~~NC Balance of State Continuum of Care Program Standards~~

Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Written Standards

OVERVIEW

The NC Balance of State Continuum of Care has developed these ~~program~~ written standards to provide specific guidelines for how programs can operate to have the best chance of ending homelessness. These guidelines create consistency across the Balance of State, protect our clients by putting their needs first, and provide a baseline for holding all of the CoC's homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs to a specific standard of care.

The NC BoS CoC has used the Rapid Rehousing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards document published by the National Alliance to End Homeless in partnership with the U.S Department of Veteran Affairs, the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Abt Associates, other federal technical assistance providers, and nationally recognized high-performing rapid rehousing providers. This document provides details on performance benchmarks that would qualify programs as effective at ending and preventing homelessness.[1]

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires every Continuum of Care to evaluate outcomes of projects funded under Emergency Solutions Grants program and the Continuum of Care program and report to HUD (24 CFR 578.7(a)(7). In consultation with recipients of ESG program funds within the geographic area, establish and operate either a centralized or coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry system that provides an initial, standardized comprehensive assessment of the needs of individuals and families for housing and services.

In consultation with recipients of ESG and CoC program funds within the geographic area, establish and consistently follow written standards for providing CoC assistance. At a minimum, these written standards must include:

- Policies and procedures for evaluating individuals' and families' eligibility and determining the process for prioritizing eligible households in emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing programs (24 CFR 578.7(a)(9).
- For homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs, program standards to define policies and procedures for prioritization of eligible households, to set the

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[1] http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/rapid-re-housing-performance-benchmarks-and-program-standards

percentage or amount of financial assistance and housing stabilization services to households, and to determine the length of time the assistance will last.
- Policies and procedures for coordination among emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, essential service providers, homelessness prevention programs, rapid rehousing programs, and permanent supportive housing programs.
- Definitions for participation in the CoC's Homeless Management Information System (or comparable database for domestic violence or victims' service programs).

The NC Balance of State Continuum of Care developed the following homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing program standards to ensure:
- Program accountability to individuals and families experiencing homelessness, specifically populations at greater risk or with the longest histories of homelessness
- Program compliance with the US Department of Housing and Urban Development and the US Department of Veteran Affairs
- Service consistency within programs
- Adequate program staff competence and training specific to the target population served

EXPECTATIONS
All program grantees using US Department of Housing and Urban Development Continuum of Care, Emergency Solutions Grant, VA SSVF, and HOME TBRA funding must adhere to these performance standards. Programs funded through the Continuum of Care and Emergency Solutions Grant will be monitored by the NC Balance of State Continuum of Care to ensure compliance. The NC BoS CoC recommends that homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs funded through other sources also follow these standards. These performance standards attempt to provide a high standard of care that places community and client needs first. Based on proven best practices, this high standard of care is necessary to achieve our goal of ending homelessness in the NC BoS CoC.

Some requirements and parameters for homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing assistance vary from program to program. It will be necessary to refer to the regulation for each program along with these program standards (CoC: 24 CFR 587; ESG: 24 CFR 576; SSVF: 38 CFR 62; HOME: 24 CFR 570). The program standards note many of the differences below in each of the following sections. For other helpful documents to check for compliance with requirements, see the footnotes below.[2]

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND RAPID REHOUSING
Rapid rehousing provides an immediate permanent housing solution for vulnerable homeless individuals and families by providing short-term or medium-term rental assistance and services.[3] Common publicly-funded types of rapid rehousing programs include HUD CoC Pprogram funded rapid rehousing, Emergency Solutions Grant Pprogram funded rapid

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[2] https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Rapid_Re-Housing_ESG_vs_C.oC.pdf;
http://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/HUD?src=/program_offices/administration/hudclips/handbooks/cpd/6509.2
[3] https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/CFR-2012-title24-vol3/CFR-2012-title24-vol3-part576/content-detail.html

rehousing, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs funded through the US Department of Veteran Affairs, and Tenant-Based Rental Assistance programs funded through the HOME Investments Partnership (HOME) formula grant program. Research shows rapid rehousing to be one of the most effective types of ~~contemporary~~ homeless service programs to end homelessness from a financial and housing stability perspective.[4]

In general, rapid rehousing programs have latitude in determining the target population the program will serve and a great degree of flexibility in how programs apply subsidies, in duration and amount, to house and stabilize individuals and families experiencing homelessness. Many rapid rehousing programs focus on ending homelessness among youth and family populations. ~~Others~~ Other programs focus exclusively on veterans and veteran families. Still others design their programs to target the needs of families, survivors of domestic violence, or persons experiencing chronic or episodic homelessness. Rapid rehousing is an intervention that can adapt to serve individuals, families and youth with a variety of housing barriers.

