, and the recertification**

From application to keys can run 12 to 15 months, with about 109 days between selection and lease signing alone.<sup>3</sup> And the unit is not a one-time approval. Income gets verified again at move-in and every year after. Knowing that going in makes the annual process feel routine instead of threatening.

## **For property managers, it runs in reverse**

Every approved file has to hold up under HPD and HUD review, which means the staff handling intake and recertification carry real weight. A rushed or incomplete file is not just a service problem. It is a compliance exposure. Operators who do this well treat leasing and recertification as a specialty, not an afterthought, and they staff it that way.

I have watched families spend more than a year chasing one of these units, and I have watched a single missing pay stub end the whole thing in an afternoon. This is housing, but underneath it is people trying to build a life in a city that does not make it easy. Both sides win when the work happens before the deadline, not at it.

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### **SOURCES**

1. QNS, "Housing lottery receives 6 million applications for just 10,000 units" (May 2025), citing HPD Acting Commissioner Ahmed Tigani, NYC Council hearing, April 29, 2025.
2. NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), citywide rental vacancy data, 2025.
3. City of New York, 2025 Mayor's Management Report (average days from selection to lease signing).
4. NYC Housing Connect program guidelines (AMI income bands).
5. NYC Housing Connect applicant documentation requirements.