RAPID RE-HOUSING WRITTEN STANDARDS
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CITY OF CHICAGO CONTINUUM OF CARE

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RAPID RE-HOUSING IN THE CITY OF CHICAGO

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) provides housing relocation and stabilization services and short- to medium-term rental assistance, as needed, to help households experiencing homelessness to move as quickly as possible to permanent housing and achieve stability in that housing. The Chicago Continuum of Care (CoC) has demonstrated, and research has shown, that RRH is a valuable strategy for quickly transitioning individuals and families directly from literal homelessness into permanent housing with needed and appropriate supports.

To sustain RRH as a valuable community tool for ending homelessness, the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program, the Continuum of Care (CoC) program, and the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program all include RRH as an eligible form of assistance. Chicago’s RRH projects from all current and future funding streams are required to meet HUD defined housing first standards.

The purpose of this document is to outline minimum standards to which all of Chicago RRH programs should adhere, within their respective funding constraints, as well as to identify best practices which all RRH programs should strive to implement.

CORE ELEMENTS / PHILOSOPHIES

RRH programs in Chicago are grounded in the core values and evidence-based practices adopted by all housing programs in the Chicago CoC, including, but not limited to: Housing First and harm reduction; and RRH assistance offered without preconditions (such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety). RRH staff believe that housing is a human right and every household can be successful through RRH assistance. RRH programs utilize a person-centered approach, whereby resources and services provided are tailored to the needs of unique housing stability goals created by the participant in collaboration with their case manager.

Self-sufficiency is the primary goal of RRH. For RRH projects, self-sufficiency means that through RRH, households will leverage their strengths and obtain what they need in order to maintain permanent housing without the aid of the RRH program. The specific goals will depend on the household’s unique barriers to housing stability but will likely include obtaining enough income to pay rent on their own; and developing the skills maintain housing on their own; and acquiring any support needed to maintain this housing. Frequently, this requires learning rights and responsibilities as a tenant and developing the routine of paying rent directly to the landlord. For many households, self-sufficiency involves meeting personal goals like developing a support network; maintaining or improving health; establishing healthy financial practices; ensuring safety; or supporting their children’s success in school.
RRH programs in Chicago are committed to including and expanding practices that emphasize a person-centered and strengths-based approach toward assistance and services. RRH programs should incorporate progressive engagement and "employment first." These approaches should be incorporated into every RRH project. In order to effectively utilize scarce resources, the Chicago CoC encourages all RRH projects to incorporate a "just-enough" philosophy to the provision of financial assistance and services. Progressive engagement also empowers households to leverage their own strengths to obtain and maintain housing stability.

The core components of an RRH program are:

1. Housing Identification;
2. Financial Assistance; and

**LENGTH OF ASSISTANCE**

The Chicago CoC has determined the length of assistance for the majority of households enrolled in RRH is between 6 and 18 months. The timeframe acknowledges the needs of different special populations as well as parameters set by funding sources. During their RRH enrollment, households may receive supportive services, rental assistance, or both.

The best practice is for RRH projects to have households take on the full amount of the rent and continue to provide supportive services before exiting the household. This allows the household to continue to receive support as they are getting used to taking over their rent and remain stably housed. It also adheres to the underlying philosophy that RRH should provide a basic amount of assistance, or just enough to help a household obtain and sustain housing.

**ELIGIBILITY**

Per funder requirements, a person experiencing homelessness must document that they meet certain HUD definitions to receive RRH services. For CoC and SSVF RRH, a household must meet either Category 1 or Category 4 homelessness status. For ESG-RRH, a household must meet Category 1.

- **Category 1 – Literally Homeless:** Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning that they have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not meant for human habitation; are living in a publicly or privately-operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing (TH), and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state and local government programs); or are exiting an institution where they have resided for 90 days or less and resided in an
emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.

- **Category 4 – Fleeing/Attempting to Flee Domestic Violence:** Any individual or family who is fleeing, or is attempting to flee, domestic violence; has no other residence; and lacks the resources or support networks to obtain other permanent housing.

