



# RAPID RE-HOUSING TOOLKIT



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The Alliance is a leading national voice on the issue of homelessness that accomplishes its mission through research and education, policy analysis and advocacy, and capacity building.

The Melville Charitable Trust is the largest foundation in the U.S. that is exclusively devoted to supporting solutions to prevent and end homelessness.

# HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

**Providers** can use this toolkit to design any new Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) program or to improve their current RRH practice, no matter how it is funded. This toolkit provides clear guidelines on the goals, program policies, and staff activities of an effective program, and can be used to train new staff and improve the practice of current staff.

**Funders, State Leaders, and Coalitions** can use the toolkit to design new RRH programs, standardize practice across programs, and increase the effective implementation of existing RRH. This toolkit can be used in conjunction with the Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards to develop Requests for Proposals (RFPs) for a variety of funding streams and contracts for RRH program activities. It also can be used to evaluate applications for new RRH programs, determine which organizations are best suited to provide RRH, and review current program performance.

**Continuums of Care (CoCs)** can use this toolkit to develop new RRH programs, standardize and systematize best practices across programs, and when monitoring and evaluating existing RRH practice.

## TOOLS


At the end of each section of this toolkit, the reader will find links to various tools and community examples. Tools and tips will use the following icon:

 Resource



› This toolkit is a companion to the  [Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards](#) and the  [Performance Evaluation and Improvement Toolkit](#).

# INTRODUCTION

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) is a Housing First intervention designed to help households quickly exit homelessness, return to housing in the community, and not become homeless again in the near term. While RRH is not designed to end poverty, it is designed to help households establish a foundation to support long-term permanent housing success. The  **core components of Rapid Re-Housing** are:

- 1 housing identification,
- 2 move-in and rent assistance, and
- 3 RRH case management and services.

The three core components discussed in this toolkit represent the minimum that a program must provide to be considered a RRH program, but do not fully describe what constitutes an effective RRH program. The three core components do not exclusively occur in a household's housing timeline in the order discussed in this toolkit. For example, there are instances where a household will identify housing, move in, engage in case management, and due to unforeseen circumstances, will need to relocate into another housing arrangement. In this type of situation, the housing identification and rent and move-in assistance core components would begin again.

This toolkit is intended to help current and potential RRH providers design, redesign, and operate effective programs that successfully use the three core components of RRH to end homelessness for individuals and families. This toolkit provides details on recommended RRH program design and practice, based on what is currently considered recommended practices by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and high-performing RRH programs. Though different funding sources may dictate certain nuances in how a program operates (e.g. geographic restrictions, population-focused funding, etc.), the core components and practices of RRH explained in this toolkit can be used in every RRH program. As RRH practice continues to evolve, this toolkit will be updated.

## HOUSING FIRST

🔗 **Housing First is a philosophy** that values flexibility, individualized supports, client choice, and autonomy. Housing First is a 🔗 **proven, effective approach** operationalized in homeless assistance that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness. This prioritization can thus end their homelessness and serve as a platform from which people can continue to grow and thrive in their communities.

Housing First is not solely about housing, and never should be. Support services are part of the Housing First model and may include formal support services (e.g., doctor, therapist, social worker) or informal supports, like connecting with family, friends, and faith groups. In Housing First, these supports are not prescribed; people have the agency to select supportive services they need and want, tailoring their supports to their unique situation.

The solution to homelessness is housing. Permanent housing is what ends homelessness – whether a person follows the rules or not, whether they are “compliant” with treatment or not, whether they have a criminal or eviction record or not. A homeless response system should ensure that its programs align with Housing First so that everyone experiencing homelessness can access housing and services. In order to honor client choice, it may be important to offer some homeless programs with requirements. However, an entire homeless system should not be built on a system that screens people out of housing and services instead of in.

Utilizing a Housing First approach in Rapid Re-Housing provides the opportunity for any household experiencing homelessness to have access to permanent housing, no matter their circumstances. The RRH program assists the household with housing identification, as well as rent and move-in assistance, and case management and services to facilitate the household’s successful acquisition of permanent housing. Once in housing, the households work with the RRH case manager to set housing sustainability goals, define pathways to reach them, and take steps to achieve them.

A RRH program’s Housing First approach assists in removing the barriers to accessing permanent housing. These barriers cause people to experience homelessness for longer periods of time, which is more expensive to the community and lengthens a household’s trauma. Once a household is in permanent housing, they are better able to address any issues that may have contributed to their experience(s) of homelessness and/or issues that could contribute to their return.



## WHO SHOULD GET RAPID RE-HOUSING?

RRH can be effective for a broad range of people who experience homelessness. RRH programs should cast a wide net and serve households experiencing homelessness who have engaged in homeless assistance programs and have been identified as needing additional assistance to help them exit homelessness. No research has yet been able to identify or predict characteristics that are associated with success or failure in a RRH program. Thus, communities should seek to have sufficient resources to offer RRH to anyone who is homeless, whether unsheltered or staying in a shelter, and cannot otherwise exit homelessness quickly, either on their own or through another form of permanent housing assistance.

The great majority of RRH program participants exit homelessness to permanent housing, and a relatively low number return to homelessness. While further research is needed, communities and programs report similar rates of success across different subpopulations and people with different levels and types of circumstances (e.g. people with no income, people with active addiction to substances, etc.). Nationally and locally, RRH programs such as the [🏠 Supportive Services for Veteran Families \(SSVF\)](#) program have demonstrated that even people with high tenancy barriers and those with no income can obtain and retain permanent housing with the assistance of RRH. Keys to success include individualized and flexible assistance, progressive engagement strategies, and the ability to make program modifications when needed.

RRH programs must be attentive and informed about how to address the unique needs of individuals and families, as well as needs that are related to the program's target subpopulations, such as [🏠 youth](#), [🏠 survivors of domestic violence](#), [🏠 veterans](#), or [🏠 persons who experience chronic homelessness](#). Additionally, RRH programs must ensure equity in the experiences and outcomes of their program participants, particularly prioritizing proportionate outcomes by race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity. The RRH program may need to offer deeper subsidies; more intensive support, safety planning, or service connections; or find creative approaches to help some subpopulations make the adjustments necessary to stabilize in permanent housing.

People with the highest levels of vulnerability, trauma, and/or the least experience living in independent housing may require higher levels of staff support as they stabilize in permanent housing. A RRH program must be alert to evidence that a person needs more than a basic level of support. But it is important not to make assumptions that all members of a subpopulation, even a particularly vulnerable subpopulation, will need longer-term, intensive assistance. It is recommended that organizations use a [🏠 progressive engagement model](#), which requires an incremental and tailored approach to identifying and meeting the needs of program participants throughout their program engagement.

## TOOLS

[🏠 Housing First Fact Sheet](#)

# HOUSING IDENTIFICATION

## OVERVIEW

Housing identification is the first core component of Rapid Re-Housing, the goal of which is to quickly find housing for program participants. RRH uses a Housing First approach to assist people in identifying and obtaining permanent housing options immediately, regardless of their tenancy barriers. These barriers may include lack of income, poor rental history, criminal justice involvement, disabilities, or other challenges that make it difficult to obtain housing. Program activities include continuous recruitment of landlords with units in communities and neighborhoods; identification of a variety of permanent housing options such as single room occupancy units (SROs), shared housing, and rooms for rent; and negotiation with landlords to help program participants access housing.

Beyond landlord recruitment, programs also must match households to appropriate housing that is decent and safe, with a particular focus on safety needs when working with survivors of domestic violence. It is critical that households are matched to housing that can be realistically maintained by paying the rent after financial assistance ends. Effective programs accomplish this by identifying a variety of housing options and by serving as a resource to households during the housing search and application process.

Staff also must be knowledgeable about landlord responsibilities to help households served by the program obtain and sustain appropriate housing. Programs should help households understand tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities, and should not knowingly place households with negligent landlords.

## 1.1 PRINCIPLES OF HOUSING IDENTIFICATION

- Within the limits of the participant's income, a RRH program should have the ability to help households access units that are desirable and sustainable — i.e., that are in neighborhoods where they want to live, have access to transportation, are close to employment, and are safe.
- Housing identification efforts should be designed and implemented to actively recruit and retain landlords and housing managers willing to rent to program participants who may otherwise fail to pass typical tenant screening criteria.
- Critical to the formation of a landlord-program relationship is the recognition of the landlord as a vital partner. The RRH provider must be responsive to landlords to preserve and develop those partnerships for future housing placements.

## 1.2 MATCHING PARTICIPANTS TO HOUSING

Matching participants to the “right” housing option from the start of the program is the first step that leads to a positive RRH exit. There are several factors to consider when making the right match for each household.

**The most important is to make certain that the match can realistically move a household from homelessness to permanent housing as quickly as possible.**

It is also important to note that in many cases, a program participant's initial permanent housing placement may not be where they stay long term. This placement may instead reflect their current strengths and needs, and provide a realistic permanent option to move them from homelessness towards a path of stability.

The following is a list of steps RRH program staff should take to match program participants to appropriate housing.

### 1 Gather Critical Background Information Needed to Obtain Housing

Most landlords want critical background information on an applicant for housing. Accordingly, RRH programs must have information on a participant's Tenant Screening Barriers (i.e., potential problems that would be identified in the tenant screening process, *see Section 1.3*) before beginning the housing search. Staff can obtain this information directly from a combination of program participant interviews, public databases, and landlord references, or they can purchase a background check that summarizes the person's credit, housing, employment, income and criminal justice involvement history and references from their past landlords. In either case, program staff should make it clear to program participants that gathering background information is done without any





judgment and will not result in screening them out of the RRH program. Rather, it is a necessary step to be as prepared as possible to obtain housing, since the landlord can obtain this information from public databases. Program staff should reassure participants they will help them work through any tenancy barriers that may appear, and that people with similar barriers can and do obtain housing.

If programs conduct their own background checks, they should plan to find source data and contact landlord references. A participant interview is not usually sufficient to get a comprehensive picture of the participant's history. People may not remember, understand, or disclose all the information the program needs to help prepare a rental application. People also sometimes disclose more than is necessary on a rental application. For example, people often confuse arrests with convictions or notices to vacate with evictions.

What do RRH programs do about a person's Tenant Screening Barriers? Again, they do not use this information to refuse assistance to someone experiencing homelessness. Experienced programs show that the great majority of people with high Tenant Screening Barriers are able to successfully exit homelessness to housing. Instead, information about Tenant Screening Barriers enables the program to make the best housing match with the appropriate landlord, or know when the program may have to offer additional incentives (such as a double security deposit) to overcome landlord resistance, or take other steps to address or remediate the barriers. In other words, information on Tenant Screening Barriers is used to obtain housing.

## 2 Define the Housing Options

Successful RRH programs use a multitude of creative housing options. The goal of RRH is to end homelessness quickly, and using an “outside the box” approach to identifying housing options allows for successful outcomes, especially in challenging housing markets.

The choice of a place to call home is subjective and personal: where to live, with whom, the type of housing, the size of the apartment, and the rent should be driven by the participant. RRH program staff can help with these decisions by helping participants consider their available, appropriate, and realistic housing options, and by recognizing and checking their own biases about what the household “needs.” Engaging each household in [problem solving conversations](#) is the most effective tool in assisting households to identify and reality test workable housing options for themselves. When possible, it is recommended to provide at least two to three housing options to a participant.

Engaging the household in a problem-solving conversation at the start of enrollment in RRH uses a conversational approach to help uncover the unique assets and needs of the household and leverage that information to identify appropriate and realistic housing options. The problem-solving conversation is collaborative, person-centered, strengths-based, and focuses on uncovering creative housing options that the household can maintain. Problem solving includes active listening, coaching, and motivational interviewing that sets the stage for the housing search process unique to each household.

