

## **Communicating with Tenants During Funding Uncertainty or Possible Service Disruptions**

The goal of this guidance is to ensure tenants are informed, supported, and treated with dignity during moments when funding or services may change. Providers play a critical role in helping tenants feel as safe and prepared as possible. This approach helps staff communicate in ways that are clear, compassionate, and consistent, even when the path forward is uncertain.

### **Core Practices for Communication with Tenants**

If you work directly with tenants, these principles can guide your conversations. If you are in management or leadership in an organization, let these principles guide how you prepare staff to talk with tenants.

#### **1. Be Honest and Communicate Early**

Tenants deserve to know about any changes to their housing as soon as possible. Sharing information early helps build trust and prevent surprises. Staff should be open about what aspects of tenants' housing situations are known, what is still unclear, and what the potential outcomes may be. It is essential to be honest without minimizing concerns or making promises that can't be kept for certain. Before talking with any tenant, ensure that the information you share is correct and relevant to that tenant. If you are a manager or leader, work with your staff to create a consistent communication strategy for talking with tenants.

In practice:

- Share information early, even if details are still developing
- Explain what is known and unknown in straightforward terms
- Avoid offering guarantees or minimizing risk

#### **2. Use Trauma-Informed Communication**

Staff should ground conversations in safety, choice, and respect. A trauma-informed approach means meeting tenants where they are emotionally and giving them space to process any potential changes. Staff should check in about how tenants prefer to receive updates and use calm, supportive language throughout.

In practice:

- Prioritize the tenants' emotional and physical safety (ensure quiet, private space; allow for enough time to process; check in before, during, and after the conversation)
- Offer choices about how and when tenants receive updates from staff
- Validate feelings and allow time for questions
- Use calm, strengths-based language (Examples: "You've already made progress in a few areas," "You've demonstrated a lot of resilience to get here," etc.)

### **3. Start with Relationships**

These conversations should be led by staff who tenants already know and trust. Smaller settings—one-on-one or in small groups—help tenants feel safer and more supported. Clinicians, case managers, and peer support specialists should be involved in these conversations when their presence can strengthen emotional support.

In practice:

- Use trusted staff to deliver messages
- Keep conversations small and personal
- Bring in clinical or peer support when helpful

### **4. Tailor the Approach**

Each tenant is different. Communication should reflect their needs, preferences, and potential triggers. Providers should identify tenants in programs most likely to be impacted and plan the message delivery thoughtfully. Peer support should remain a central element whenever possible.

In practice:

- Identify tenants most at risk (e.g., if the grant funding their housing unit is expiring, their individual vulnerability, etc.)
- Adjust communication to each tenant's needs and preferences
- Choose the right setting and staff to engage in these conversations based on the tenant's needs
- Utilize peer support as part of the engagement plan

### **5. Keep Communication Going**

Uncertainty can be stressful, so consistent communication with tenants is essential. Even when there is no new information, regular check-ins show tenants they have not been forgotten. Staff should prepare for difficult conversations, document what is discussed, and follow up as promised.

In practice:

- Provide regular updates, even if the update is “no new information”
- Plan for hard conversations and allow time for tenants to process
- Document conversations and follow up promptly

## **6. Plan with Dignity and Realism**

If changes in tenants’ housing are anticipated, staff should help tenants explore options through housing problem-solving conversations. The approach must remain dignified, supportive, and realistic. Staff should focus on continuity and stability while being careful not to over-promise outcomes.

In practice:

- Explore all viable housing options (vouchers, bridge subsidies, transfers, etc.)
- Plan collaboratively with tenants
- Avoid overstating what is possible
- Share advocacy opportunities and tools

## **7. Follow Up in Writing**

Clear written information helps reduce confusion and provides tenants with something to refer back to. After each conversation, provide a simple written summary and next steps so tenants know what to expect and who to contact.