There are no criteria or preconditions to enrollment in ESG-RRH or CoC-RRH, other than homeless status. In addition, SSVF-RRH requires veteran status and an income of no more than 50% Area Median Income (AMI).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Eligibility: HUD Homelessness Category</th>
<th>Income Requirements</th>
<th>Funder Requirements</th>
<th>Documentation Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>VA SSVF</strong></td>
<td>Veterans</td>
<td>Literally homeless - HUD Category 1 &amp; 4**</td>
<td>Not required (No minimum, maximum is 50% AMI)</td>
<td>(See full VA documentation checklist for full information) VA Eligibility Conditions: 1) Veteran Status, 2) Very low-income status, 3) Imminently at risk of literal homelessness (Category 1, 2, or 3) or housing status</td>
<td>Verification of veteran status &amp; discharge (can be accomplished over the phone with the VA for intake or with the DD214 affidavit); Thresholds MH Diagnosis Any of the below for homeless verification: 1. Written third-party documentation including HMIS history sent in the CES matching e-mail 2. Intake worker observation 3. Participant self-certification Any of the below for income verification: 1. Third-party documentation 2. Participant self-verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESG RRH</strong></td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Literally homeless - HUD Category 1 * only</td>
<td>Not required (no minimum or maximum).</td>
<td>(See full HUD guidelines for additional information)</td>
<td>Any of the below for homeless verification: 1. Written third-party documentation including HMIS history sent in the CES matching email 2. Intake worker observation 3. Participant self-certification Any of the below for income verification: 1. Third-party documentation 2. Participant self-verification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CoC-RRH</strong></td>
<td>Varies by agency</td>
<td>Literally homelessness HUD Category 1 &amp; 4**</td>
<td>Not required (no minimum or maximum).</td>
<td></td>
<td>Verification of impact by HIV/AIDS for Heartland Alliance Health Any of the below for homeless verification: 1. Written third-party documentation including HMIS history sent in the CES matching email 2. Intake worker observation 3. Participant self-certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TH-RRH Joint</strong></td>
<td>Youth 18-24; individuals and families</td>
<td>Literally homelessness HUD Category 1 &amp; 4**</td>
<td>Not required (no minimum or maximum).</td>
<td>Homeless Verification (See full HUD guidelines for additional information)</td>
<td>Self-verification of Income Form is still required, although income requirements have been removed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ALLOWABLE SERVICES

Per funder requirements, the following allowable costs apply to RRH programs in the Chicago CoC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligible Costs Summary</th>
<th>ESG-RRH</th>
<th>CoC-RRH</th>
<th>SSVF-RRH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rental Assistance Type</td>
<td>Tenant-based &amp; project-based rental assistance</td>
<td>Tenant-based rental assistance only</td>
<td>Tenant-based &amp; project-based rental assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>One-time payments of up to 6 months of rental arrears, including late fees</td>
<td>Rental arrears up to rental assistance limit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Supportive Services**

- Budgeting
- Case Management
- Moving Costs
- Housing Search
- Credit Repair
- Legal Services
- Mediation
- Assessment of need
- Case Management
- Moving Costs
- Food
- Housing Search
- Transportation
- Child Care
- Education Services
- Employment Assistance & Training
- Legal Services
- Life-Skills Training
- Mental Health Counseling
- Outpatient Substance Abuse Treatment
- Case Management
- Moving Costs
- Food
- Housing Search
- Transportation

RENTAL ASSISTANCE STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES

The Chicago CoC has structured the amount and duration of financial assistance using a Housing First approach to 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.

RRH programs should structure their assistance to be provided in an individualized, flexible, and progressive manner. In this way, 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 program participants and the community as a whole.