RRH staff can use this housing search checklist when helping match participants to housing options:



### EXAMPLE OF HOUSING SEARCH CHECKLIST

- [ ] How much income is available for rent?  
*(This may require projecting income and developing a tentative monthly budget. Unless the housing is subsidized or shared, rent will almost certainly be more than 50 percent of income.)*
- [ ] Who will live in the housing?
- [ ] What is the minimum number of bedrooms needed?
- [ ] Should the housing allow pets?
- [ ] Are there any local options for subsidized housing?
- [ ] Are there safety concerns that limit housing options?  
*(For example, the search may need to avoid certain neighborhoods or be limited to buildings with secure entry. This is particularly important for domestic violence survivors and people who are trying to escape past associations with illegal activities.)*
- [ ] Should housing be close to specific supports including family, friends, faith community, child care, children's current school district, employment, or healthcare provider?
- [ ] What means of transportation will the participant be using and how does this affect the housing search?
- [ ] Does the housing need to be close to a certain school or job site?
- [ ] Is shared housing an option?

### 3 Consider Shared Housing

Shared housing may be the best option for both individual and family households, particularly in tight housing markets or when participant income may be severely limited and unlikely to increase. Shared housing requires creating various participant engagement and coordination strategies on the part of the program but can offer participants a more sustainable housing option.

#### There are five important things to remember when considering shared housing:

- › **Shared housing is NOT a lesser option.** Living with other people – especially when transitioning out of homelessness – has extraordinary social, mental, and emotional benefits. It also is a more affordable option than renting an entire unit on one's own.
- › **Shared housing is flexible.** There are multiple options and ways that people can share housing, whether through formal or informal arrangements. Shared housing doesn't have to be sharing a simple apartment with a roommate; it can be adapted to fit different demographics (such as families, seniors, or individuals) or can fit different affinity groups (e.g., people who are in recovery or people who identify as LGBTQ).
- › **Shared housing makes permanent housing affordable for people experiencing homelessness and the homelessness system.** Shared housing is often significantly less expensive than living alone, especially considering the nationwide affordable housing shortage. It lowers the cost per tenant and accelerates how quickly the homelessness system can house people.

› *Shared housing can maximize quality of life.* Since shared housing makes housing more affordable for each person in a unit, tenants may be able to rent units in neighborhoods that otherwise may not be affordable to them. This proximity provides access to different schools, amenities, job opportunities, and transportation options, among other benefits.

› *Shared housing doesn't have to be forever.* Like all living situations, shared housing does not have to be a rest-of-your-life option. It can serve different purposes for different people: it could be an in-between situation on someone's way to their own unit, or it could be someone's preferred way of life. Either way, shared housing is not the mode of housing that people need to stick with for the rest of their lives.

Every RRH provider's goal is to get people into permanent housing quickly – whether in their own unit or in a unit with other people. Ultimately, shared housing is an approach that can lead people experiencing homelessness into stable housing situations. With an extremely tight rental market, exploring shared housing in RRH widens the opportunities available and provides more sustainable options for people transitioning from homelessness into housing.

Assisting households in identifying roommates can include making connections with existing family and friends, identifying groups of persons that agree to share housing together, or creating a matching system for persons looking for roommates. The following is an example of a tool that can be used in the latter situation.



### EXAMPLE OF SHARED HOUSING ROOMMATE MATCH FORM: WHAT DO YOU WANT IN A ROOMMATE?

What to Look for in a Roommate/What to Avoid	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not Important	Notes
Someone I can be friends with	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Someone who will not have many visitors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Someone who does not smoke	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Someone who is clean and sober	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
Someone with pets	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	
A "night" person	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	



#### **4 Housing Navigation – Assisting Participants to Connect to Appropriate Housing**

Successful RRH programs take primary responsibility for the housing search process. Assisting in the housing navigation process recognizes that participants may be in crisis and overwhelmed by the prospect of finding suitable and affordable housing options.

Housing navigation includes matching participants to landlords whose properties best meet the household's search criteria as well as match the household to appropriate landlords that can work with specific program participants, including those who want to share housing. For example, some landlords may have units that are better suited for large families or roommate/shared housing situations, while other landlords may have units that are better for single individuals. Some landlords may be willing to overlook certain types of eviction history and/or criminal justice involvement, or may be more welcoming to veterans, people with mental health histories, or people in recovery.

The housing navigation process includes providing support not only in identifying but also accessing appropriate and affordable housing options, completing tenant applications, assistance in understanding and signing leases, and information on how to approach landlords. If a shared housing model is used, the role of staff becomes even more important to work out the details of the lease(s) and responsibilities amount the tenants.

#### **TOOLS**

- [🔗 Apartment Comparison Checklist](#)
- [🔗 Apartment Database](#)
- [🔗 HUD Lead-Based Paint Brochure](#)
- [🔗 Getting Started on Housing Search Checklist](#)
- [🔗 Getting Started On Housing Search Flowchart](#)
- [🔗 Housing Search Assistance Policy](#)
- [🔗 Roommate Decision Tool](#)
- [🔗 Roommate Agreement](#)
- [🔗 Shared Housing Agreement](#)

## SUMMARY OF RAPID RE-HOUSING PROGRAM STAFF ACTIVITIES IN PROVIDING HOUSING NAVIGATION AND MATCHING ASSISTANCE TO PARTICIPANTS

*The following is a list of important steps in the housing navigation process.*

Determine the kind of housing options participants want and can maintain:

<b>ASSIST</b>	participants to gather information and complete a standardized rental application.
<b>ARRANGE</b>	visits to the partner landlord units that match participant preferences; accompany participants when possible or needed.
<b>ACCOMPANY</b>	or assist participant to set up interviews with landlords who are a likely match for the individual's Tenant Screening Barriers and negotiate with or on behalf of participants.
<b>PREPARE</b>	participant for landlord interviews (i.e., coach participants on how to respond to potential questions about Tenant Screening Barriers); accompany participants to interviews when possible or needed.
<b>ARRANGE OR PROVIDE</b>	transportation for housing search and/or interviews and help to arrange for childcare during interviews when needed.
<b>NEGOTIATE</b>	the lease terms with the landlord. When necessary, discuss any additional incentives that may convince a landlord to accept a person/household with particularly high Tenant Screening Barriers, such as a criminal history with arson or a sex offense.
<b>ENSURE</b>	that the unit, terms of the lease, and rental cost meet funder requirements. Ensure that the participant understands lease requirements before signing.
<b>DEVELOP</b>	agreement, when appropriate or helpful, between RRH agency and landlord.
<b>OBTAIN</b>	participant consent to release information to and from the landlord, such as through a Landlord-Case Manager Communication Agreement.

The key to a RRH program participant's success is to utilize a problem-solving conversation to assist in identifying and accessing a variety of permanent housing options from the moment they are enrolled in the program. Housing identification goes well beyond recruiting and maintaining landlords. RRH staff play a significant role in working with program participants to develop an individualized housing identification plan that is reflective of a person-centered approach.

### 1.3 UNDERSTANDING LANDLORDS' NEEDS

It is important for RRH programs to recognize that landlords are running a business and have priorities they need to meet. Thus, RRH programs must make the “business case” to landlords and meet their business priorities in order to negotiate leases for their program participants. To engage landlords effectively, RRH programs should understand landlords’ business priorities and why they screen people out.

In general, landlords are looking for tenants who will be able to pay rent consistently, who will treat their units with care, who will be trouble-free neighbors, and who will not require an eviction or leave a unit vacant. Every landlord has their own set of requirements for the tenants who live in their units and go about collecting that information in a variety of ways.

Landlord Priority	What Landlords Want
<b>Rent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• On Time</li> <li>• Reliable</li> </ul>
<b>Respect for the Property</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No Property Damage</li> <li>• Only lease-holders staying in apartment</li> </ul>
<b>Good Neighbors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get along with other tenants</li> <li>• Avoid disputes with law</li> <li>• Respect “quiet enjoyment” of others on or neighboring the property</li> </ul>
<b>No Vacancies or Evictions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding eviction costs</li> <li>• Units not sitting empty</li> <li>• Consistant income generation</li> </ul>

#### Why Landlords Screen Prospective Tenants

Landlords screen prospective tenants because they want information that will help them choose reliable tenants who will protect their business interests. Landlords may be hesitant to rent to tenants whose rental history suggests they have not been able to meet these priorities in the recent past: landlords may not want to take the risk that such past behavior will be repeated. RRH programs can help to overcome this hesitation with strategies described throughout this toolkit.

Landlord Priority	Screening Sources Used by Landlords
<b>Rent</b>	Income, evictions, credit, landlord references
<b>Respect for the Property</b>	Landlord references, criminal justice involvement history
<b>Good Neighbors</b>	Landlord references, criminal justice involvement history
<b>No Vacancies or Evictions</b>	Landlord references, rental history, criminal justice involvement history

### Tenant Screening Barriers

Any problem identified in a tenant screening, called a “Tenant Screening Barrier,” is a potential obstacle to a RRH program participant obtaining housing. Tenant Screening Barriers typically include information about participants that can be legally collected and used by landlords making rental decisions to screen out applicants. For example, lack of income is a legal tenant screening barrier. However, landlords are prohibited from screening out protected classes of individuals. Programs should consult local regulations and fair housing laws to better understand legal tenant screening procedures.

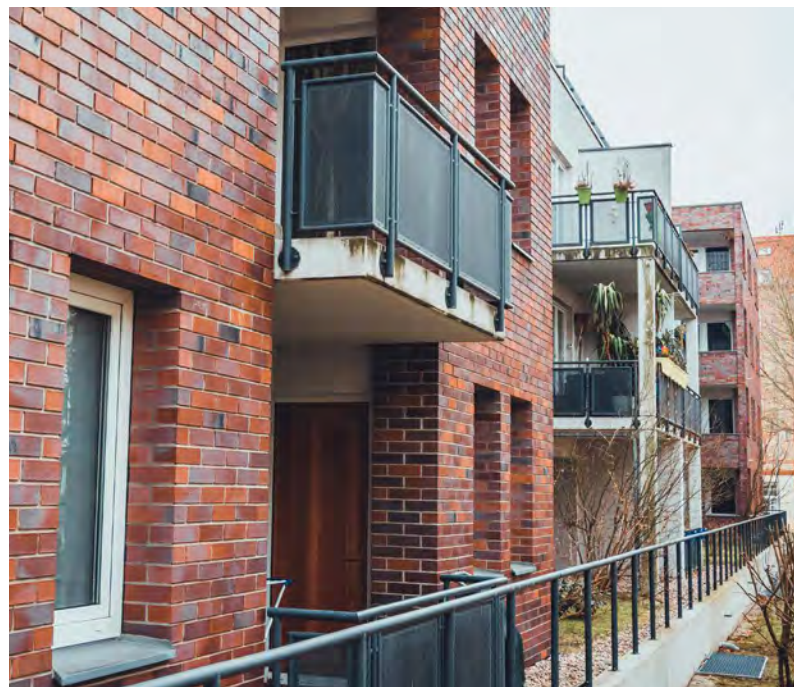


**It is important for RRH programs to recognize that Tenant Screening Barriers are not reasons for providers to deny a household’s enrollment in the RRH program. The issues that are not legal Tenant Screening Barriers may be barriers to sustaining housing. They are not barriers to the RRH program providing assistance to obtain housing for the participant. Strategies to help participants sustain housing despite barriers are provided in the “Case Management and Services” section of this document.**

### 1.4 RECRUITING LANDLORDS

Another primary activity under housing identification is the **recruitment of landlords** to make the housing search process as rapid as possible. Without the help of a RRH program, people experiencing homelessness may spend weeks and months identifying and viewing housing units, filling out applications, paying application fees, and interviewing for vacant units on their own, only to be screened out by landlords. RRH programs help to curtail or avoid this difficult experience by identifying and incentivizing landlord partners as an ongoing program activity, as well as negotiating leases on behalf of program participants.

RRH program staff should find housing for program participants and negotiate with landlords unless program participants choose to conduct these housing search activities on their own. If participants who choose to conduct housing searches on their own do not find housing within a couple of weeks, program staff should quickly step in to support or take on their housing search activities.



Constant landlord recruitment and support is essential. It ensures that program participants have rapid access to permanent housing from the moment they enter the program. The more partnerships the program has developed with landlords, the more opportunities program participants will have to rapidly obtain permanent housing. Over time, as landlords experience the benefits of a partnership with the RRH program, they may give preference to program participants. Sometimes, landlords may even be willing to occasionally consider some reduction in rent or negotiate other terms of the lease that would help the participant obtain and sustain the unit.