Homelessness prevention programs can play an important role in ending homelessness. Like rapid rehousing programs, homelessness prevention programs can focus financial assistance and housing stabilization services on specific populations, including survivors of domestic violence, families with children, and formerly homeless individuals and families. While research clearly shows the effectiveness of rapid rehousing programs on reducing homelessness in communities, homelessness prevention programs demonstrate mixed results. In order to end homelessness, communities understand they must prevent new episodes of homelessness and returns to homelessness for individuals and families in housing crises. However, it can be difficult to determine which households would have become homeless if not for this intervention. Data suggests that only one out of ten households presenting to prevention programs would actually become homeless without financial assistance. In light of this research, homelessness prevention programs should target their limited financial assistance and housing stability resources appropriately and develop methods to determine which households are at greatest risk of becoming homeless. In order to do so, prevention programs are encouraged to focus their spending on households who are at imminent risk of homelessness (within 72 hours) or those households who can be diverted from the shelter system with the aid of financial assistance. Homelessness prevention programs should target their funding towards households that have similar characteristics to the general homeless population in their community.

No matter the focus population, all NC BoS CoC homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs should adopt a Housing First philosophy by reducing barriers to eligibility (i.e. no income, sobriety, and rental history) and housing people as quickly as possible. These programs should also participate in their ~~Regional Committee's~~ local coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry process, including the local prioritization of individuals for housing. In the NC Balance of State CoC ~~BoS CoC~~, each community utilizes the Prevention and Diversion screening tool and Homeless Assessment and Referral Tool (HART)~~the Individual and Family VI-SPDAT Prescreen Tools~~ to set priorities and housing triage methods, while permanent housing programs use the

| Commented [BA2]: Replaced VI-SPDAT with HART. |

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[4] http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000265-Rapid-Re-housing-What-the-Research-Says.pdf

Case Management Tool for more developed housing placement purposes and for intensive case management over time. Communities use HART~~the VI-SPDAT~~ to prioritize individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness based on an acuity score that indicates the type of housing intervention best suited to their ongoing needs.

DEFINITIONS

Acuity: When using HART~~the VI-SPDAT prescreens~~, acuity means the presence of a presenting issue based on the prescreening score. Acuity on the prescreening tool is expressed as a number with the higher score representing more complex, co-occurring issues likely to impact overall stability in permanent housing. When using the Case Management Tool acuity refers to the severity of the presenting issue and the ongoing goals to addressing these issues.

Case Management Tool: A standardized tool for case management to track outcomes in the coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry process. Housing programs administer this tool at program entry, housing entry, and every six months thereafter until program discharge. Upon discharge from the program, housing case managers administer the tool one final time 12 months later, when possible, to ensure the household continues to make progress.

Chronically Homeless: (1) an individual with a disability as defined in section 401(9) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11360(9)) who: (i) lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter; and (ii) had been homeless and living as described in (i) continuously for at least 12 months or on at least 4 occasions in the last 3 years, as long as the combined occasions equal at least 12 months and each break in homelessness separating occasions included at least 7 consecutive nights of not living as described in (i). Stays in institutional care facilities for fewer than 90 days will not constitute a break in homelessness, but rather such stays are included in the 12-month total, as long as the individual was living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or an emergency shelter immediately before entering the care facility; (2) an individual who has been residing in an institutional care facility, including jail, substance abuse or mental health treatment facility, hospital, or other similar facility, for fewer than 90 days and met all of the criteria in paragraph (1) of this definition, before entering that facility; or (3) a family with an adult head of household (or if there is no adult in the family, a minor head of household) who meets all of the criteria in (1) or 2) of this definition, including a family whose composition had fluctuated while the head of household has been homeless. (24 CFR 578.3)

Comparable Database: HUD-funded providers of housing and services (recipients of ESG and/or CoC P~~p~~rogram funding) who cannot enter information by law into HMIS (victim service providers as defined under the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005) must operate a database comparable to HMIS. According to HUD, "a comparable database . . . collects client-level data over time and generates unduplicated aggregate reports based on the data." The recipient or subrecipient of CoC and ESG program funds may use a portion of those funds to establish and operate a comparable database that complies with HUD's HMIS requirements. (24 CFR 578.57)

Coordinated ~~Assessment~~ Entry: "A centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake, assessment, and provision of referrals across a

geographic area. The . . . system covers the geographic area (designated by the CoC), is easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, is well advertised, and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool" (24 CFR 578.3). CoC's have ultimate responsibility to implement coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry in their geographic area.