RENTAL ASSISTANCE STRUCTURE

The Chicago CoC has adopted a declining subsidy structure for RRH rental assistance. This means the subsidy declines from its initial level on a fixed or “step-down” schedule. The declining subsidy structure can be based on a household’s income or rent, meaning that the
participant’s rental portion may be either a percentage of their income or a percentage of the rental amount. RRH programs must have a policy and procedure that outlines the declining subsidy structure and schedule. The program does not need to share the structure with the participants, but participants should be made aware that the amount of the subsidy will change and that the participant will take over the full amount of the rent while enrolled in the program. A key consideration for RRH programs in designing and offering rental assistance is avoiding the “cliff effect,” where 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.

At a minimum, all RRH programs must implement a declining subsidy structure for rental assistance. Additionally, the Chicago CoC believes that a hybrid model that combines a declining subsidy and progressive engagement is best practice from both participant outcome and grant management perspectives. The addition of progressive engagement in the rental assistance structure allows the RRH program to provide a basic amount of assistance, or just enough, that is needed to help a household obtain and sustain housing. It also requires periodic assessment of the household to determine if they are on a path to self-sufficiency or if they need more assistance. This assessment should determine whether financial assistance should be increased, 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. If assistance has been extended to the maximum amount and the household still does not seem on the path to long-term stability, then it may be appropriate to assist the household towards a more permanent subsidy, if they are eligible.

**TENANT-BASED RENTAL ASSISTANCE**

All rental assistance must be tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA; also sometimes referred to as tenant rental assistance (TRA)). TBRA means the lease is between the participant or head of household and the landlord. Under TBRA, the participant must pay their portion of the rent directly to their landlord.

**CASE MANAGEMENT/SUPPORTIVE SERVICES STANDARDS**

All RRH programs in the CoC provide participants with ongoing case management. Case management is tailored to address a participant’s main barriers to housing, whether that is employment, conflict resolution skills, etc. The following minimum standards apply to case management services:

- A participant’s service plan is updated every 90 days, and a needs assessment is done annually;
• Participant is expected to engage in monthly case management;
• For ESG-RRH, **housing stability** case management is provided for a maximum of 30 days pre-housing;
• Participant is expected to engage in a monthly budgeting process; and
• Follow-up calls are completed 3 and 6 months after exit.

**HOUSING IDENTIFICATION STANDARDS AND BEST PRACTICES**

Housing identification addresses the household’s most immediate need. The housing locator builds a pool of willing landlords, communicates program expectations, and coordinates lease signing and move-in logistics. In the event that a participant and landlord are not able to resolve concerns directly, the housing locator acts as a point of contact and mediator for maintenance issues and any other concerns between participant and landlord. Participants pay their rent directly to the landlord because all RRH is tenant-based rental assistance.

The Chicago CoC’s best practice is to separate housing identification from case management. The skills and experience for effective housing identification are different and specific from those of case management.

**SKILLS AND TRAINING**

Housing locators possess the knowledge and expertise needed to communicate with landlords in their own “language” and to provide accurate information to participants. Housing locators may receive training on HUD Housing Quality Standard (HQS) inspections, lead visual inspections, tenant’s rights, rent calculation, and conflict resolution/mediation. Housing locators may also be certified occupancy specialists (COS).

**RELEASE OF INFORMATION (ROI)**

Housing identification staff provides a release of information (ROI) to the participant or receives the ROI from case management staff. As a best practice, multiple ROI’s may be collected to authorize information provided to landlords, outside supportive services, etc. Participant information released to landlords may include income information, household size, credit score, and history of evictions.

**HOUSING SEARCH**

To expedite housing location, the participant’s preferences are obtained immediately upon project enrollment and housing location services are initiated. RRH projects encourage client empowerment and participant choice. Housing locators are responsible for providing referrals to participant. Participants may also search independently if they choose, but the housing locator should be involved in communications with the landlord. The housing locator can
provide the participant with education and a script to aid them in contacting potential landlords. If a participant independently locates a willing landlord, the housing locator will make contact. The participant may view units alone or with the housing locator. Programs have the goal of completing at least three viewings within 30 days of enrollment and may provide approximately 15 referrals.