**To incentivize landlords to provide a one year lease - even though the RRH program may be offering less than a year in rent - RRH programs should use national or local program data and program participant stories in their landlord marketing materials. These data and stories should illustrate the success of a majority of RRH participants, and their ability to pay their own rent and maintain housing after a RRH subsidy ends.**



**Try working with smaller “mom and pop” landlords. They often are far more flexible in screening tenants and negotiating leases than larger property-management companies.**

#### **Identifying Landlord Partners**

RRH programs continually search for landlords in many of the same ways any prospective tenant would look for housing: by word of mouth, through classified ads, websites, and “For Rent” signs in target neighborhoods. The program also may use various communication approaches to solicit landlord partners, such as sending well-designed brochures or marketing materials to a broad mailing list of rental property owners and by giving presentations to local real estate associations and property management organizations. A targeted approach can be utilized, for example, with more personalized direct mailings and “cold calls” to landlords who have suitable properties that are well-priced and located in areas with access to good transportation. Programs and communities can host landlord recruitment events such as luncheons to provide potential landlords with a forum to learn about how RRH works. Some communities enlist the help of elected officials or prominent community members to invite landlords to participate in such events to motivate landlords to work with programs.

Programs also solicit partnerships with publicly-subsidized housing properties. The managers of tenant-based and site-based housing subsidy programs often have very different eligibility requirements and detailed, inflexible processes for selecting tenants. RRH programs should focus on learning these details to make timely, well-documented referrals of eligible applicants.



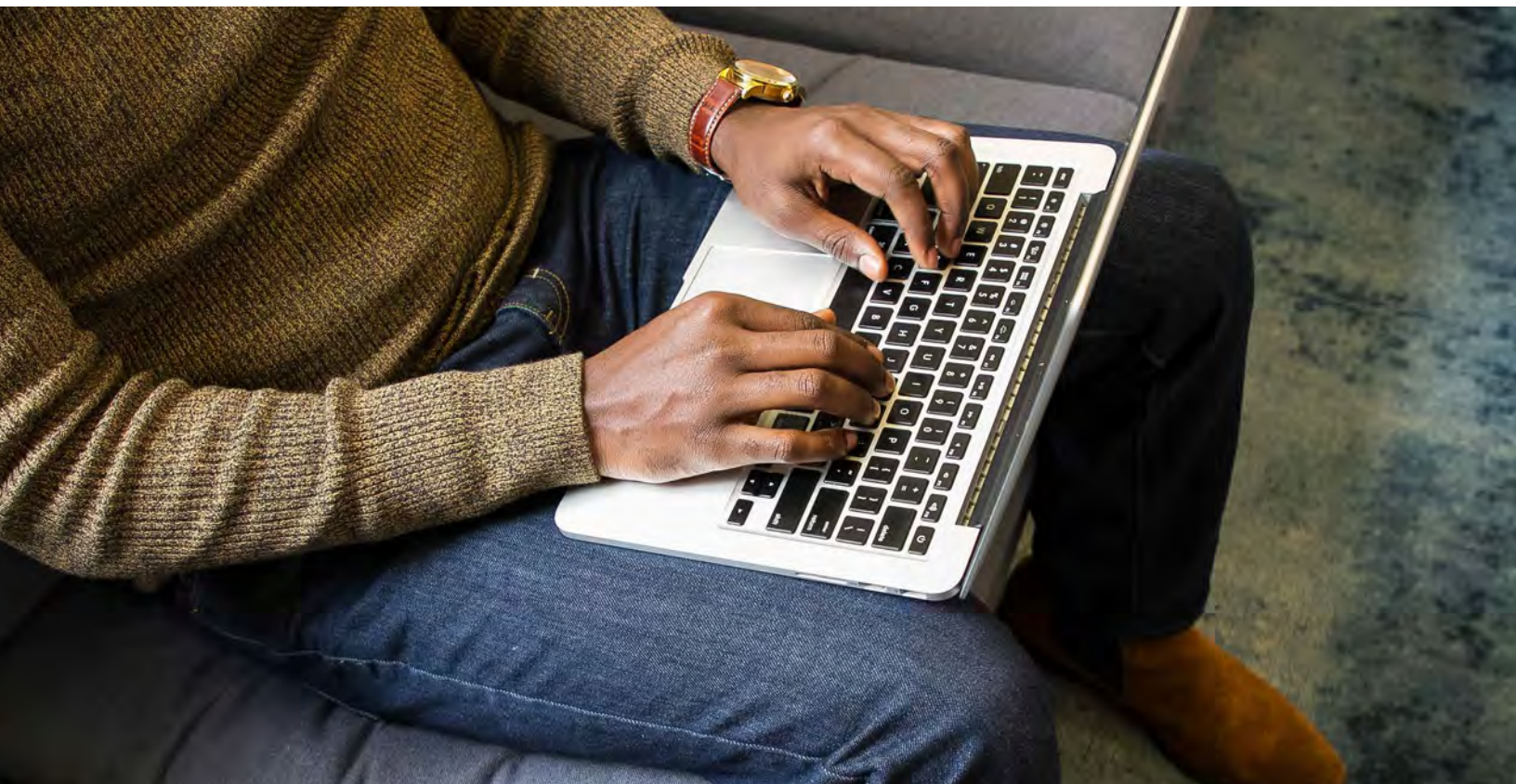
**Staffing Options for Housing Identification:  
Dedicated Housing Specialists**

Ideally, a RRH program has the capacity to hire dedicated housing specialist staff for landlord recruitment and housing identification functions. In this staffing model, the program has dedicated housing staff whose primary job is to recruit landlord partners and identify housing units. The program also has RRH case managers for direct, day-to-day communication with a landlord, and intervention or mediation between program participants and the landlord after move-in.

Dedicated housing staff at effective RRH programs have specialized experience as real estate agents, leasing agents, brokers, or housing specialists to recruit landlords and act as the landlord’s primary liaison to the program. The benefits of having specialized housing staff are that they will be adept at accessing landlord networks, will better understand landlord perspectives, can speak the same “language” as landlords

when marketing the program and negotiating leases, and can build lasting landlord relationships. RRH case managers may not have these specialized skills and have other job duties that may make landlord recruitment more challenging; however, the role of housing staff is specific to recruiting landlords with no other competing job priorities, allowing them to have the time and skills to be as effective as possible.

Dedicated housing staff members are responsible for landlord recruitment, identifying vacant housing units, negotiating with landlords on behalf of program participants, and routine check-ins with landlords. Some programs contract out this housing search function to an organization that is entirely dedicated to landlord recruitment and housing identification, which can be an effective program design if the organizations work in close coordination to support participants in obtaining and maintaining housing.



### Rapid Re-Housing Case Managers Who Also Provide Housing Search

Some programs may not have the resources that would enable them to hire dedicated housing staff. For these programs, it is still possible to have a successful RRH program by supporting case managers to be successful. For programs that give case managers the duties of landlord recruitment and housing search in addition to case management responsibilities, case managers should be trained in working with landlords. Training should include such topics as recruiting landlords, understanding landlord perspectives, negotiating leases, and understanding tenancy rights and lease requirements.

Case managers who also recruit landlords should be given a smaller caseload so they can adequately juggle both duties. In either staffing model, dedicated housing staff and/or case managers will most effectively sustain the trust of landlords if staff is extremely and immediately responsive to a landlord's needs, and caseload size allows case managers to be as quick and responsive as possible when landlords contact the program with an issue or question.

The benefits and challenges of having specialized housing staff versus having only case managers with the added responsibility of housing identification are described in the chart below.

Staffing	Benefits	Challenges
<b>Dedicated Housing Staff that Recruits Landlords</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experienced in accessing and communicating within landlord networks.</li><li>• Understands landlord perspectives and can effectively market the RRH program to negotiate with landlords.</li><li>• Has dedicated time and resources for identifying housing and recruiting landlords with no other competing job priorities.</li><li>• Allows the case manager to focus on supporting the program participant in sustaining housing.</li><li>• Helps ease the challenges of finding landlords in tight housing markets.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Must coordinate with case managers to be responsive to landlord needs as they arise.</li><li>• Must find units that are suitable for program participants before knowing which participants will be matched to the unit.</li></ul>
<b>Case Managers that Recruit Landlords</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop relationships with landlords and participants simultaneously and can help match participants to landlords who are a “good” fit.</li><li>• Can translate landlords’ tenancy expectations to participants.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• May lack housing identification skills and real estate background that are needed to continuously recruit new landlords.</li><li>• May misunderstand landlords’ business needs and instead make ineffective pitches to landlords.</li><li>• May play a stronger tenant advocate role with landlords rather than a more neutral role that results in win-win compromises between landlord and tenant.</li></ul>

### Considerations in High-Cost and/or Low-Vacancy Housing Markets

Housing markets can create additional challenges when recruiting landlords. With rising rental costs and low vacancy rates across the country, meeting these challenges relies on RRH programs and staff that are innovative and creative in recruitment efforts and strategies.

While most communities do not have enough affordable housing options for their participants, some housing markets are more challenging than others. Some areas do not have enough rental housing stock, and these low-vacancy housing markets also tend to be of higher cost. Effective RRH programs [located in challenging housing markets](#) can successfully recruit partner landlords using the following strategies that may require some program modifications:

- Devote more staff time to landlord recruitment.
- Rely on dedicated housing staff with deep real estate expertise.
- Use a variety of communication and marketing strategies to do an aggressive search for potential partners.
- Cut checks to landlords very quickly, by implementing and regularly evaluating internal policies and procedures that ensures a quick process of payment for landlords.
- Create a special “security reserve” or “damage mitigation fund” to pay for damages to a unit to lessen a landlord’s hesitation to rent to a participant lacking a strong rental history.
- Hold open units as soon as they become available – even before a participant is ready to move in – by paying rent on an empty unit.
- Enlist community partners, elected officials, and well-respected community members to incentivize or recognize willing landlords.

- Identify creative housing opportunities for participants including shared housing solutions, single room occupancy (SRO) options, rooms for rent, or multifamily properties.

Because federal funding may not cover some of these activities, programs in challenging housing markets may have to secure more flexible local or private funding to enable these strategies.

Marketing the program and making a business case to landlords is one of the best ways to recruit them in a challenging housing market. (This concept is explained in more detail in [Section 1.3, “Understanding Landlords’ Needs”](#)). In a challenging housing market, marketing materials that offer financial and program incentives – such as security deposits, damage mitigation funds, regular tenancy support and communication to landlords, housing stabilization case management support, and on-time rent – help landlords choose RRH program participants over other potential tenants that do not come with those benefits. (See [Section 1.3: “Understanding Landlord Needs”](#) for more ideas on how to market to landlords).

### Rural Areas

Rural areas present additional challenges for landlord recruitment. While urban areas may be able to concentrate on owners of multiple buildings with many units, rurally-based RRH programs often must devote considerable effort to finding and recruiting landlords who may own only a few units or even just a single one. Additional challenges include the difficulty of identifying available units in rural areas, as well as the challenges of finding units that can be accessed by tenants with limited transportation. However, owners of smaller properties may be flexible, so building trust and a strong relationship can be more important with these landlords.

Landlords who do become RRH partners in rural communities can be excellent recruiters. They can provide referrals to other landlords and offer testimonials that will help build trust in the program, as well as offer helpful mentoring tips to new landlord partners. In rural areas, faith-based organizations sometimes have wide-reaching donor bases that also may provide a good pool of willing landlords. RRH providers in rural areas should look for creative shared housing solutions, such as renting rooms in a multifamily home.

🔗 **Programs in rural areas** often must find creative ways to provide remote support to landlords and participants who may be hundreds of miles away through video meetings or phone calls. Because case managers may have to drive far distances to meet with participants or landlords, staff-to-participant ratios should be adjusted accordingly to give staff the appropriate time needed to identify housing and provide landlord and participant supports.