Developmental Disability: As defined in section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 15002): (1) A severe, chronic disability of an individual that (i) is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments; (ii) is manifested before the individual attains age 22; (iii) is likely to continue indefinitely; (iv) results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following major life activities: (a) self-care; (b) receptive and expressive language; (c) learning; (d) mobility; (e) self-direction; (f) capacity for independent living; (g) economic self-sufficiency; (v) reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated. (2) an individual from birth to age 9, inclusive, who has a substantial developmental disability or specific congenital or acquired condition, may be considered to have a developmental disability without meeting three or more of the criteria in (1)(i) through (v) of the definition of "developmental disability" in this definition if the individual, without services or supports, has a high probability of meeting these criteria later in life. (24 CFR 578.3)

Disabling Condition: According to HUD: (1) a condition that: (i) is expected to be of indefinite duration; (ii) substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently; (iii) could be improved by providing more suitable housing conditions; and (iv) is a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury; or a developmental disability, as defined above; or the disease of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or any conditions arising from AIDS, including infection with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). (24 CFR 583.5)

Diversion: Diversion is a strategy to prevent homelessness for individuals seeking shelter or other homeless assistance by helping them identify immediate alternate housing arrangements, and if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them return to permanent housing. Diversion practices and programs help reduce the number of people becoming homeless and the demand for shelter beds.

Family: A family includes, but is not limited to the following, regardless of actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, or marital status: (1) a single person, who may be an elderly person, displaced person, disabled person, near-elderly person, or any other single person; or (2) a group of persons residing together, and such group includes, but is not limited to: (i) a family with or without children (a child who is temporarily away from the home because of placement in foster care is considered a member of the family); (ii) an elderly family; (iii) a near-elderly family; (iv) a disabled family; (v) a displaced family; and (vi) the remaining member of a tenant family. (24 CFR 5.403)

Homeless:

Category 1: an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, meaning: (i) an individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground; (ii) an individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by Federal, State, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or (iii) an individual who exits an institution where ~~he/she~~ they resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution;

Category 2: an individual or family who will immediately lose their primary nighttime residence, provided that: (i) the primary nighttime residence will be lost within 14 days of the date of application for homeless assistance; (ii) no subsequent residence has been identified; and (iii) the individual or family lacks the resources or support networks (e.g. family, friends, faith-based or other social networks) needed to obtain other permanent housing; or

Category 4: any individual or family who: (i) is experiencing trauma or a lack of safety related to, or fleeing or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous, traumatic, or life-threatening conditions related to the violence against the individual or a family member in the individual's or family's current housing situation, including where the health and safety of children are jeopardized; (ii) has no other safe residence; and (iii) lacks the resources to obtain other safe permanent housing. (24 CFR 578.3)

Homeless Assessment and Referral Tool (HART): A tool used by all regions in the NC Balance of State CoC to determine acuity and assist the CE system to prioritize households for permanent housing resources.

Housing First: A national best practice model that quickly and successfully connects individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions such as sobriety, treatment compliance, and service and/or income requirements. Programs offer supportive services to maximize housing stability to prevent returns to homelessness rather than meeting arbitrary benchmarks prior to permanent housing entry.[5]

Prevention and Diversion Screening Tool: A tool used to reduce entries into the homeless service system by determining a household's needs upon initial presentation to shelter or other emergency response organization. This screening tool gives programs a chance to divert households by assisting them to identify other permanent housing options and, if needed, providing access to mediation and financial assistance to remain in housing.

Rapid Rehousing: A national best practice model designed to help individuals and families exit homelessness as quickly as possible, return to permanent housing, and achieve long-term stability. Like Housing First, rapid rehousing assistance does not require adherence to preconditions such as employment, income, absence of criminal record, or sobriety. Financial

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[5] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1448313/pdf/0940651.pdf

assistance and housing stabilization services match the specific needs of the household. The core components of rapid rehousing are housing identification/relocation, short- and/or medium-term rental and other financial assistance, and case management and housing stabilization services. (24 CFR 576.2)

Transitional Housing: Temporary housing for participants who have signed a lease or occupancy agreement with the purpose of transitioning participants into permanent housing within 24 months.

~~**VI-SPDAT (Vulnerability Index-Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool):** An evidence-based tool used by all regions in the Balance of State to determine initial acuity and set prioritization and intervention for permanent housing placement.~~

Commented [BA4]: Removed VI-SPDAT.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS
PERSONNEL
STANDARD: Programs shall adequately staff services with qualified personnel to ensure quality of service delivery, effective program administration, and the safety of program participants.

