



# Best Practices for HVRP Grantees: Housing Services

## **Housing Needs of HVRP Participants**

HVRP grantees ensure that veterans experiencing homelessness are connected to gainful, sustainable employment opportunities and the resources to support their long-term career goals. These programs serve nearly 16,000 homeless veterans each year, achieving long-term employment retention for 64% of placed veterans.

The most successful HVRP grantees pair their main objective – provision of customized employment and training services – with the delivery of supportive services provided internally or through partner referrals. These services can maximize gains in employment placement and retention by alleviating some significant challenges to employment goals.

One of the core services to help organizations reach employment goals is access to appropriate and progressive housing alternatives that meet the needs of the veteran. HVRP grantees recognize the reciprocal, beneficial relationship between employment and housing for veterans participating in their programs. Income security plays a critical role in securing and maintaining housing, and stable housing provides a solid baseline for expanding training and employment goals as the veteran is stabilized.

Participants must have access to affordable housing that meets their specific needs, and grantees meet this need by staying informed of all opportunities and changes in housing resources from VA, other agencies, and the philanthropy community. Best practices in this area require a working knowledge of changes in programs, planning and environments; of intersections between HVRP and veteran-specific and mainstream resources; and of various private resources that support housing goals of homeless veterans.

## **Changes and Trends: Programs, Data Sources and Environment**

Three recent and important trends within the housing arena impact HVRP grantees making referrals to housing resources within their communities:

- Changes to programs
- Changes to data collection and planning
- Changes to the overall housing environment

These trends mean that HVRP grantees have more opportunities to represent the housing interests of their participants and have more options to connect veterans with income to housing that matches their needs and abilities.

## **Programs**

Housing programs for homeless veterans are shifting, expanding, and targeting their focus toward rapid stabilization and placement into permanent housing. At the beginning of the VA's Five-Year Plan to End Veteran Homelessness, Grant and Per Diem (GPD) was the most accessible resource for longer-term transitional housing stability. Now, GPD has shifted its internal structure to focus on more rapidly connecting veterans to permanent options through Transition in Place and an emphasis on Housing First.

In 2010, HUD-VASH was only beginning to build out to the anticipated number of vouchers needed to house 60,000 chronically homeless veterans. Now, HUD-VASH is likely to reach this goal before 2015, with high lease-up rates, more successful targeting and minimal turnover of vouchers, meaning veterans in need of housing supports should consider other permanent supportive housing options. Before the Plan, prevention resources were largely limited to HUD's Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). Now, prevention resources through VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) are expanding on an unprecedented scale, reaching more veterans in need of gap funding to make the move from homelessness or transitional housing into permanent housing. HVRP grantees have seen marked successes in securing housing for their program participants when they develop their assessment and enrollment schedules to match the demands on GPD programs. Additionally, grantees have success when they make targeted referrals to HUD-VASH when the veteran needs comprehensive VA case management, or to other supportive housing programs

### **SPOTLIGHT - Changes and Trends: Programs, Data Sources and Environment**

Several HVRP grantees have capitalized on these changes in housing programs, data sources, and environment to build innovative housing programs for veterans seeking employment through HVRP.

#### **Albany Housing Coalition – New York**

Recognizing that the competitive rental market created new barriers for veterans moving rapidly through transitional housing to seek permanent housing in the community, Albany Housing Coalition in New York developed a relationship with volunteer real estate agents. These agents help veterans secure housing more quickly and avoid possible rental scams through direct connections with landlords, allowing the veteran to spend more time and energy engaging in employment and training services through HVRP.

#### **American G.I. Forum - Texas**

When data showed a growing number of homeless veteran families, American G.I. Forum in Texas developed a Lease Housing program. This program has been effective in helping homeless veterans and their families transition into housing that meets their privacy and space needs. Providing housing stability allows these families to address other unmet needs that can impact successful sustained employment, including child care and efforts for family reunification.

#### **America Works – New York**

America Works in New York has capitalized on the new resources available. This organization focuses on maximizing the earning potential of participants through high-quality placements. They provide financial counseling and guidance on increasing savings and credit repair to make veterans more competitive in the rental market.

#### **New Directions – California**

New Directions in Los Angeles has capitalized on changes in the housing environment. They realized quickly that the high local foreclosure rate provided a rare opportunity to acquire lower-cost properties. They work through the National Community Stabilization Trust and with the city of Los Angeles to acquire foreclosed properties for shared community-based housing for veterans.

when the need is restricted to income support. Grantees also find success when connecting veterans early on with SSVF providers.