#### TOOLS

- 🔗 **Example of Job Description for Housing Specialist**
- 🔗 **Landlord Information Packet and Habitability Checklist**
- 🔗 **Letter to Landlord Describing Program**
- 🔗 **Northwest Youth Services Landlord Brochure**
- 🔗 **S.M.A.R.T. Landlord Brochure**

### 1.5 INCENTIVIZING LANDLORDS

RRH program staff can convince landlords to accept their program participants, even those with many Tenant Screening Barriers, by offering a package of landlord and tenancy supports that accompany their tenants. The program should show how these financial and service supports can be more effective in helping landlords achieve their financial and property goals than a traditional tenant screening process. Landlords know that screening may prevent tenancy problems; however, RRH programs can offer more help to both prevent and resolve such problems. RRH program staff offer assistance that not only includes financial support, but also provides the landlord with someone to contact when there is a tenancy-related issue – a benefit to landlords that other tenants do not bring. Landlords often will solicit the program for more tenants after continued success with tenants placed from the RRH program and receiving responsive support from program staff when needed. Therefore, consistent support and follow-up with landlords is a crucial program staff function.

RRH programs should define a basic level of financial and support service incentives for all landlords. Only when necessary, should the RRH program offer additional incentives to house a participant with Tenant Screening Barriers that landlords view as particularly risky. Staff should balance the type and level of landlord/tenant supports offered with the landlord's level of risk aversion.

#### **Rapid Re-Housing Program Incentives that Respond to Landlord Priorities**

RRH programs offer unique financial and service supports that respond to each of the landlord priorities as outlined in [\*Section 1.3: "Understanding Landlords' Needs."\*](#)

› **Landlord Priority: Rent**

Most obviously, RRH programs subsidize the tenants' rents for some period of time, essentially guaranteeing property revenue. Depending on funding parameters, RRH programs can pay several months of rent up front for participants who may have a poor rental history. RRH programs also can assist with creating monthly budgets and helping participants increase income so they can work toward eventually paying the rent on their own. For landlords who are concerned that the program is paying only a few months of rent, RRH programs can use national and local data, as well as program participant success stories, to show landlords that a majority of RRH program participants maintain permanent housing on their own once the RRH subsidy ends.

› **Landlord Priority: Respect for Property**

RRH programs offer a security deposit to landlords to offset any concerns about damage to the property. RRH programs can offer double security deposits for program participants who may have a particularly challenging list of Tenant Screening Barriers. RRH programs can create a risk mitigation fund for landlords to use if there are any damages to the unit. RRH programs also can offer participants training on tenant responsibilities and conduct home visits to identify areas where participants may need help. Programs also can offer to fix up units for landlords before a program participant moves in or out.

› **Landlord Priority: Good Neighbors**

RRH programs offer a staff contact person for landlords to call if there are any issues with the tenant's lease compliance, such as noise complaints, disputes with neighbors, or having a lot of people staying at the apartment who are not on the lease. RRH programs provide guidance to the participant, mediate issues with the landlord, and teach skills that help avoid lease violations.

› **Landlord Priority: No Vacancies or Evictions**

RRH programs help landlords avoid the many costs associated with turnover if a tenant does not work out. Turnover of units is very costly to landlords, who may have to pay legal costs for eviction, lose revenue while the unit is in dispute or empty, pay to refurbish the unit, or bear the cost of soliciting, screening, and interviewing prospective tenants. RRH programs can offer to spare landlords these costs by minimizing evictions, covering damages, minimizing the time a unit is empty, and providing a regular stream of new and essentially "pre-qualified" tenants for vacated units. This saves landlords a lot of money and time, and successful RRH providers can show the estimated amount a landlord might save by partnering with them as part of making the "business case" pitch.





### Making the Business Case to Landlords

The actual business case “pitch” made to landlords should be designed to emphasize 1) these financial benefits for landlord partners, and 2) credibility of the RRH program – through references, participant outcomes, agency history, etc. – in achieving good results. The “pitch” is built on a landlord’s needs as outlined above. All communication and marketing for landlords is built on how RRH program involvement will benefit the landlord in renting their units to program participants.

The RRH program must be prepared to address landlord concerns about rental agreements, housing inspections, and the availability of staff to respond to landlord concerns. While in most cases, the RRH program should make the “business case” to the landlord, it sometimes may be appropriate to also emphasize the importance of ending homelessness, such as when pursuing landlord partners through charitable giving interactions.

Using professionally developed marketing materials or brochures can help to legitimize the RRH program to landlords and easily communicate the benefits of the RRH program.

**Landlords are sometimes willing to waive some or all screening requirements or negotiate lower rent amounts because the RRH program will pre-screen tenants, resolve tenancy problems as soon as possible if and when they arise, and provide unique financial incentives.**

### Landlord Priorities and Corresponding Rapid Re-Housing Program Incentives

The supports offered by a program to its landlords should be clearly communicated to program participants and landlords. A landlord-RRH program partnership can be formal – a written agreement about the specific roles of each partner – or informal, such as a generic letter or brochure that describes those roles. In addition (and with the program participant’s consent), the RRH program should specify which events trigger contact between a landlord and staff and outline consistent approaches and policies for addressing issues with landlords. For example, the program would want to be notified if the participant has missed a rent payment, if the landlord has observed a lease violation, or if conflicts arise with other tenants. The program should inform the landlord with reasonable notice about the end of the participant’s subsidy or services, as well as any landlord supports that are available after that date.



### EXAMPLE OF BUSINESS CASE “PITCH” TO LANDLORDS

Our RRH Program will:

- Decrease your vacancy rate
- Lower your advertising costs for vacancies
- Accelerate your unit turnover time
- Decrease your risk of evictions

### TOOLS

- 🔗 [Community Examples of Risk Mitigation Funds](#)
- 🔗 [Landlord Benefits Checklist](#)
- 🔗 [Landlord Outreach Strategies](#)
- 🔗 [Landlord Tenant Program Agreement](#)
- 🔗 [Whatcom Landlord Tenant Program Agreement](#)
- 🔗 [Tenancy Supports Offered to Clients and Landlords](#)

## 1.6 RETAINING LANDLORDS

Retaining landlord partners is just as important as recruiting them. RRH programs essentially have two clients: program participants and landlords. Throughout each participant's time in the program, RRH staff should focus on maintaining the relationship with both the program participant and the landlord to ensure housing stability. The following are effective approaches to ensure that the RRH program retains as many landlord partners as possible.

### Deliver Landlord and Tenant Supports as Promised

The best way for programs to retain landlord partners is simply to deliver landlord and tenant supports as promised and in a timely manner. This does not mean that RRH programs can prevent every program participant from "falling out" of housing or leaving the program to re-enter homelessness. Retaining landlord partners successfully does mean that staff will always respond promptly to the landlord's concerns and do their best to resolve the issue. Communication with the landlord (outside of using protected participant information) is open and regular, and staff should assist both landlords and tenants meet their respective responsibilities and protect their rights. The goal is to find a win-win solution to issues that may jeopardize the program participant's housing.

### Match Each Participant to the "Right" Landlord

A second important approach to building and maintaining a strong partnership is to carefully match each household to a landlord

who can work with the participant's Tenant Screening Barrier profile. This is particularly critical for initial placements with a landlord. For example, a landlord may be willing to overlook income barriers and a misdemeanor, but be unwilling to accept anyone with a drug felony. Over time, as the landlord's trust in the RRH program grows, initial boundaries may be gradually expanded so that the landlord will include persons with higher barriers.

### Recognize Good Landlords

In addition to offering incentives, programs can strengthen their partnerships by recognizing good landlords. Recognition may include thank you notes, awards for Landlord of the Year (or Month), articles in local newspapers, certificates of appreciation, or an annual Landlord Appreciation Event.

### Communicate Success and Positive Impact to Landlords

Though landlord partners are running a business, they also may have an interest in social issues. Understanding the impact of homelessness and the importance of housing can be highly motivating. By offering landlord partners positive outcome data, success stories, and presentations by people who experienced homelessness, the program creates a sense of shared mission, fostering a new level of commitment and partnership.

## TOOLS

 [Landlord Thank You Letter](#)



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**Create a shared database of landlords that your program or community is working with that lists what types of apartments they rent; indicates whether they are flexible in working with people with high tenancy barriers, such as criminal justice involvement or lack of income; describes in which neighborhoods their units are located and whether they are "good" landlords with whom to partner; and provides other useful information that will help match households to appropriate housing.**

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# RENT AND MOVE-IN ASSISTANCE

## OVERVIEW

Rent and move-in assistance is the second core component of Rapid Re-Housing (RRH). Its goal is to provide short- and medium-term assistance to households to pay for housing. Activities under this core component may include paying for security deposits, move-in expenses, rent, utilities, arrears, or other costs that may help a participant obtain and sustain housing.

The intent of the rent and move-in assistance component of RRH is to enable the quick resolution of the immediate housing crisis. 🏠 **A decade of RRH implementation has shown** that the majority of RRH participants are able to maintain housing with short- and medium-term rent assistance and connections to services.

Utilizing a 🏠 **progressive engagement approach** to rental assistance allows for programs to be attentive to the ability of a household to maintain housing once the subsidy ends. Given the realities of the housing market today, programs cannot be constrained by attempts to reach a rent burden of only 30 percent of a participant's income: this standard is not possible for most low-income and poor households. Instead, programs should recognize that once housed, RRH households will be much better positioned to increase their incomes and address their other needs.

Additionally, by providing assistance in an individualized, flexible, and progressive manner, programs can maximize the ability of available resources to serve the largest number of people possible. The flexible nature of the RRH program model allows agencies to be responsive to the varied and changing needs of both program participants and the community.



## 2.1 PRINCIPLES OF RENT & MOVE-IN ASSISTANCE

- Rent and move-in assistance should be person-centered and flexible. It should also be tailored to the varying and changing needs of a household, while providing the assistance necessary for a household to immediately move out of homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing.
- A RRH program should make efforts to maximize the number of households it is able to serve by providing households with financial assistance in a progressive manner, providing only the assistance necessary to stabilize in permanent housing.



**A household's financial barriers to obtaining or maintaining housing should not stop a RRH program from serving that household. Even a household with zero income should be placed into housing as soon as possible, and the program should immediately work with the household and community partners to increase the household's income by connecting them to employment and/or benefits. People with no or little income are more likely to obtain and maintain employment once they are housed, rather than trying to increase household income while they remain homeless.**

## 2.2 STRUCTURING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Financial assistance includes rental assistance, move-in costs, utilities, and flexible financial assistance to cover other costs related to obtaining and sustaining housing. A best practice to implementing financial assistance is for programs to structure the amount and duration of financial assistance using a Housing First approach and provide financial assistance in a flexible, individualized, and progressive manner. This will achieve the strongest outcomes for participants and serve the maximum number of households.

### Use a Housing First Approach to Provide Financial Assistance

RRH programs should use a Housing First approach to provide financial assistance, which means there are no preconditions for people to receive assistance. The person or household is not required to have employment, meet a minimum income threshold, exhibit motivation to succeed, or participate in classes such as life skills or budgeting before obtaining housing. When and if supports and services are helpful for participants to sustain housing, assistance is provided after the person





is housed. For strategies on how to help participants who have [👉 little to no income](#) to obtain and sustain housing, *see* [“Part 1: Housing Identification”](#) and [“Part 3: Case Management and Services”](#) of this toolkit.

#### **Provide Individualized Financial Assistance**

Financial assistance in a RRH program should be individualized and person centered. Rather than giving every household the same “package” of assistance, financial assistance should be determined based on each household’s strengths, supports, and needs. Not every household needs the same level or length of financial assistance. As such, RRH programs should not simply offer every participant the same fixed length and amount of subsidy (e.g. offering every household a one-year subsidy). Though providing a set package of assistance may be what the funding stream allows, and it may be easier for the agency’s budgeting, it will decrease the number of households the program is able to serve.

The most impactful and effective way to serve more households with RRH funds is to provide individualized financial assistance tailored to the strengths and needs of each household. This allows the program to provide just enough assistance to households that may not need more than a minimal subsidy to sustain housing on their own, and offer more assistance to households that may need longer and deeper subsidies. For example, households beginning with zero income should still be placed into their own housing and could receive a higher and longer level of subsidy while new income is secured, while a household with more income could be given a lower and shorter level of subsidy.

