

General Must-Haves:

Rules vs Expectations

Rules tend to have a negative connotation and can contribute to a punitive environment. Instead, shelters should create and utilize shelter expectations to communicate desired behaviors, which uses a more positive framework.

Keep it Short and User-Friendly

Expectations should apply to a diverse population of people. They should be clear, concise, and easy to read for most people.

Maintain Housing and Safety Focus

The ultimate goal of shelter is to assist people out of homelessness and into permanent housing. Therefore, shelter expectations should center on keeping guests, staff, and visitors safe; and around the work to support people in obtaining permanent housing. Housing First shelter expectations should contribute to a low barrier environment and should not impede guests' ability to access shelter and obtain permanent housing.

Fill your shelter with those that **need it the most**, not those that got there first or can "comply" with the rules.

Ten Steps to Evaluating Your Shelter Rules:

Follow these steps to evaluate and improve your shelter rules. Work collectively with shelter leadership, direct-service staff, former and current shelter guests, and other community members and stakeholders to transform shelter rules into shared shelter expectations.



What if some guests don't meet shelter expectations?

Below are considerations that Crossroads, Rhode Island, a successful low-barrier shelter, utilizes when addressing a guest's behavior that does not align/meet shelter expectations:

Crossroads Rhode Island considers:

What are the guest's circumstances?

What do you know about the guest? Are there mitigating circumstances such as serious mental illness, vulnerability, or a history of violent behavior?

If an episode (or episodes) of violence is involved, what was the level of violence?

What is the guest's level of insight regarding their behavior?

How will the victim's safety factor into how long a guest is restricted?

“ Crossroads has 3 values;

**SAFETY,
RESPECT, and
EFFECTIVENESS. ”**

What are the staff's circumstances?

Has the staff given shelter guests a clear understanding of what behavior is expected and an understanding of what the consequences might be?

Was staff able to use de-escalation techniques (CPI or other strategies) to which the guest responded and was able to engage with staff to end confrontation, or was that not possible, necessitating a call to the police?

Can the guest be allowed entry to receive case management services focusing on housing placement?

Is there an opportunity for mediation? Does the shelter manager make themselves available to meet with guests who are restricted? Can they bring together guests and staff to discuss the incident?

Is the length of restriction informed by the level of violence and precipitating issues (for example, physically or emotionally taking advantage of a vulnerable guest)?

Are there external circumstances to consider?

Are there other shelter options for the guest being restricted?

What are the weather conditions?

Steps for Updating Your Shelter Expectations

1) Conduct an Assessment:

Review incidents resulting in guests being barred and examine those rules for necessity. Consider how similar issues could be handled differently.

Identify any disparities in who is being barred or disciplined.

Meet with staff and guests to gather input on the current rules.

2) Conduct a Review:

Review each rule to determine **(1)** if it helps guests exit shelter into housing, and **(2)** if they are directly related to safety.

Discard rules that do not meet these criteria, no longer make sense, or only pertain to an isolated incident.

3) Inform Staff and Guests:

Post new expectations and let them take effect in 30 days.

Hold frequent meetings with staff and shelter guests to assess effectiveness.

Revise expectations and provide ongoing staff training as needed.

4) Watch Your Data:

Track whether the number of people being barred decreases, and if people are moving into permanent housing at a higher or faster rate.

Additional Resources:

- [Five Keys to Effective Emergency Shelter](#)
- [Healing Centered Engagement](#)
- [How the Earth Didn't Fly into the Sun - Missouri](#)
 - [Excerpt from Missouri Project on Reducing Rules](#)
- [Sample Policies and Procedures - NAEH](#)
- [Sample Policies and Procedures - OrgCode](#)