Written follow-up should include:

- A short summary of what was discussed
- Contact information for staff
- Clear next steps
- When the next update will come
- A housing stability plan, if needed

## **Ensure Staff Preparation (For Managers and Leaders)**

Before communicating with tenants, staff must be fully updated and prepared on any potential or anticipated changes to service delivery. All team members should understand the funding situation, potential impacts, and available housing options. This ensures consistent, accurate messaging and reduces confusion.

Staff should be trained and informed on:

- Trauma-informed communication and de-escalation
- The agency’s current funding status
- Which tenants and programs may be most impacted
- Required documentation and timelines
- Additional support available for staff who may potentially lose employment

## **Suggested Language for Staff**

This language is meant to guide conversations. Staff should adapt it to fit their own voice, tenants' needs, and the moment.

### **1. Opening the Conversation (Safety + Transparency)**

"Thank you for meeting with me today. I want to talk with you early so you have time to hear the information, think about it, and ask questions. Before we start, I want to be very clear: nothing changes today, and you are safe in your home right now."

"There are some possible changes with the funding that supports this program. We don't have all the details yet, but you deserve to know what we know, what we don't know, and what we're doing to protect your housing as much as possible."

### **2. Explain the Situation Clearly and Calmly**

"The federal government is considering changes that could affect programs like Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-Housing. This might mean delays in renewing contracts or fewer resources for some projects – resources that fund our organization. Our program is one that *may* be impacted, so we want to make sure you're fully informed."

"We're preparing for both possibilities: the best-case scenario where nothing changes, and the worst-case scenario where you will lose your housing subsidy and will need to look for additional support, funding to keep your housing stable, or alternative places to stay."

### **3. Validate Emotions**

"I know this may bring up worry, frustration, fear, or anger. Those feelings make sense. Anyone in your position would feel that way. You're not alone in this. We will walk through each step together."

### **4. Emphasize Support and Partnership**

"Our priority is your stability. We are already planning ahead so that if anything changes, you will be aware. We will work with you directly to find the safest, least disruptive path forward. You won't have to face this alone."

### **5. Explore Current Needs (Housing Problem-Solving)**

"I'd like to talk a little about what support you might need if we have to plan ahead. We don't know what will happen yet, but it helps us be prepared."

"We can help with things like:

- Applying for housing options, including vouchers, bridge subsidies, or other supports if needed

- Applications, documentation, benefits, and landlord communication
- Case management, clinical support, and check-ins throughout the process”

“You will not navigate any part of this by yourself. We will support you at every step.”

## **6. Offer Choice and Collaboration**

“How would you prefer to get updates – by phone, in person, or another way that works for you?”

“Is there anyone you’d like to have with you during future conversations – peer support, your case manager, or another staff member you trust?”

“What questions do you have right now? What worries or concerns are coming up as you hear this?”

## **7. Close the Conversation with Stability and Next Steps**

“I want to repeat that nothing changes today. You are not being asked to move, and you are not losing your housing right now. We are sharing this with you early, so you’re not surprised later if anything changes.”

“We will check in with you again on \_\_\_\_ (date). If anything changes sooner, we will reach out to you right away.”

## Tenant Next Steps & Housing Stability Plan (template)

*This form is for you to keep. It helps track what was discussed and what comes next.*

### Tenant Information

- **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Program:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Date of Conversation:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Staff Present:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Summary of What We Talked About

(Staff: Briefly note what was discussed in plain language.)

### Questions or Concerns You Shared

(Write down anything important the tenant wants to revisit.)

### Next Steps

(List the actions we agreed to and who is responsible.)

- **Next Step:** \_\_\_\_\_
  - **Who Will Do This:** \_\_\_\_\_
  - **Target Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Housing Stability Plan (If Applicable)

(Only fill this out if you discussed possible housing options.)

- **Potential Options Explored:**

- **Documents Needed:**

- **Supports Offered (case management, clinical, peer support):**

**Next Check-In**

- **Scheduled Date:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Time:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Who Will Meet with You:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Information**

(Who to call if you have questions or need support.)

- **Primary Staff Contact:** \_\_\_\_\_
  - Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Email: \_\_\_\_\_