#### **Provide Flexible Financial Assistance**

The length and depth of financial assistance should be flexible enough to adjust to a household’s changing needs and circumstances: if a household’s income increases or decreases, the financial assistance should be flexible enough to be appropriately adjusted. The ability to flex financial assistance up and down when needed requires clear and efficient internal procedures to ensure adjustments are executed smoothly. For example, if a household started the program with income but loses a job in the third month, the RRH program should be able to increase or extend assistance, so they do not lose housing.

The goal is to help households until they are no longer imminently at risk of becoming homeless in the near term. It is important to recognize that RRH programs are not meant to solve a household’s poverty, nor alleviate every challenge a household may experience. In reality, a household may still be severely rent burdened by the end of the subsidy. If the RRH program has ended homelessness for that household and provided the foundation, connections, and support for it to be successful in staying housed, the RRH program has met its goal.

### Use a Progressive Engagement Approach to Determine the Amount and Duration of Financial Assistance

To best meet the needs and build on the strengths of each household, serve as many households as possible, and achieve strong housing outcomes, it is recommended that RRH programs use a progressive engagement approach to determine the amount and duration of financial assistance, as outlined below.

- 1 The RRH program initially provides a basic amount of financial assistance (and case management) that is just enough to help a household obtain and eventually sustain housing on its own.
- 2 RRH program staff, using a person-centered approach and in collaboration with the RRH household, periodically assess if the household is on the path to housing stability or needs more assistance.
- 3 If the initial amount of assistance provided is enough for the household to sustain housing on its own and not become homeless in the near term, assistance will not need to be extended.
- 4 If the household needs more assistance than what was initially provided, the program can extend financial assistance as needed and provide proactive case management to work with the household to further stabilize in housing until they are no longer at risk of becoming homeless.
- 5 If assistance has been extended to the maximum amount and the program has provided as many services and linkages to the household as possible, and the household still does not seem on a path to housing stability, it may be appropriate to help the household get a more permanent subsidy, such as a Housing Choice Voucher or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) if they are eligible.

In summary, providing financial assistance in a progressive way allows the program to be flexible enough to adjust to each household's unique strengths, needs, and resources, especially as their financial circumstances or housing costs change. This approach to financial assistance – tailored to the individual strengths and needs of each household – supports the household toward becoming independent from RRH assistance. In an environment where there are limited RRH funds to meet the needs of the high number of households experiencing homelessness, this approach also enables the program to serve a higher number of households experiencing homelessness in a community.

When using a progressive approach to providing rental assistance, the RRH program engages in a regularly-scheduled conversation with the household to assess its progress toward assuming full rental payments. This assessment should determine whether financial assistance should be increased, reduced, extended, or tapered off. It also should identify additional actions needed from the program or the participant, and services or linkages that are needed, to enable the household to assume rental payments on its own. RRH programs must be able to extend or increase financial assistance when necessary to help participants avoid falling back into homelessness.



**RRH programs can rapidly re-house someone who is chronically homeless, especially if PSH is not available. The program will likely need to provide deeper subsidies and more intensive case management and services to support that person in housing. For purposes of remaining eligible for permanent housing placements dedicated to chronically homeless people, those persons will maintain their chronically homeless status while they are receiving Rapid Re-Housing. Source: HUD FAQ.**



### **Avoid the “Cliff Effect”**

A key consideration in designing and offering rental assistance is avoiding the “cliff effect,” in which a household is unable to shoulder the full rent at the time the subsidy ends. As a result, the household becomes imminently at risk of homelessness shortly after exiting the RRH program.

There are common reasons this may occur. First, in the case management plan, projections about income increases may have been too optimistic and not reality-tested; thus, the household is too severely rent-burdened to sustain housing on its own. Second, the availability of the subsidy and the lack of affordable units may lead the provider to identify and encourage units more expensive than the household can afford, or the household chooses housing that is more expensive than it can afford, (thus another reason why shared housing is an important option). Third, housing identification and case management delivered without a lens of – and training in – equity can lead to implicit bias with regard to what a household can and can’t afford (e.g., making assumptions of what a household can afford based on race, familial status, disability, etc.).

To avoid the cliff effect, program staff and the household – throughout the program and especially as the subsidy gets closer to terminating – should work closely together to ensure proactive case management as to whether the household is clearly on a path to assuming rent payments on its own (*See “Part 3: Case Management and Services”* for more strategies on supporting participants to assume full rent payments).



**Most homeless households – even with some income – usually do not have money for start-up costs such as security deposits, utility deposits, furniture, and movers. This assistance most likely will need to be provided to most, if not every, household.**

## Other Methods of Structuring Financial Assistance: Advantages and Disadvantages

To be most effective, it is recommended RRH programs structure financial assistance using the progressive engagement approach described above. However, there are many communities that do not follow this best practice. The following describes three other known methods that communities use to provide RRH financial assistance.

Example	Advantages	Disadvantages
<h3>Declining Subsidy</h3> <p><i>The initial subsidy is high and declines on a “step-down” schedule, regardless of the participant’s income or circumstances.</i></p>		
<p>Program/Participant rental share is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Month 1&amp;2: 100%/0%</li> <li>• Month 3: 75%/25%</li> <li>• Month 4: 50%/50%</li> <li>• Month 5: 25%/75%</li> <li>• Month 6: 100%/0%</li> </ul>	<p>Predictability and clear guidelines for the rent subsidy allows households to plan.</p> <p>By the time financial assistance ends, the household is paying 100 percent of the rent. This prevents the “cliff effect.”</p>	<p>Some households may not require a high subsidy in the beginning because they have income, while others may require a higher subsidy until they can secure a job or employment. This method does not reserve the most funds for the people who are in the most need.</p> <p>The household’s income may not increase in lockstep with the declines in subsidy.</p>
<h3>Fixed Percentage of Household Income Paid Toward Rent</h3> <p><i>Regardless of whether a household’s income increases or decreases, the household pays a specific percentage of its income towards rent and the subsidy covers the difference</i></p>		
<p>Household pays 30 percent of income toward rent</p>	<p>Households have an incentive to increase income because their discretionary income also increases.</p> <p>Program can allow zero contribution and pay 100 percent of rent if household income is zero.</p>	<p>Households may feel they are being penalized for increasing income.</p> <p>If the percentage of household income contributed toward rent is low, there is a risk of the “cliff effect” when the subsidy ends.</p>
<h3>Fixed Subsidy</h3> <p><i>Program contribute a fixed amount toward rent, based not on income but family or unit size.</i></p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1BR: \$1,000/Month Subsidy</li> <li>• 2BR: \$1,500/Month Subsidy</li> <li>• 3BR: \$2,000/Month Subsidy</li> </ul>	<p>Could create an incentive for the household to select a smaller and less expensive unit to obtain a relatively deeper subsidy—and which may be easier to afford after the subsidy ends.</p>	<p>Households with zero income or very low income would likely be unable to afford rent.</p> <p>Does not allow flexibility if household income changes.</p> <p>If amount is equivalent to deep subsidy, ending subsidy risks the “cliff effect.”</p>

While there are advantages to some of these methods, the disadvantages could have a considerable impact on the household, and must be taken into account. At a minimum, communities should blend these models with the individualized, flexible, progressive approach described in this toolkit. For example, a program participant's rental assistance could be a fixed subsidy for the first three months. In the fourth month, they may transition to a progressive engagement approach that works with the household to determine whether rental assistance should be flexed up or down.

Many cases will arise that require flexibility in structuring the length and duration of rental assistance, which is why a more structured "one-size fits all" model is less effective than a progressive, flexible, individualized approach. A fixed subsidy based on unit size will not assist a person with zero income to retain housing. A defined, step-level, declining rental subsidy cannot help individuals who lose their new job in month three. Some of these issues can be predicted in advance and exceptions defined, but other situations may be more case-specific.

## TOOLS

- 🔗 [Rapid Re-Housing Budget Calculation](#)
- 🔗 [Stability Conversation Guide](#)
- 🔗 [Case Closure Policies](#)
- 🔗 [Rent Reasonableness Form](#)
- 🔗 [Affidavit for No Income](#)
- 🔗 [Notice from Landlord of Approval with Financial Assistance](#)
- 🔗 [Micah Notice to Landlord of Financial Assistance](#)
- 🔗 [Notice to Client of Change in Financial Assistance](#)
- 🔗 [The Art of Projecting Income](#)

## 2.3 FLEXIBLE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO SUPPORT OTHER HOUSEHOLD NEEDS AND COSTS

RRH programs should provide financial assistance to cover housing costs, which may include rental deposits, first month's rent, last month's rent, temporary rental assistance, and/or utility assistance, either directly to the landlord or through formal agreement with another organization or agency. However, sometimes other expenses can be obstacles to people's ability to retain their housing after exiting homelessness. Therefore, programs should also be prepared to help participants meet basic needs at move-in.

### Household Needs

Rapidly creating a livable home can help a participant sustain permanent housing. Most people who experience homelessness will not have essential items such as mattresses or cribs, kitchen items, cleaning supplies, etc. necessary to set up a home. Having flexible dollars to pay for or to retrieve a household's furnishings from storage and transporting them may be quicker and more cost effective than obtaining replacement goods. In some situations, rental housing does not include a stove or refrigerator, so programs may need to help participants obtain an essential appliance. RRH programs should have resources to fill these critical gaps.



### **Other Costs to Promote Housing Stability**

Using a problem-solving conversation at enrollment into and throughout the RRH program will uncover other possible barriers to achieving housing stability. As such, programs also may need to cover other costs that hinder a participant's ability to obtain or sustain housing, such as childcare, transportation, job-related costs, and car repairs. Again, using a progressive engagement approach to determine the minimal amount of provided assistance, RRH programs should have the capacity to pay reasonable rental or utility arrears that directly prevent a participant from being able to sign a lease.

*(Note: There are many instances where a person does not have to pay arrears to be able to sign a lease with a new landlord. Programs should not pay arrears until first trying other options to obtain housing for the participant.)*

### **Use Flexible Local or Private Resources**

RRH programs are far more effective at helping people obtain and sustain housing when they have flexible funds to cover these other household needs. These short-term costs do not fall into a single category, and some are not eligible expenses under federal funding programs. Many RRH programs use local or private funding sources, as well as donations, to cover costs that are ineligible for federal funding.



### **EXAMPLES OF USING FLEXIBLE LOCAL OR PRIVATE RESOURCES**

- A family lost all their household goods upon becoming homeless. The RRH program has established partnerships with local churches, mosques, synagogues, or hotels to collect gently used bedding, towels, dishes, etc. These items can be provided as a “housewarming gift” for the family and formerly homeless households.
- An elderly man, living in his car, has some furniture and household items he doesn't want to lose. The RRH program uses flexible funds to pay for a storage unit while working to place him in permanent housing.
- A former carpenter lost his job during an extended illness and was homeless for two years. He has a job offer at a construction company but will only get hired if he pays union dues. The RRH program uses flexible funding sources to cover the union dues and buys him a tool belt with basic tools for him to use at work.
- A single mother is on a waiting list for subsidized day care but likely will not be able to enroll her children for two months. The RRH program identifies childcare funding through a partnering organization so the woman can get a job.
- A homeless man who is a registered sex offender has been unable to find housing that will meet the locational restrictions of his parole. His brother does not want to share his home because of unannounced parole visits, but he is willing to allow the man to live on his property. The RRH program finds a used house trailer and pays for the tie-down and utility hook-ups.
- An apartment in a tight housing market becomes vacant while a participant is in the hospital for two weeks. The program uses flexible funds to pay rent on the vacant apartment to hold it until the participant can move in after their hospital stay.