### **Data Sources**

Improved data reliability from HUD's Point-In-Time Count means that community planning at the Continuum of Care (CoC) level will more accurately prepare for the needs of veterans within the homeless population. Because CoCs were not required to conduct an unsheltered count in 2012, nearly 30% used 2011 numbers, meaning that while the 2012 AHAR is the most reliable source of information on the numbers of homeless veterans, some changes might not become visible through the data until the 2013 numbers are released.

This accurate data and better planning coincides with the streamlining of HUD resources under one grant program, the Continuum of Care Program, through the implementation of the HEARTH Act. HVRP grantees can use this data to advocate for equitable access to all Continuum services, including housing services, for their homeless veteran participants.

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### **Environment**

The environment beyond Federal programs and data collection tools has also shifted markedly since the beginning of the Five-Year Plan, with new resources and challenges for grantees. A depressed home buyer market means more competition within the rental market, driving up costs for rental housing units. Extensive foreclosures mean more families are experiencing homelessness. As a result, HVRP grantees, especially those with GPD programs within their organization, face the challenging task of placing veterans into jobs that both meet their needs and also have high enough wages to support a transition to more expensive rental units.



Grantees must help secure housing options for veterans with children, a challenge for programs that are connected primarily to GPD programs that do not have accommodations for female veterans or veterans with dependent children. Best practice HVRP grantees have met this challenge by leveraging community resources beyond traditional veteran-specific programs, using assets provided by philanthropy and their business partners, and by developing more advanced jobs that bring higher income for employed veterans.

### **HVRP and Federal Housing Programs**

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When referring HVRP participants to housing resources – either within one organization housing several programs or to a partner in the community – grantee staff can save time by targeting these referrals based on the needs of the veteran and on the availability of resources. Understanding how the main Federal housing programs intersect with HVRP can help grantees determine when and where to refer.

### **Grant and Per Diem and Transitional Housing Resources**

The drop in the homeless veteran count in 2012 to 62,619 includes a 4.2% decline among sheltered veterans, with nearly no change in the numbers of unsheltered veterans. The steady decline among sheltered veterans could mean that veterans in GPD or other transitional housing are more successfully moving into permanent housing. VA is encouraging GPD programs to streamline their assessment process to transition veterans into permanent housing through an emphasis on Housing First and Transition In Place. HVRP grantees need a seamless process for receiving and making referrals with GPD and CoC transitional housing providers so

veterans in need of the unique employment resources provided by HVRP can access these services while they are still eligible prior to permanent housing placement.

This process can work well in organizations with HVRP and transitional housing under one roof, even when grantees must create innovative approaches to meeting veterans' specialized needs.

### **HUD-VASH and Permanent Housing Resources**

Veterans in GPD programs can be eligible for HVRP; veterans leased up with HUD-VASH or other Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) likely are not. Under the HEARTH Act, veterans are no longer considered chronically homeless after 90 days in a transitional housing program, adding additional pressure on GPD and CoC transitional housing programs to quickly identify veterans who will need both the comprehensive case management and housing support of a HUD-VASH voucher.

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Given the pressure to expedite HUD-VASH lease up and quickly identify veterans eligible for incremental HUD-VASH vouchers, HVRP grantees will need to streamline their enrollment processes to identify veterans who are a good fit for HVRP before they lease up with HUD-VASH. Determining employment readiness becomes an even more critical function, as grantees need to determine sooner whether individuals are ready for HVRP or could benefit more from a different treatment program that might lead to a HUD-VASH voucher before the veteran is enrolled in HVRP. Strong relationships with HUD-VASH liaisons within the VA Medical Center and transitional and permanent housing contacts within the CoC allow HVRP grantees to engage with veterans at these critical access points.

### **Continuums of Care**

Under the new HUD Continuum of Care Program, several critical homeless housing resources are consolidated into one large program that restructures services and brings planning back into a localized forum. Continuums not only need representatives from homeless veteran service providers within the planning committees, but also on the Continuum Boards. Continuum Boards must also include a formerly homeless person, who could be a former HVRP participant.

### **Supportive Services for Veteran Families**

The Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) grant can address funding gaps that separate a homeless veteran with income from a permanent housing opportunity. Thirty-two organizations currently hold both HVRP and SSVF grants. Thirteen of these programs are new SSVF grantees, while the 19 remaining programs are in their second year of SSVF funding. Coordinating eligibility between HVRP and SSVF takes dedicated program staffs that are cognizant of the limitations and spending restrictions on both programs. Additional guidance for HVRP grantees with SSVF grants will be available through the NCHV-NVTAC publication "HVRP-SSVF Program Overlaps," available online in the fall of 2013.