Benchmarks
- The organization selects employees and/or volunteers with adequate and appropriate knowledge, experience, and stability for working with individuals and families experiencing homelessness and/or other issues that place individuals and families at risk of homelessness.
- The organization provides time for all employees and/or volunteers to attend webinars and/or trainings on program requirements, compliance and best practices.
- The organization trains all employees and/or volunteers on program policies and procedures, available local resources, and specific skill areas relevant to assisting clients in the program.
- Program designates staff whose responsibilities include identification and recruitment of landlords, encouraging them to rent to homeless households served by the program. Staff have the knowledge, skills, and agency resources to: understand landlords' perspectives, understand landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities, and negotiate landlord supports. Grantees should train their case management staff who have housing identification responsibilities on this specialized skill set to perform the landlord recruitment function effectively.
- For programs using the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), all end users must abide by the ~~NC HMIS~~HMIS@NCCEH End User and Participation Agreements, including adherence to the strict privacy and confidentiality policies.

Commented [BA5]: Updated the name of the HMIS implementation.

- Staff supervisors of casework, counseling, and/or case management services have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree in a human service-related field and/or experience working with individuals and families experiencing homelessness and/or other issues that place individuals and families at risk of homelessness.
- Staff supervising overall program operations have, at a minimum, a bachelor's degree in a human service-related field and/or demonstrated ability and experience that qualifies them to assume such responsibility.

- All program staff have written job descriptions that address tasks staff must perform and the minimum qualifications for the position. Ideally, homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs would have dedicated staff for housing identification and landlord recruitment. However, if programs do not have the capacity to have dedicated staff, case manager job descriptions must include responsibilities for landlord recruitment and negotiation.
- Case managers provide case management with the designated Case Management Tool on a frequent basis (minimum of monthly) for all clients.
- Organizations should share and train all program staff on the NC Balance of State Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Written Standards.

CLIENT INTAKE PROCESS
STANDARD: Programs will actively participate in their community's coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry system by only taking referrals from the coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry system for their program. At a minimum, programs will perform the Prevention and Diversion screening tool to determine the ability of the program to divert the presenting household from the homeless service system and/or HART~~the VI-SPDAT Prescreen~~ on all program applicants to determine their acuity score. The program will limit entry requirements to ensure that the program serves the most vulnerable individuals and families needing assistance.

Benchmarks
- All adult program participants must meet the following program eligibility requirements:
    - Rapid rehousing programs work with households who meet the definition of homelessness in the definitions section of the performance standards (CoC RRH programs may work with participants in Categories 1 and 4. ESG RRH programs may work with participants in Category 1 and literally homeless participants in Category 4). SSVF programs should follow specific guidelines for eligible participants.
    - Homelessness prevention programs work with households who meet the at-risk of homelessness definition (Category 2) in the definitions section of the performance standards.
    - Adult household members have the ability to participate in developing and carrying out an appropriate housing stability plan and maintain accountability of said plan.
    - CoC programs should also assess participant eligibility based on eligibility criteria established by the NOFA for the year of the award.
- Programs cannot disqualify an individual or family because of prior evictions, poor rental history, criminal history, or credit history.
- Programs explain the available services, encouraging each adult household member to participate in said services, but does not make service usage a requirement or the refusal of services a reason for disqualification or eviction unless service requirements are attached to funding (SSVF grants have a service requirement).
- Programs must use the standard order of priority of documenting evidence to determine homeless status and chronically homeless status per the program's eligibility requirements. Grantees must document in the client file that the agency attempted to obtain the documentation in the preferred order. The order should be as follows:
    - Third-party documentation (including HMIS)
    - Intake worker observations through outreach and visual assessment

- o   Self-certification of the person receiving assistance
- Programs will maintain release of information, case notes, and all pertinent demographic and identifying data in HMIS as allowable by program type. Paper files should be maintained in a locked cabinet behind a locked door with access reserved for case workers and administrators who need said information.
- Programs can turn away individuals and families experiencing homelessness from program entry for only the following reasons:
  - o   Household makeup (provided it does not violate HUD's Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity requirements): singles-only programs can disqualify households with children; families-only programs can disqualify single individuals
  - o   Prevention and rapid rehousing subsidy money has been exhausted
  - o   If the housing has in residence at least one family member with a child under the age of 18, the program may exclude registered sex offenders and persons with a criminal record that includes a violent crime from the program so long as the child resides in the same housing facility (24 CFR 578.93)
  - o   For SSVF and HOME programs only, the family or individual has household income over 50% of area median income

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

STANDARD: Programs will assist participants in staying in their current housing situation, if possible, or assist households at imminent risk of homelessness to move into another suitable unit as defined under the specific program type.