**PARTICIPANT REFUSAL**

A participant may refuse a unit for various reasons, such as building features that are not ideal for participant or location in a neighborhood that does not meet participant’s preferences. The participant must apply to at least three referrals within the pre-housing period. If a participant refuses to engage in the application process or declines an excessive number of units, program staff may meet with them to explain program limitations and expectations and participant’s responsibility. The participant may not be exited from project specifically for unit refusal, though a participant may decline program participation at any point in the process.

**LANDLORD RECRUITMENT**

Housing locators use multiple avenues to locate landlords, including Internet searches and word of mouth. As a best practice, RRH programs share landlord lists and contact information. When recruiting landlords, locators may emphasize the benefits of renting to participants. These can include:

- Security deposit equaling two months’ rent;
- Consistent payment of rent, before the first of the month;
- Case management and mediation services to help resolve landlord/tenant issues;
- Reduced advertisement costs; and
- Involvement with a legitimate and reliable network of continuum providers.

Events and ongoing resources may be provided to build and enhance landlord relationships. To prevent a landlord from becoming over-utilized, a temporary “freeze” may be placed on referrals.

**LEASES**

Participants must enter into a legally binding lease agreement between participant and landlord. As a best practice, standardized materials may be offered to landlords, describing what leases with participants may and may not contain. Such material may include a standardized lease. Excessive lease restrictions or discriminatory clauses are addressed with landlord by staff and result in termination of relationship if not resolved.
LANDLORD ENGAGEMENT

The Housing locator provides contact information to the landlord and explains by-issue contact protocol. Program staff may not be available 24 hours and landlord is requested to attempt first contact with participant directly for non-emergencies. In the event of a police or medical emergency, landlords are requested to dial 911 prior to contacting program staff.

Staff “triage” reports as either emergencies or non-emergencies and attempt to respond to emergencies within one business day. The best response time for non-emergency reports is 1 to 3 business days. As a best practice, programs may record non-emergency reports on a standardized form. Landlord reports are referred to the appropriate case management or housing location staff, depending on the issue being reported.

RENT REASONABLENESS

Rental assistance is only provided if the total rent for the unit complies with HUD’s standard of rent reasonableness. Recipients and subrecipients should determine rent reasonableness by considering the gross rent of the unit and the location, quality, size, type, and age of the unit, and any amenities, maintenance, and utilities to be provided by the owner. Comparable rents may be checked using a comparison of rental amounts in the area. For more information on how to determine rent reasonableness, refer to the [HUD guidelines](#).

DATA COLLECTION

Per funder requirements, certain minimum data elements should be entered into the Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) for every project participant. The HUD minimum data elements can be found [here](#).

In addition to HUD requirements, RRH programs must record 3-month and 6-month follow-ups and should enter, at a minimum, participant’s zip code at time of follow-up into HMIS. All RRH programs will enter income data into HMIS whenever there is a significant change or at least once every 6 months. All RRH programs must track services, the total rent, rental assistance amount provided by agency, and rent portion paid by participant. Ideally, this is tracked through HMIS, but programs may utilize another database. However, all RRH programs should be collaborative and share this information periodically with the Chicago CoC so the community can gain a better understanding of the provision of RRH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RRH Data Collection (in addition to HUD Data Standards)</th>
<th>Data Element</th>
<th>Point of Data Entry</th>
<th>Database for Entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow-ups</td>
<td>3 months after Exit</td>
<td>HMIS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 months after Exit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**DEFINITIONS**

**Progressive Engagement:** A strategy of providing a small amount of assistance to everyone entering the homelessness system. For most households, a small amount of assistance is enough to stabilize, but for those who need more, more assistance is provided. This flexible, individualized approach maximizes resources by only providing the most assistance to the households who truly need it.

**Employment-First Approach:** A perspective which assumes that any participant, regardless of perceived ability, might desire to work and be capable of maintaining employment.