## STEPS FOR PROVIDING RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND OTHER HOUSEHOLD NEEDS AND COSTS

### 1 Assess the Likely Level of Rent the Person Will Be Able to Sustain when the Program Ends

- When calculating rents a participant can pay, it is important to recognize that unless the participant is able to obtain a permanent rent subsidy (e.g., Housing Choice Voucher or “Section 8”) or a subsidized housing unit, it is likely that housing costs will exceed the standard “affordability” limit of 30 percent of income. Given the nation’s affordable housing crisis, it is anticipated that participants will spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing. When assessing, staff should ask: What is the most the household can pay for housing, considering all other necessary costs and income? Based on a household’s income and available units, the degree to which the community has built a landlord engagement strategy should assist both the provider and participant to predict what housing choices will more quickly lead to housing stability. These choices should also consider shared housing options in the process.
- When considering current and potential income, staff and the program participant should openly and honestly discuss the household’s income history, current household expenses, the local job market, and the eligibility and amount of any income supports for which the household qualifies.

### 2 When Necessary, Provide or Help the Participant to Access Funds for Housing Search

- In some communities, this may include paying application fees or buying a tenant screening report. Paying transportation costs for a housing search may be eligible program costs from some funders, or it may require the program to secure more flexible private dollars to pay for bus cards, gas cards, or car repairs. Identifying community supports – coupled with employing a person-centered, strengths-based, and trauma-informed care approach to case management – should result in referrals and warm hand-offs that better position the household to identify supports they may need once they exit the RRH program.
- RRH programs may choose to offer assistance with these costs even when the household has some savings available. This can be part of a plan for households to use their savings for other essential (but frequently ineligible) expenses, such as paying for a car repair, or to protect the savings as an emergency reserve to cover a future unanticipated financial crisis.







**Programs should be attentive to the ability of a household to maintain housing once a subsidy ends. Programs should not be entirely constrained by attempts to reach a rent burden of only 30 percent of a participant’s income—a standard that is not achieved by the majority of low-income and poor households. Instead, they should recognize that once housed, RRH households will be much better positioned to increase their incomes and address their other needs.**

**3 When Necessary, Set Up Utilities, Which May Require Paying a Deposit and/or Utility Arrears**

- Utilities are an eligible expense under some federal funding programs, as well as through other flexible funding streams.
- Negotiate with the utility company. Sometimes a utility company is willing to accept partial payment of arrears. Some payment may be better than no payment; if the household is working with a program to exit homelessness, the utility company may be willing to discuss a lower lump sum or small monthly payment on arrears. Consider building a system-wide partnership between the homeless response system and the utility company specifically for people experiencing homelessness.
- Try to find housing where utilities are included in the rent, particularly when there are significant utility arrears that cannot be satisfied. When utilities are included in the rent, the utility company often does not require a credit check or utility deposit. Consider negotiating such an arrangement with interested and willing landlords.
- Where utilities are separate, a utility subsidy also may be required.

**4 Provide Essential Basic Household Furnishings, Which May Require Private Furniture Donations or Flexible Private Funding to Buy Furniture**

**TOOLS**

- 🔗 [Abode Household Items Donation Wish List](#)
- 🔗 [Micah Household Items Donation Wish List](#)



## 2.4 FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AND STAFF ROLES

Each RRH program will have its own staffing pattern and staff job descriptions. In some cases, case managers are responsible for all aspects of a participant's services: housing search, case planning, financial assistance, and closing the case. In these programs, case managers may have smaller caseloads. In other programs, housing search and financial assistance may be given to a housing specialist, so case management caseloads may be larger. The housing specialist and case management roles are integral to all RRH programs; the staff responsible for each function is a program design decision.

All program staff should be trained on regulatory requirements of all RRH funding streams and on the ethical use and application of a program's financial assistance policies. These include, but are not limited to, initial and ongoing eligibility criteria, program requirements, and assistance maximums. Programs should set expectations and benchmarks regarding financial assistance requests, reviews, and timelines for paying landlords and related move-in expenses to house program participants as quickly as possible. Programs should also have a routine way to train new staff and to keep staff regularly updated on progressive engagement, housing first, budgeting, cultural competencies, and trauma informed care, in addition to modified regulations and/or program policies.

## 2.5 FINANCIAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The standards, policies, and procedures a RRH program should have in place for structuring and administering financial assistance are further outlined in the [🔗 Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards](#).

Programs should have clearly defined policies and procedures for determining the amount of financial assistance provided to a participant, as well as defined and objective standards for when case management and financial assistance should continue and end. Policies detailing this progressive approach include clear and fair decision guidelines and processes for reassessing the continuation and amount of financial assistance. If participants are expected to pay an amount toward their housing, the RRH program should have a written policy for determining that amount, and it must be an amount that is reasonable for their income (this could be up to 50 to 60 percent of income), including \$0 for those with no current income.

In a minority of circumstances, a household may receive RRH financial assistance while it is waiting for a voucher or more permanent type of subsidy. Policies and procedures also should carefully detail when and how RRH assistance is used as a bridge to a permanent subsidy (e.g., moving a person who is experiencing chronic homelessness to PSH, if necessary). Whenever a program departs from its rental assistance structure, the case manager and supervisor should ensure that the departure is fair, necessary, and subject to adequate oversight.

## 2.6 ADMINISTERING FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

To manage the program's budget and remain in compliance with funder requirements, financial assistance must be carefully administered, documented, and monitored with appropriate oversight. The administration of financial assistance should assure that all start-up costs are quickly paid to the landlord. In RRH programs, there are various special considerations for administering financial assistance.

### 1 Establish Workflow and Timing

- Programs must have a clearly delineated workflow between program staff and the finance staff responsible for administering funds. Having a clearly delineated workflow will ensure that rents and other move-in expenses are paid on time and quickly ensure that the household remains homeless for the shortest period of time possible.

### 2 Ensure Predictable Payments

- The finance staff also must be able to determine when and how a case manager or housing specialist should submit a monthly invoice. This will assure that all rent subsidy checks are paid to the landlord when due each month, and that utility payments are transmitted according to the utility company's deadline.

### 3 Assure the Immediate and Timely Issuance of Rent Checks

- RRH programs need procedures for assuring that checks are issued and transmitted directly to landlords quickly and in a timely manner. Checks for rental subsidies cannot be written to participants and should be delivered directly to the landlord by the program.

- To maintain the best possible relationship with landlord partners, checks should be processed within the shortest period of time possible. Ideally, the program can pay the security deposit and first (and last—if required) month's rent at the time of lease signing or within one to three days. The ability to quickly pay for housing start-up costs requires an expedited process for program staff to submit an invoice, obtain any necessary supervisory or administrative approval, and for administrative/fiscal staff to quickly cut the check.

### 4 Plan for Unpredictable But Urgent Costs

- The program must be able to immediately generate a check to the landlord for the security deposit and first month's rent when a lease is offered to a participant. This is often necessary to secure an apartment, especially in a competitive rental market. Where there is any delay in issuing a check for housing start-up, finance staff must be able to provide a written/electronic guarantee of funds to the landlord. Other case-specific expenses may require quick turnaround, such as subsidizing day care or purchasing a uniform for a new job.



### 5 Provide Staff Training

- Finance staff should be familiar with the RRH program's goals and case manager roles so they can support urgent payment requests to secure housing or prevent a participant from losing housing. Similarly, finance staff should communicate their procedures and limitations to program staff, encouraging as much advance planning as possible.

### 6 Establish Documentation Standards

- Given that most RRH programs have multiple funding sources, finance staff must have documentation standards that will fulfill varying requirements and meet generally accepted accounting standards. As a best practice, consider developing one set of standards and forms that will suffice for all funders. Finance staff must provide training and forms to program staff.

### 7 Track and Frequently Update Current and Projected Spending

- Given that rental subsidies vary and may change from month-to-month, and new costs may emerge at any time, it is imperative to track expenses carefully. It is also important to routinely update spending projections to ensure sufficient funds remain through the end of a given funding source period (or fiscal year).
- Budgeting may seem challenging when providing individualized rental subsidies instead of set financial packages or step-down declining subsidies. RRH programs should provide their staff with tools to budget each month of assistance so they can see how much is left in the program budget and provide further assistance accordingly. After operating for some time, programs also can assess what the average length of assistance is for households and use that average as a basis to project program costs for the year.



# CASE MANAGEMENT AND SERVICES

## **OVERVIEW:**

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) case management and services is the third core component of RRH. The goal of RRH case management is to help participants obtain and move into permanent housing; support participants to stabilize in housing; connect them to community and mainstream services and supports that can help participants to build community and achieve long-term housing stability; and successfully exit households from the program in as short a time as necessary.

RRH is a short- to medium-term crisis intervention. As such, the intent of RRH case management is not to build a long-term services relationship, but instead to assist a household in accessing and stabilizing in a housing unit. Because of that, RRH case management focuses on navigating barriers to stable tenancy and helping participants to build an ongoing support system. It does the latter by identifying and connecting participants with community supports – including services and mainstream resources, family and friend networks, and faith-based and cultural-based networks – so they have support to attain their own personal goals.

Programs should not initially assume all participants need multiple services, but instead actively engage participants in identifying and assessing their sustainability needs. Programs can then utilize this information to tailor supports and services to the household. RRH case managers should be proactive and prepared to inform participants about services and resources that are available in the community, including those that will help the household stabilize within their new home and improve economic and overall well-being. This may include connections to quality childcare and child development programs, employment services, education, and recreational programs, as well as health and behavioral health resources.

*continued >*



Staff should increase supports as needed to help program participants. When household situations are more complex and they want longer-term supports to retain their housing, a program must be able to connect them to appropriate community and mainstream services. Programs that utilize a progressive engagement approach to increasing supports and services increase their success in tailoring their programs to the unique needs of their participants.

### **3.1 PRINCIPLES OF CASE MANAGEMENT AND SERVICES**

- RRH case management should be participant-driven. Case managers should actively engage participants in voluntary case management and service participation. This can be done by creating an environment in which participants are driving the case planning and goal-setting based on what they want from the program and services, rather than on what the case manager or program decides they need to do to be successful.
- RRH case management should be flexible in intensity – offering only essential assistance until a demonstrated or requested participant need arises. The intensity and duration of case management is based on the needs of individual households and may lessen or increase over time. Programs should be flexible in their ability to adjust to households' fluctuating needs, and should also consider that households may have varying culturally-rooted preferences and needs based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual identity, etc.
- RRH case management uses a strengths-based approach to empower participants. Case managers identify the inherent strengths of a household instead of diagnoses or deficits, then build on those strengths to support the household's success in permanent housing.
- RRH program case management reflects the short- to medium-term nature of RRH assistance. It focuses on assisting a household to build a support network outside of the program, with the goal of attaining housing stability. It connects the participant with community resources and service options (such as legal services, health care, vocational assistance, transportation, childcare, and other resources and forms of support) that continue beyond program's end.

### 3.2 RAPID RE-HOUSING CASE MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

#### 1 Focus on Resolving the Housing Crisis

One of the primary goals of RRH is to resolve housing crises rapidly. Thus, while all case managers assess, plan, facilitate, coordinate care, evaluate, and advocate, the role of a RRH case manager is different due to the short- to medium-term and housing-focused nature of the program. Other types of case management may emphasize addressing longer-term goals, such as medical, therapeutic, or economic improvement. **RRH case management, however, requires knowledge and skill sets that are highly specialized and focused on ending a participant's housing crisis in a short period of time.**

Resolving a housing crisis requires that case managers place a primary focus on housing-focused activities. The case manager in a RRH program is a specialist in all things related to obtaining and retaining housing. This requires both knowledge and skills, including:

- knowledge of the types of housing available in the local community, including eligibility requirements and processes, costs, amenities, and services;



**Separating the RRH case manager role from the housing navigator and landlord specialist roles is an effective best practice strategy.**

**It helps to ensure each role is specialized, emphasized, and appropriately staffed according to skills and experience best suited for the duties of each.**

- a working knowledge of landlord-tenant rights, protections, and responsibilities, and the ability to assess and provide information to participants on tenancy requirements;
- the ability to assist participants in accessing the community resources they will need to secure and retain housing;
- familiarity with strategies that participants can use to prevent or resolve future housing crises;
- the ability to assist households using a Housing First, strengths-based, equitable, and person-centered approach; and
- skills related to negotiation, mediation, creative problem-solving, crisis prevention and de-escalation, and motivational interviewing.