## **SPOTLIGHT - HVRP and Federal Housing Programs**

These organizations have demonstrated their ability to utilize resources such as Grant and Per Diem, HUD-VASH, Continuums of Care, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, and private resources to address the housing needs of homeless veterans.

### **Central City Concern - Oregon | GPD and Transitional Housing Resources**

Central City Concern in Oregon has HVRP staff members working closely with the Grant and Per Diem Program under the umbrella of a “Veterans Team.” Employment specialists have weekly discussions with case managers at the women’s and men’s GPD residences.

### **Interfaith Community Services - California | GPD and Transitional Housing Resources**

When homeless veterans are in need of housing but require more intensive services before enrollment in HVRP, Interfaith Community Services in California utilizes a HUD grant for a Sobering Services Program, which provides treatment and shelter to individuals with drug and alcohol addictions and prepares veterans for enrollment and success in HVRP.

### **SEARCH Homeless Services - Texas | GPD and Transitional Housing Resources**

Homeless female veterans can face challenges in finding veteran programs with the transitional housing capacity to meet their needs, but SEARCH in Texas developed a relationship with a local hostel to provide transitional housing beds for its women veterans.

### **Albany Housing Coalition - New York | HUD-VASH and Permanent Housing Resources/SSVF/Continuums of Care**

Albany Housing Coalition in New York manages 31 Shelter Plus Care housing vouchers, allowing veterans receiving services through HVRP to transition from GPD to permanent housing without losing connectivity to a treatment team. As a result, of 52 veterans leaving AHC housing in 2010, 73% moved on to independent living, 20 had secured employment, and another 15 enrolled in education or vocational programs.

Building off of its experience with HPRP, AHC has been able to quickly pay security deposits and first month’s rent for new renters and even been able to privately secure furniture and housing resources.

Albany Housing Coalition helped develop its CoC, remaining an active participant in planning for nearly 20 years. This history and AHC’s trusted reputation within the CoC has led to the development of a veteran’s preference within the Housing Authority’s wait lists.

### **Swords to Plowshares - California | HUD-VASH and Permanent Housing Resources**

Swords to Plowshares in California utilizes CoC financing and HUD-VASH to provide 102 units of permanent housing with onsite supports at the Presidio in San Francisco.

### **Veterans Leadership Program - Pennsylvania | HUD-VASH/Permanent Housing Resources**

Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania provides 98 scattered-site leased apartments serving over 250 individuals each year that are in close proximity to other organization resources. Each of these programs can track veterans moving through their internal systems to match them with HVRP when they are employment-ready and before they are placed in permanent housing.

### **Goodwill Industries - Texas | Continuums of Care**

Goodwill Industries of Houston maintains a strong relationship with their local CoC, recognizing that this allows for additional connections to housing providers and improved program outreach.

## Resources

For additional information, grantees are encouraged to review the following resources:

*HVRP Best Practices* (<http://bit.ly/10OtMKp>)

New profiles include recently reported results and strategies for providing employment services to homeless female veterans and formerly incarcerated veterans under the Homeless Female Veteran/ Homeless Veterans with Families Program (HFV/VWF) and Incarcerated Veterans Transition Program (IVTP).

*Converting Foreclosed and Vacant Properties to Support Homeless Veterans Single-Housing-Unit Template* (<http://bit.ly/10OucQN>)

The template provides proven strategies for acquiring single-family units and discusses community resources that can be leveraged to facilitate, support, and maintain permanent housing placement for homeless veterans.



*Corporate Connection – Housing Resources* (<http://bit.ly/Wx1Jtc>)

This section highlights important housing reports, housing data and information from across the country that will help in your efforts to house homeless veterans.

*HUD-VASH Best Practices* (<http://1.usa.gov/WX3ka6>)

The purpose of this working document is to spread the word about effective strategies for administering HUD-VASH. It summarizes the most unique and innovative practices submitted by PHAs and VAMCs.

*USICH HUD-VASH Toolkit* (<http://1.usa.gov/Wpfdq8>)

This toolkit produced by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness includes information on targeting veterans experiencing chronic homelessness, Housing First, rapid lease-ups, case management, collaboration, and more.

*USICH Report to Congress* (<http://1.usa.gov/10DwVYP>)

For Fiscal Year 2012, the Senate Committee on Appropriations asked USICH to assess the progress of the HUD-VASH Program and efforts to address veteran homelessness in rural communities and on Native American reservations USICH produced this report in response.



*VA HUD-VASH Resource Guide* (<http://bit.ly/Wx227n>)

This guide is designed to provide case managers and others who work with homeless veterans in the HUD-VASH program with a comprehensive set of resources to address these veterans' multifaceted needs.



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