Benchmarks
- Programs are encouraged to target prevention funds toward community diversion efforts. When paying financial assistance to divert households from homelessness, programs should target assistance to the households most likely to experience homelessness if not for this assistance.
- Programs explain program rules and expectations prior to admitting the individual or family into the program. Programs will have rules and expectations that ensure fairness and avoid arbitrary decisions that can vary from client to client or staff to staff.
- In evaluating current housing, programs consider the needs of the individual or family living there to decide if the current unit meets Housing Quality Standards and long-term sustainability (ESG and SSVF only).
- When moving the individual or family into a new unit, programs consider the needs of the household in terms of location, cost, number of bedrooms, handicap access, etc. Programs will assess potential housing for compliance with program standards for habitability, lead-based paint, and rent reasonableness prior to the individual or family signing a lease and the program signing a rental assistance agreement with the landlord.
- Programs may provide assistance with rental application fees (ESG and SSVF only), moving costs (ESG, CoC, and SSVF only), temporary storage fees (ESG and SSVF programs only), security deposits (up to 2 months for ESG, CoC and HOME), last month's rent (ESG, CoC and SSVF only), utility deposits, utility payments, rental arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), utility arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), credit repair (ESG and CoC only), and legal services (ESG and CoC only) related to obtaining permanent housing. Grantees should

follow the specifics of the grant program under which their program is funded to understand specific restrictions for each program and the maximum number of months allowed for rental and utility assistance.

- Lease: The program participant will sign a lease directly with a landlord or property owner. Grantees may only make payments directly to the landlord or property owner.
- Rental Assistance Agreement: Grantees may make rental and utility assistance payments only to an owner with whom the household has entered into a rental assistance agreement. The rental assistance agreement must set forth the terms under which rental assistance will be provided. The rental assistance agreement must provide that, during the term of the agreement, the landlord must give the grantee a copy of any notice to the program participant to vacate the housing unit or any complaint used under state or local law to commence a legal eviction against a program participant.
- Programs will determine the amount that households will contribute toward their monthly rent payment. The household's payment cannot exceed ESG, CoC, SSVF, or HOME regulations. Except for the HOME TBRA program, programs can choose not to charge households rent during their participation in the program. All rent payments made by program participants must be paid directly to the landlord or property owner. Programs will review the amount of rental assistance paid for the participating household every 3 months, and changes made to the agreement will be determined by continued need and ability of the household to sustain housing long-term.
- Programs may provide no more than 3 months of rental and utility assistance to a participating household for homelessness prevention. If the household needs more than 3 months of financial assistance, the agency Executive Director or ~~his/her~~ their designated proxy may extend financial assistance month-to-month based on proof of continued need and demonstrated efficacy of stated housing sustainability plan.
- Use with other subsidies: Except for one-time payment of rental arrears on the program participant's portion of the rental payment, rental assistance cannot be provided to a program participant who receives other tenant-based rental assistance or who is living in a housing unit receiving project-based rental or operating assistance through public sources. Programs can pay for security and utility payments for program participants to move into these units when other funding sources cannot be identified.

RAPID REHOUSING
STANDARD: Programs will assist participants in locating and moving into safe, affordable housing, providing housing stabilization and case management services meant to provide long-term sustainability as defined under the specific program type.

Benchmarks
- Programs explain program rules and expectations prior to admitting the individual or family into the program. Programs have rules and expectations that ensure fairness and avoid arbitrary decisions that vary from client to client or staff to staff.
- Programs consider the needs of the household in terms of location, cost, number of bedrooms, handicap access, and other pertinent information when moving a household into housing. Programs will assess potential housing for compliance with program standards for habitability, lead-based paint, and rent reasonableness prior to the individual

or family signing a lease and the program signing a rental assistance agreement with the landlord.