#### 2 Use a Housing First Approach

Effective RRH case managers use a Housing First approach. A RRH case manager's primary focus is quickly ending the crisis of homelessness by assisting participants to obtain and retain permanent housing. This means the case manager does not expect or require that the participant meet certain behavioral, psychological, physiological,

or economic preconditions (such as an income threshold or sobriety) to be able to obtain housing and exit homelessness. Housing First RRH programs work with households using a harm reduction approach. Programs will identify barriers to obtaining housing and/or housing stability, and provide assistance in connecting the household to optional resources and supports. Effective RRH programs do not require households to meet any preconditions to obtain housing.

### **3 Use a Trauma-Informed and Strengths-Based Approach**

Effective RRH case managers use a trauma-informed and strengths-based approach. Because homelessness can be a crisis of major significance, rapidly re-housing a household requires case managers who understand the impact of trauma and stress on participants and their emotional, behavioral, and cognitive capacity. Case managers must also consider that some households may face race-based trauma and/or trauma related to other aspects of their identity. Certain personal issues, such as mental health or substance use, may be exacerbated by the stress of experiencing homelessness and should not be a reason for the case manager to assume that someone is not able to obtain or sustain housing.

Until the housing crisis is resolved and the participant's stress is decreased, case managers should support the household in setting short-term, achievable, and appropriate goals instead of focusing on longer-term goals. While many symptoms of stress will subside once the crisis is resolved, the case manager must be skilled at assessing participants, including their various and changing levels of ability to carry out goals and action steps. The case manager should focus on the essential steps required to end the housing crisis.

### **4 Recognize Participant Choice**

RRH case management is driven by participant choice. The case manager assists and empowers participants to create housing plans that reflect the participant's goals and priorities. Although very low-income households with high housing barriers do not have unlimited housing choices, they can still decide who they live with and how to address their own barriers. Choice is a component of trauma-informed care. When embraced, this provides an opportunity for people to increase self-efficacy (a person's perception of control over their goals), which is often greatly impacted by traumas like homelessness.

### **5 Work With Each Household in an Individualized and Flexible Way**

RRH case managers should work with each household in an individualized and proactive way. Case managers should understand that people have different histories, preferences, cultural norms, strengths, barriers, and responses to stress. Services must be tailored accordingly and changed as the person's situation and capacity shifts. This engagement is influenced by and determined in collaboration with the household.

A RRH program should not set rigid, uniform time limits or caps on case management assistance, but be flexible enough to provide the amount of case management and services that a household needs. This need may initially be minimal. Case managers should be able to provide longer or more intensive case management assistance when a household is unable to achieve the critical elements of stability with the program's usual level of case management. Incrementally increasing the intensity of case management support embraces the best practice of progressive engagement, ensuring that the right amount of service is provided to the household.



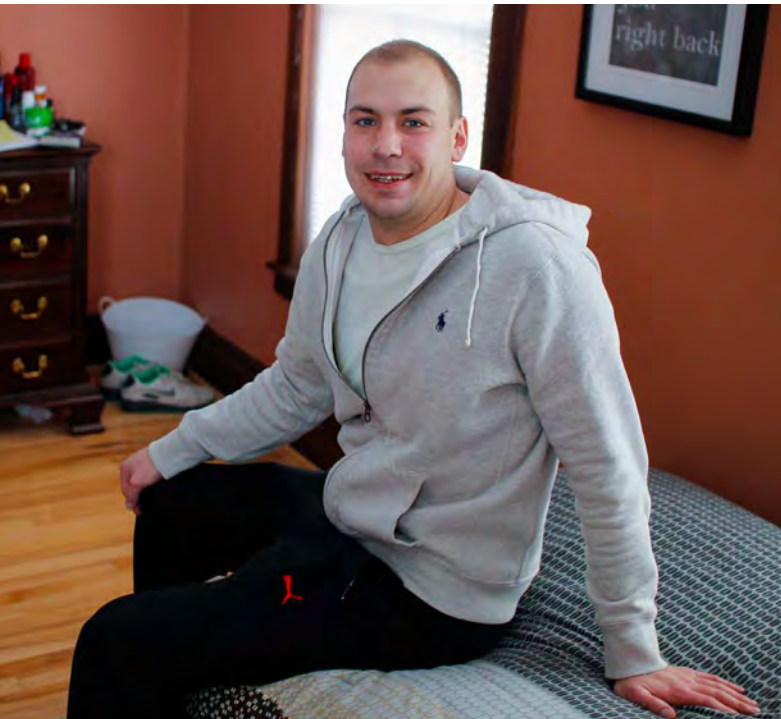


**RRH case managers should work with people with low to very high barriers to housing. Even though people experiencing the crisis of homelessness may have many challenges, most people in effective RRH programs return to permanent housing with relatively short-term interventions and do not return to homelessness.**

### **Caseload Sizes**

Caseload size varies across RRH programs depending on how they are staffed, such as whether they have housing or landlord specialists that conduct the housing search for participants. This has an impact on the frequency and duration of contacts with a household. It is not possible to reliably predict which individual households will need more (or less) contact. But there are factors that suggest the need for more contact and can be used to make decisions about caseload size.

Because RRH case management is home-based, travel time is a factor. Some case managers must travel extended distances to meet with participants. In general, it might be logical to assume that participants who have had little or no experience living in housing may need more support and guidance than more experienced renters or homeowners. Whether the program has a caseload of 1:20 or 1:40, written policies and procedures should establish general expectations for participant contact. Nevertheless, the program should allow flexibility to provide more contact with participants who need it, or less with those who do not.



### **TOOLS**

- [🔗 Case Management Support Policies](#)
- [🔗 Case Manager Job Description Sample](#)
- [🔗 Re-Housing Navigator Job Description](#)
- [🔗 Client Eligibility Policies](#)

### 3.3 PHASES OF RAPID RE-HOUSING CASE MANAGEMENT

RRH case management can be described in three phases: obtaining and moving into permanent housing; supporting stabilization in housing; and closing the case. RRH is not just about ensuring a household gets into housing, but making sure that the connections and resources are in place for them to successfully stay housed. In the following section, these three phases will detail how each phase can and should support the ultimate goal of quickly resolving a household's housing crisis.

Note that if the RRH program does not have specialized housing staff and case managers are also performing the duties of housing search and landlord recruitment, staff should include the activities described in “*Part 1: Housing Identification*” of this toolkit.

#### PHASE 1.

##### OBTAINING AND MOVING INTO PERMANENT HOUSING

Initially, RRH case management was primarily focused on assisting a participant in obtaining and moving into a new housing unit. We now know that case managers should also assist participants with achieving housing sustainability by providing short-to-medium term support once the household is housed. Case managers should help participants resolve or mitigate Tenant Screening Barriers, like address rental and utility arrears or multiple evictions, obtain necessary identification, support other move-in activities, such as providing furniture, and prepare participants for successful tenancy by reviewing lease provisions.

##### Assessment

While participants may have been assessed prior to their referral to a RRH program (e.g., by street outreach, coordinated entry, or emergency shelter provider), RRH case managers often have to perform additional assessments. It is important for the RRH assessments be relevant in helping the participant obtain and move into permanent housing, rather than assessing areas the program won't focus on.

The following assessments are appropriate for case managers to conduct to help a participant obtain and move into permanent housing.

› **Assess Tenant Screening Barriers.** Tenant Screening Barriers are issues in the person's income, credit, housing, and criminal history that would cause a landlord to deny the person's rental application. (See “*Part 1: Housing Identification*” for more information on Tenant Screening Barriers.) This assessment must be conducted immediately, as it will guide choices for matching appropriate landlords to households.

› **Assess Housing Stabilization Barriers.** Housing Stabilization Barriers are patterns in earlier episodes of housing instability or homelessness that could reasonably be expected to recur in the near future and jeopardize housing. These may be based on underlying issues, such as a lack of information about tenant responsibilities, an unreliable income, or problems having guests whose behavior is illegal or disruptive to the “quiet enjoyment” requirement in the lease. Sometimes, these barriers may be suggested by the Tenant Screening Barrier assessment, but often housing stabilization barriers are identified over time.

Housing stabilization barriers do not have to be addressed before a housing search, but case managers should work with participants to reduce the risk of housing stabilization barriers that may jeopardize their success in permanent housing. For example, a participant who has been evicted due to allowing guests to conduct illegal activities in their unit can still move into permanent housing through RRH, but will need to work with the case manager and other community supports to prevent a similar occurrence. Helping the tenant to understand their tenant rights and responsibilities, as well as consequences of their actions on their housing, can help prepare them to make improved decisions related to maintaining permanent housing. Case managers must consider that some behaviors and beliefs of tenants may be culturally rooted, requiring conversations about alternative ways for tenants to move forward without compromising their housing. Case managers must take caution to ensure bias doesn't influence their determination of whether certain behaviors are Housing Stabilization Barriers.



**It is important to utilize information on housing stabilization barriers and tools to obtain and retain housing, not to use as criteria to screen people out of a RRH program. The great majority of people with significant Tenant Screening and/or Housing Stabilization Barriers can and do successfully exit homelessness with RRH.**

› **Assess Housing Options.** Housing options are a combination of the types of housing a household wants and what rental amount can be reasonably sustained after the RRH program ends. This will inform the housing search process. The case manager must discuss the following with the participant in an open and nonjudgmental way:

- The household's current or probable income and how much is available for rent.
  - For many people, their income can be expected to remain relatively stable. (However, once the case manager connects the household to free or low-cost goods and services, the portion of income available for rent may increase.)
  - This conversation should include any income that may come from things outside of traditional or formal employment.
  - For those with little to no income, the case manager must create estimates of likely employment earnings and/or income supports. Permanent rental subsidies may offer the best option for someone who may be unable to have adequate or increased income. Given the local supply and eligibility requirements, the case manager should know whether this is a realistic option. Most people, however, will have various sources of income, so part of the assessment should examine what can be done to increase resources from those sources.
  - Shared housing can also be an option for those with little or no income. Participants can enter shared housing arrangements with others with little income; tenants who can use additional help with bills, childcare, or other services; or those who prefer to live with others.

- Constructing a simple, tentative spending plan (budget) will suggest the target range for rent. It is unlikely a household can spend only 30 percent of their income on rent in unsubsidized housing. 🏠 **Nationally**, low-income households spend more than 50 percent of their income on housing.

- The type, location, and size of housing the participant would prefer and how their choices match their income, Tenant Screening Barriers, and any relevant eligibility factors.

› **Assess Family, Friends, and Other Social and Community Supports.** Participants often have family, friends, faith-based supports, and other community supports in their lives. Discussing these options can help participants recognize they already have strong supports they can build upon.

› **Assess Gaps in Support.** Staff also can assess areas where participants feel there are gaps in their supports and what other goals they would like support in achieving (e.g. childcare, employment, transportation). These goals may need to be revisited after a person is housed, given the difficulty of focusing on goals that are not short-term or related to housing.

## Housing Plans

A Housing Plan is a road map for obtaining and maintaining permanent housing. The case manager and participant discuss and define the end goals, break each into specific action steps to be taken by the case manager and the participant, and set dates for reviewing progress and updating the Housing Plan.

A Housing Plan should be:

› **Participant-Driven.** The RRH participant’s goals and priorities drive the Housing Plan. The case manager provides critical information to help the participant make choices and supports the household’s decisions to the extent possible.

› **Housing-Focused.** The overarching purpose of the Housing Plan is to obtain and sustain permanent housing. Goals that are not related to getting and keeping housing are deferred unless they are a high priority for the participant.

› **Reasonable.** A participant experiencing a housing crisis may feel overwhelmed with too many goals. What is “reasonable” in terms of making progress will be different for each person and can change over time. Housing Plans should reflect this and be flexible and changeable. Housing Plans’ goals are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely – and include action steps specific to each goal while specifying who is responsible for each step – staff or participant. Action steps include a target date for achievement, keeping in mind the short- to medium-term nature of the RRH program. Plans also identify when a progress review and update will occur and are revised as needed. The Plan should be reviewed and updated frequently. Exit planning should start early in the process of case management so households have realistic expectations of the program and are not caught off guard when the subsidy is about to end.



› **Short-Term.** Action steps are those that can be taken in a relatively short period of time. This allows the case manager and participant to continually reassess progress and address remaining barriers.



