



TIPS FOR SUCCESS FOR ESTABLISHING PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRANSITIONAL AND PERMANENT HOUSING

Progress toward the goal of *Opening Doors*, the federal strategic plan to end homelessness, has been steady. Since its 2010 release, the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness decreased by 31 percent (Henry, Shivji, de Sousa, & Cohen, 2015). Homelessness among veterans declined at an even greater rate, with entire cities and states declaring an end to homelessness among that population.

This headway has had its challenges, not the least being a dramatic change in the rental market. According to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies, the number of available rental units is at its lowest point in 30 years. This shortage is especially dire among low-income renters; only 34 affordable rental units are available for every 100 low-income renters (Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2015). The National Alliance to End Homelessness finds these numbers troubling, noting that "it is becoming harder to find affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness (Doran, 2015)."

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) helps veterans experiencing homelessness obtain meaningful employment. Although employment-focused, HVRP grantees recognize that stable housing plays an important role in getting and keeping jobs. Toward that end, building partnerships with local transitional and permanent housing providers is paramount, particularly during times of limited affordable housing options. The following tips suggest how to establish those connections.

Conduct an internal audit. HVRP grantees provide referral and access to both transitional and permanent housing. Some veterans with disabilities may also benefit from the extra assistance that permanent supportive housing provides. It is important for HVRP grantees to understand the specific needs of their clients and what housing resources already exist to fill those needs. A thorough audit will reveal gaps in housing supports.

Assign a dedicated staff person. Who will do the work of maintaining existing partnerships and building new ones? Many successful HVRP grantees recommend having at least a part-time individual specifically assigned to developing relationships with landlords and other housing providers. Some programs have trained peer specialist veterans who negotiate with landlords.

Get connected. A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provides billions of dollars in CoC grants that may be used for permanent housing, transitional housing, supportive services, Homeless Management Information System, and homelessness prevention. CoCs perform a key role in addressing homelessness at the local level. When HVRPs retain a presence on the CoC itself, or on its board, it can open doors to partnerships with local public housing agencies, affordable housing developers, nonprofit homelessness assistance providers, and others.

Use The Data. One of the responsibilities of the CoC is to inform future funding and re-direction of services based on counts of people experiencing homelessness. HUD's annual Point-in-Time Count includes veterans as a distinct sub-population. Knowing these numbers will help HVRP grantees ensure that its participants receive equitable access to all CoC services, including housing services (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, n.d., *Best Practices...*). The CoC operates the community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) that collects data on all homeless housing and service projects operating in the CoC. Veteran status is a universal data element that all homeless providers are required to record in the system when working with a homeless individual or family. Reports from the HMIS can be helpful in planning for your HVRP or locating a veteran who is no longer active in your program.

Navigate the System. Several federal housing programs are available to veterans experiencing homelessness, but it is important that grantees understand how those programs intersect with HVRP. The Department of Veterans Affairs offers the Grant and Per Diem (GPD), HUD-Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs. However, HUD-VASH and SSVF participants cannot be living in permanent housing at the time of enrollment in HVRP. Maintaining working relationships with federal liaisons can help HVRP grantees understand eligibility rules and facilitate quick enrollment when needed.

Mine the Community. Support can often be found in unexpected places. Real estate professionals in one community banded together to help those in need of housing by tapping professional networks and expertise to engage landlords and increase housing placements. Philanthropic organizations, community businesses, and veterans' service organizations may be willing to subsidize innovative programs that minimize landlord risk associated with renting to individuals who may not meet screening criteria. Banks and other financial institutions often have staff devoted to working with providers of housing services and are beginning to donate properties of value (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, n.d., *Converting Foreclosed...*).

Take Charge of the Situation. If affordable housing is not available in the community, it may be necessary to acquire housing. Don't dismiss foreclosed or abandoned properties as possible housing options for veterans experiencing homelessness. Programs such as the nonprofit National Community Stabilization Trust make this a more viable option for HVRP grantees. If landlord engagement is a major stumbling block, consider master leasing, which involves a master tenant leasing an entire building or group of apartments in order to sublet units to individual households. Other ways to engage reluctant landlords include conducting a marketing campaign, identifying a housing champion who will lead the charge, or establishing a landlord advisory group.

Embrace Innovation. Homeless service providers are developing innovative approaches to securing housing for veterans experiencing homelessness. Veterans Matter uses cloud-based technology to reduce the approval time for a potential renter's security deposit from weeks to minutes. The Corporation for Supportive Housing developed a web-based tool to generate a ranked list of housing options based on common intake form information. The Atlantic Real Estate Collaborative built a live feed of information that provides daily updates of unit availability. HVRP grantees should seek out other such ways to facilitate the process of securing housing.

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