- Programs may provide assistance with rental application fees (ESG, CoC and SSVF only), moving costs (ESG, SSVF, and CoC only), temporary storage fees (ESG and SSVF programs only), security deposits (up to 2 months for ESG, CoC and HOME), last month's rent (ESG, CoC and SSVF only), utility deposits, utility payments, rental arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), utility arrears (up to 6 months for ESG), credit repair (ESG and CoC only), and legal services (ESG and CoC only) related to obtaining permanent housing. Grantees should follow the specifics of the grant program under which their program is funded to understand specific restrictions for each program and the maximum number of months allowed for rental and utility assistance.
- Lease: The program participant will sign a lease directly with a landlord or property owner. Grantees may only make payments directly to the landlord or property owner. Initial lease agreements should be for one year, renewable for a minimum term of one month and terminable only for cause. HOME TBRA leases should not have prohibited lease provisions (24 CFR 92.253).
- Rental Assistance Agreement: Grantees may make rental and utility assistance payments only to an owner with whom the household has entered into a rental assistance agreement. The rental assistance agreement must set forth the terms under which rental assistance will be provided. The rental assistance agreement must provide that, during the term of the agreement, the landlord must give the grantee a copy of any notice to the program participant to vacate the housing unit or any complaint used under state or local law to commence a legal eviction against a program participant.
- Programs should take a progressive approach when determining the amount that households will contribute toward their monthly rent payment. Programs should remain flexible, taking into account the unique and changing needs of the household. The household's payment cannot exceed ESG, CoC, SSVF, or HOME regulations. Except for the HOME TBRA program, programs can choose not to charge households rent during their participation in the program. All rent payments made by program participants must be paid directly to the landlord or property owner. Programs will review the amount of rental assistance paid for the participating household every 3 months and changes made to the agreement will be determined by continued need and ability of the household to sustain housing long-term. Programs should have written policies and procedures for determining the amount of rent participants pay towards housing costs. This amount must be reasonable based on household income (this could potentially be 50-60% of their monthly income), including $0 for households with no income. These policies should also address when and how programs use financial assistance as a bridge to housing subsidy or a permanent supportive housing program.
- When determining the amount and length of financial assistance, programs should base their decision on the needs of the household and its long-term housing stability plan. Programs should have well-defined policies and procedures for determining the amount and length of time for financial assistance to program participants as well as defined and objective standards for when case management and/or financial assistance should continue or end. Programs must review the amount of rental assistance provided every 3 months and continued need determined through consultation between the participant and the case

manager. Programs should review regulations for the funding source to determine maximum months they can pay for rental assistance.

- Use with other subsidies: Except for one-time payment of rental arrears on the program participant's portion of the rental payment, rental assistance cannot be provided to a program participant who receives other tenant-based rental assistance or who is living in a housing unit receiving project-based rental or operating assistance through public sources. Programs can pay for security and utility payments for program participants to move into these units when other funding sources cannot be identified.
- HUD CoC Pprogram grantees will adhere to the responsibilities of grant management outlined by the NC BoS CoC.[6]

HOUSING ~~STABLIZATION~~ STABILIZATION/CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

STANDARD: Programs shall provide access to housing stabilization and/or case management services by trained staff to each individual and/or family in the program.

Benchmarks

- Programs provide individual housing stabilization and/or case management services to program participants at least monthly. These services include:
  - o Housing stability services to assist participants in locating and obtaining suitable, affordable permanent housing, including:
    - Assessment of housing barriers, needs, and preferences.
    - Development of an action plan for locating housing.
    - Housing search.
    - Outreach to and negotiation with landlords or property owners.
    - Tenant counseling.
    - Assessment of housing for compliance with program type requirements for habitability, lead-based paint and rent reasonableness.
    - Assistance with submitting rental applications.
    - Understanding lease agreements.
    - Arranging for utilities.
    - Making moving arrangements.
    - Assuring participants have the basics at move-in, including simple furnishings, mattresses, and cooking utensils like pots and pans.
  - o Case management services, including assessing, arranging, coordinating, and monitoring the delivery of individualized services to facilitate housing stability for participants who have obtained and maintained permanent housing through the homelessness prevention or rapid rehousing program by:
    - Developing, in conjunction with the participant, an individualized housing and service plan with a path to permanent housing stability.
    - Developing, securing, and coordinating services.
    - Obtaining federal, state, and local benefits.
    - Monitoring and evaluating program participants' progress towards goals.
    - Providing information about and referrals to other providers.

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[6] See the signature form with responsibilities: http://www.ncceh.org/files/6274/

- - - Conducting 3-month evaluations to determine ongoing program eligibility.
  - o Programs may offer other services, including:
    - Legal services to resolve a legal problem prohibiting a program participant from obtaining or retaining permanent housing (only ESG and CoC), including:
      - Client intake.
      - Preparation of cases for trial.
      - Provision of legal advice.
      - Representation of legal advice.
      - Counseling.
      - Filing fees and other necessary court costs.
    - Mediation between the program participant and the owner or person(s) with whom the participant is living (only ESG and CoC).
    - Credit repair (only ESG and CoC), including:
      - Credit counseling.
      - Accessing a free personal credit report.
      - Resolving personal credit problems.
      - Other services needed to assist with critical skills related to household budgeting and money management.
- Case management includes the following types of contact: home visits, office visits, meeting in a location in the community, or phone calls (at least one visit per month must be in person). Programs should use the Case Management Tool as a guide for their case management services to program participants. Meeting times, place and frequency should be mutually agreed upon by both the participant and case manager.
- CoC and ESG RRH programs must meet with participants at least once per month to assist the participant in long-term housing stability. Program staff must conduct an annual assessment of service needs.
- The program will evaluate the household for continued eligibility every three months or as changes are reported in household income and housing stability. To continue receiving homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing assistance, the household must demonstrate:
  - o Lack of resources and support networks. The household must continue to lack sufficient resources and support networks to retain housing without program assistance.
  - o Need. The program must determine the amount and type of assistance that the household needs to (re)gain stability in permanent housing.
  - o For ESG, at the 12-month annual recertification, the client's income must be at or below 30% Area Median Income.