**A case manager may be able to help participants improve their Tenant Screening Barrier profile. As an example, the RRH program might pay the participant's rental arrears to a previous landlord in exchange for a positive (or at least neutral) reference. But most Tenant Screening Barriers cannot be immediately resolved, and some are difficult to change. Even if a database (e.g. credit, criminal, eviction) has errors, correcting the record can be complicated and take considerable time. The case manager's approach should accept the Tenant Screening Barriers that cannot be quickly changed and find a landlord who is willing to overlook these barriers. If the participant's Tenant Screening Barriers are greater than the landlord would ordinarily accept, staff should negotiate with the landlord, offering additional incentives to help the landlord overlook the barriers.**

### **Obtaining Housing**

Once the best housing match is made and the landlord has accepted the application, the case manager and participant should:

› **Review The Lease** to assure that it complies with funder requirements and is consistent with applicable laws. Case managers are trained in basic landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, and the characteristics of leases that meet funder requirements. The case manager also has access to community legal services to discuss potential lease irregularities. During this time the case manager should assist the participant in understanding their obligations under the lease.

› **Review the Rent** to assure that it does not exceed limits established by funders. The case manager may need to consider local [Fair Market Rents and know how to conduct a Rent Reasonableness](#) comparison.

› **Review the Premises** to assure they meet funder requirements. Case managers must be able to conduct an inspection or have prompt access to an inspector who has been trained appropriately.

› **Negotiate the Lease Terms**, when necessary, including move-in costs (deposit, first month's rent, any included utilities, fees, and penalties) or any necessary accommodations related to a disability.

› **Assure the Lease** is properly signed and move-in costs are promptly paid to the landlord.

### **Moving into Housing**

The RRH program should assist households with the actual move into their new housing unit. The program could assist with necessities, including providing moving costs; move-in kits that include cleaning supplies, linens, and toiletries; basic furnishings; and orientation to the neighborhood's grocery stores, pharmacies, childcare options, and community resources.

## PHASE 2.

### SUPPORTING STABILIZATION IN HOUSING

After moving in, Rapid Re-Housing case management should be home-based and help participants stabilize in housing. Based upon their needs and requests, it should help them identify and access supports, including family and friend networks, mainstream and community services, and employment and income.

Once the individual or family has moved into housing, the case manager's primary focus shifts to housing stability. Housing stability involves following the terms of a household's lease, including payment and shared housing agreement (if applicable). Goals and action steps in the Housing Plan reflect this emphasis.

Case managers employ multiple strategies and referrals to assist their participants with housing stability and offer various direct assistance and linkages to community-based supports. Some services, such as tenancy supports, are often available only in RRH programs and must be provided directly by the case manager. But other housing plan goals can best be achieved by linking the participant or household to a community resource, such as a job search program or public assistance benefits. Case managers must be proactive and go far beyond simply offering contact information for referrals and should provide a warm hand-off to other supports whenever possible. RRH case managers should help participants to connect with resources, including assistance with preparing eligibility documentation; assuring they can obtain an appointment; transportation; and following up with the participant and service provider to mediate or offer support.

### Provide Home-Based Case Management

🏠 **Home visits** are the most effective way to identify a household's Housing Stabilization Barriers and intervene to assure these do not cause housing loss. When case managers make the home visit an occasion to support the participant's goals in the home (rather than a time to list problems and deficits), the home visit can be a very positive experience. However, when a person does not want to meet at home, the case manager should arrange another place conducive to discussing housing issues. It is important for a program to have clear policies, procedures, and safety protocols for case managers about home visits.

### Promote Housing Stability

To promote housing stability, case managers and RRH participants work together on one or more of the following activities:

› **Increase Income.** Most often, an episode of homelessness involves a financial crisis that leads to housing loss. Some households who become homeless have zero income; others lack income that is regular and sufficient for rent. Not all participants must increase their income to sustain permanent housing; some have earnings or income supports that are at least sufficient to pay rent, even if the household is severely rent-burdened. But when the person cannot sustain housing without additional income, this must be a critical focus for case managers. Given that RRH programs are relatively short-term, case managers must become extremely knowledgeable about a wide variety of benefits and the best pathways to secure them for the participant.

Many effective RRH programs coordinate closely with employment service providers in their community to ensure participants have ready access to those resources. Case managers should foster and improve connections with key resource providers that participants will need. This can improve the long-term housing stability and well-being of participants and facilitate a responsible closure of RRH case management services.

› **Create a Budget and Maximize Income Available for Rent.** Whether or not enhancing income is a goal, managing spending can improve the household’s ability to pay the rent. Case managers can help their participants’ budget spending by:

- developing an honest household budget;
- assisting them to apply for benefits such as health care, food supports (SNAP), utility subsidies, and free lifeline cellphones;
- identifying free or reduced-cost goods and services (food pantries, clothing shelves, subsidized child care, etc.);
- connecting the participant to an accredited consumer credit counselor for debt consolidation or interest rate negotiation to reduce monthly debt payments; and
- assisting participants with accessing resources by considering elements such as transportation, navigating systems/ processes, and language barriers.

› **Provide Tenancy Supports.** Tenancy supports include providing information and/or skill-building to help tenants understand and comply with the requirements of their lease. While most households become homeless due to financial issues, some also may have been



**Even limited reductions in spending can reduce a household’s overall rent burden, especially when paired with any increase in income. Case managers should understand, however, that some costly items that may seem “unnecessary,” such as cable television, alcohol, fast food, or cigarettes, may be important to the household. Participants should feel comfortable being honest about their budgeting needs with case managers.**

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evicted for lease violations or have acquired poor landlord references due to conflict with other tenants, damage to the apartment, or problems controlling children, guests, trash, or noise. Case managers can help prevent a recurrence of these problems by:

- *Offering knowledge* of landlord-tenant rights and responsibilities and providing correct information as needed. A tenant advocate or legal aid organization may be able to train case managers and develop methods of identifying knowledge gaps.
- *Educating tenants* about issues that may be “red flags” to landlords of possible lease violations. This may happen when conducting home visits to help solve problems in caring for the unit, controlling noise, setting boundaries for guests, etc.
- *Role-playing responses* to complaints by other tenants or requests for a repair.
- *Mediating conflict* between the landlord and the participant.

› **Resolve Urgent Legal Problems.** Sometimes, a person has legal issues that can directly impact housing stability. For example, an open bench warrant is an order issued by a judge or law court for the arrest of a person and can make it difficult to sustain housing. Child support is another serious issue that can result in garnishment of wages that are needed to pay rent. RRH programs are unlikely to be able to directly offer legal assistance, but they should have access to community resources that can resolve such situations.

› **Moving to Another Unit.** In some cases, the participant may want to move from the original unit for a variety of reasons or the landlord may want the household to leave. The program should help to avoid an eviction at all costs and provide as much help as possible to the participant in finding a new unit. This should not be considered a failure if the participant moves into another permanent housing situation.


### PHASE 3.

#### CLOSING THE CASE

Rapid Re-Housing assistance should end – and the case should be closed – when the participant is no longer going to be imminently homeless. In some instances, case management may continue after financial assistance ends, if appropriate or requested by the household. For those that will require ongoing support after exiting the RRH program, case managers should provide participants with warm handoffs to mainstream and community-based services that will continue to assist them.

There is no bright line to indicate when a person’s housing crisis is resolved. The household may continue to be extremely low-income and severely rent-burdened, and yet be able to pay the rent and follow

the terms of the lease. While they have not yet achieved all their life goals or resolved all their issues, they have successfully exited homelessness and the housing crisis is over. As they stabilize, their capacity to make and carry out plans for future goals will improve, as RRH provides a foundation for participants to build upon. They may continue to work with other community resources, initiate services with new resources, or take a longer break to recuperate and consider their options.

The decision to conclude assistance requires  **evaluating a number of factors**. It should not be based upon arbitrary deadlines or spending limits. Instead, the case manager should look for indicators that the program participant’s housing is not at imminent risk due to rental or lease compliance issues or an inability to utilize essential community resources.

Assessment Activity	Indicators for Case Closure	Indicators for Continued Assistance
Contact Landlord	Landlord reports no rental arrears, lease violations, or significant complaints.	Landlord reports serious tenancy problems.
Review Income and Budget	Household can pay rent and meet other non-discretionary obligations, even if severely rent-burdened.	Household does not have sufficient income to pay rent and no Plan B for housing if notice to vacate is given.
Review Status of Referrals	Household is connected with resources necessary for legal, financial, or other necessary assistance to maintain housing.	Referrals are still pending, participant eligibility is not documented, no natural supports, or participant is in poor standing with programs providing necessary assistance to maintain housing.
Discussion with Participant/ Household	Household believes they are able to maintain housing without continued assistance from RRH program.	Household has serious and valid concerns about maintaining housing if RRH assistance ends.



Exit planning is critical to the success of RRH. From the first engagement the household has with the RRH program, there should be a clear expectation of this intervention as a short- to medium-term pathway to permanent housing and housing stability. This messaging must be consistent throughout the participant's engagement in the program and should not differ among staff members. Homeless systems should ensure that this messaging is consistent across all RRH programs in their community to achieve uniformity and, again, manage expectations of landlords, program participants, homeless services providers, and community partners and stakeholders. Failure to do so can cause inconsistencies in practice, approach, and engagement, and could compromise the efficacy of RRH throughout the entire system.


## TOOLS

- 🔗 [Support Network Map](#)
- 🔗 [Housing Plan Policies](#)
- 🔗 [Housing Plan](#)
- 🔗 [Lease Explanation Tool](#)
- 🔗 [Landlord Tenant Rights Explanation](#)
- 🔗 [Friendship Place Client Budget](#)
- 🔗 [Client Budget](#)
- 🔗 [Advocate Home Visiting Safety Protocol](#)
- 🔗 [Client Safety Plan Protocol](#)
- 🔗 [Case Closure Landlord Letter](#)
- 🔗 [Case Closure Aftercare Plan](#)
- 🔗 [Case Closure Client Letter](#)
- 🔗 [Case Closure Packet](#)
- 🔗 [Case Manager Strengths Based Self Assessment](#)



# CONCLUSION

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) is a short-to-medium term intervention designed to assist people experiencing homelessness in rapidly accessing permanent housing and establishing a foundation to support long-term sustainability. At its peak, RRH serves as a vehicle to rapidly resolve housing crises permanently, increasing flow out of the homeless response system.

Effective RRH programs follow the  **national program standards and benchmarks** which aim to (1) reduce the amount of time households spend homeless, (2) increase the number of households exiting to permanent housing, and (3) reduce the number of households who return to homelessness. RRH programs achieve these goals by utilizing: a Housing First approach to ensure all households have immediate access to permanent housing; a progressive engagement approach to right-size services; and a housing-focused approach to ensure all activities are housing sustainability-centered.

The primary activities of RRH are “FIND, PAY, STAY,” as reflected in the core components – housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, and case management and services. These distinguish RRH as a short-term, holistic resource for households with intensive housing needs.

- **Find** – This housing identification core component involves landlord engagement and housing navigation services to assist households in navigating the housing search process. Communities with the most effective RRH programs coordinate amongst programs in their community to share landlords, case conference, share housing stability resources in the community, and embrace system-wide practices across programs.

- **Pay** – Rent and move-in assistance is the financial aspect of RRH; it involves assisting households with moving into housing and providing financial support using a progressive engagement approach. Communities with the most effective RRH programs have standards, policies, and procedures for structuring and administering financial and move-in assistance.
- **Stay** – Within the case management and services core component, RRH programs provide short-term guidance and support to RRH households that help them achieve long-term housing stability. RRH programs that provide effective case management and services are participant-led, Housing First, and housing-focused, and provide households with warm handoffs to community resources. Case management understands the unique needs of each household in their program.

Communities that embrace the RRH national standards and best practices witness increased system flow and positive exits to permanent housing. To strengthen the impact of RRH on ending homelessness, systems must ensure consistency across all RRH programs in their system and facilitate coordination and collaboration between programs and community stakeholders. Doing so will move the entire homeless system forward, rather than only select programs, and make systemic progress towards achieving a functional end to homelessness.

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