SERVICE COORDINATION
STANDARD: Programs will assist program participants in obtaining appropriate supportive services and other federal, state, local, and private assistance as needed and/or requested by the household. Program staff will be knowledgeable about mainstream resources and services in the community.

Benchmarks

- Programs should arrange with appropriate community agencies and individuals the provision of education, employment, and training; schools and enrichment programs; healthcare and dental clinics; mental health resources; substance abuse assessments and treatment; legal services, credit counseling services; and other assistance requested by the participant, which programs do not provide directly to clients.
- Programs will connect families with children to appropriate educational services including, but not limited to, early Head Start, Head Start, Public Pre-K, community colleges, and others. Staff will liaise with the local homeless school liaison to ensure coordination, allowing youth to attend their school of origin and receive eligible educational and other services allowable under McKinney-Vento.
- Programs coordinate with other mainstream resources for which participants may need assistance: emergency financial assistance; domestic violence shelters; local housing authorities, public housing, and Housing Choice Voucher programs; temporary labor organizations; childcare resources and other public programs that subsidize childcare; youth development and child welfare; WIC; Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP); Unemployment Insurance; Social Security benefits; Medicaid/Medicare or other comparable services if available.
- For CoC Pprogram RRH, in addition to one-time moving costs and case management, other eligible supportive service costs include: childcare, education and employment services, food, housing search and counseling, legal services, life skills training, mental health and outpatient health services, outreach services, substance abuse treatment, transportation, and a one-time utility deposit.

TERMINATION

STANDARD: Termination should be limited to the most severe cases. Programs will exercise sound judgment and examine all extenuating circumstances when determining if violations warrant program termination. BoS recommends programs work with other community service providers to develop a board to hear client grievances.

Benchmarks
Emergency Solutions Grant Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing
- To terminate assistance to a program participant, the agency must follow the due process provisions set forth in 24 CFR 576.402 as follows:
    - If a program participant violates program requirements, the grantee may terminate the assistance in accordance with a formal process established by the grantee, recognizing the rights of the individuals affected. The grantee must exercise sound judgment and examine all extenuating circumstances in determining when violations warrant termination so that programs terminate assistance to program participants in only the most severe cases.
    - To terminate rental assistance and/or housing relocation and stabilization services to program participants, the required formal process, at a minimum, must consist of:
        - Written notice to the program participant containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
        - A review of the decision, in which the program participant has the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the person who made or approved the termination decision;

- ▪ Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.
  - o Termination under this section does not preclude the program from providing further assistance at a later date to the same individual or family.

Continuum of Care Rapid Rehousing, HOME Tenant-Based Rental Assistance
- To terminate assistance to a program participant, the agency must follow the provisions described in 24 CFR 578.91 of the HEARTH Continuum of Care Interim Rule as follows:
  - o The grantee may terminate assistance to program participants who violate program requirements or conditions of occupancy. Termination under this section does not preclude the program from providing further assistance at a later date to the same individual or family.
  - o To terminate assistance to program participants, the grantee must provide a formal process, recognizing the rights of the individuals receiving assistance under the due process of law. This process, at a minimum, must consist of:
    - ▪ Providing program participants with a written copy of program rules and the termination process before the participant begins to receive assistance with copy signed by client;
    - ▪ Written notice to program participants containing a clear statement of the reasons for termination;
    - ▪ A review of the decision, in which the program participant has the opportunity to present written or oral objections before a person other than the person who made or approved the termination decision;
    - ▪ Prompt written notice of the final decision to the program participant.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families – Prevention and Rapid Rehousing
- Limitations on and continuations of the provision of supportive services can be found under 38 CFR 62.35 as follows:
  - o *Extremely low-income veteran families:* a participant classified as an extremely low-income veteran family will retain that designation as long as the participant continues to meet all other eligibility requirements.
  - o *Limitations on the provisions of supportive services to participants classified under 62.11(c):* a grantee may provide supportive services to a participant until the earlier of two dates:
    - ▪ The participant commences receipt of other housing services adequate to meet the participant's needs;
    - ▪ Ninety days from the date the participant exits permanent housing.
  - o Supportive services provided to participants classified under 62.11(c) must be designed to support the participants in their choice to transition into housing that is responsive to their individual needs and preferences.
  - o *Continuation of supportive services to veteran family member(s):* if a veteran becomes absent from a household or dies while other members of the veteran family are receiving supportive services, then such supportive services must continue for a grace period following the absence or death of the veteran. The grantee must establish a reasonable grace period for continued participation by the veteran's family member(s), but that period may not exceed 1 year from the date of absence or death of the veteran, subject to the requirements of bullets (1) and (2) of this section. The grantee must notify the veteran's family member(s) of the duration of the grace period.

- *Referral for other assistance:* if a participant becomes ineligible to receive supportive services under this section, the grantee must provide the participant with information on other available programs and resources.
- *Families fleeing domestic violence:* Notwithstanding the limitations in 62.34 concerning the maximum amount of assistance a family can receive during a defined periods of time, a household may receive additional assistance if it otherwise qualifies for assistance under this part and is fleeing from a domestic violence situation. A family may qualify for assistance even if the veteran is the aggressor or perpetrator of the domestic violence. Receipt of assistance under this provision resets the maximum limitation for assistance under the regulations for the amount of support that can be provided in a given amount of time under 62.34.

FOLLOW-UP SERVICES

STANDARD: Programs must ensure a continuity of services to all clients exiting their programs. Agencies can provide these services directly or through referrals to other agencies.

Benchmarks

- Programs prioritize the development of exit plans for each participant to ensure continued permanent housing stability and connection to community resources as well as a list of prevention and diversion services available if another housing crises occurs, as desired.
- Programs should attempt to follow up with participants through verbal or written contact at least once 6 months after the client exits the program. A program may provide follow-up services to include identification of additional needs and referral to other agency and community services in order to prevent future episodes of homelessness.

CLIENT AND PROGRAM FILES

STANDARD: Programs will keep all program participant files up-to-date and confidential to ensure effective delivery and tracking of services.

Benchmarks

- Client and program files should, at a minimum, contain all information and forms required by HUD (24 CFR 576.500), the state ESG office, and/or the VA; service plans; case notes; referral lists; and service activity logs, including services provided directly by the homelessness prevention or rapid rehousing program and indirectly by other community service providers. Programs should have:
  - Documentation of homeless status (for RRH) and at-risk of homelessness status (for homelessness prevention).
  - Determination of ineligibility, if applicable, which shows the reason for this determination.
  - Initial and annual income evaluation, per program rules.
  - Program participant records
  - Documentation of using the community's coordinated ~~assessment~~ entry system.

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  - Compliance with shelter and housing standards
  - Services and assistance provided
  - Expenditures and match
  - Conflict of interest/code of conduct policies

- Homeless participation requirement
- Faith-based activity requirement, if applicable
- Other Federal requirements, if applicable
- Confidentiality procedures

- All client information should be entered in the ~~NC HMIS~~HMIS@NCCEH in accordance with data quality, timeliness, and additional requirements found in the agency and user participation agreements. At a minimum, programs must record the date the client enters and exits the program, HUD required data elements, and an update of client's information as changes occur.

- Programs must maintain a release of information form for clients to use to indicate consent in sharing information with other parties. This cannot be a general release but one that indicates sharing information with specific parties for specific reasons.
- Programs must maintain the security and privacy of written client files and shall not disclose any client-level information without written permission of the client as appropriate, except to program staff and other agencies as required by law. Clients must give informed consent to release any client identifying data to be utilized for research, teaching, and public interpretation.
- All records pertaining to ESG funds must be retained for the greater of 5 years or the participant records must be retained for 5 years after the expenditure of all funds from the grant under which the program participant was served. Agencies may substitute original written files with microfilm, photocopies, or similar methods. Records pertaining to other funding sources must adhere to those record retention requirements.

FAIR HOUSING POLICY
STANDARD: Rapid rehousing and homelessness prevention programs will support households who may be working with housing providers who have violated Federal, state, and/or local Fair Housing laws.

Benchmarks
- Understand and implement the NC Balance of State CoC's Fair Housing Policy.
- Post the Fair Housing Public Notice (see Appendix A of the CoC's Fair Housing Policy) in a location where the program conducts intake conversations or provide a copy of the Public Notice to households when meeting in a location at the household's choosing outside of the program's office.
- Develop affirmative marketing and outreach strategies to ensure that all households eligible for RRH or HP are provided a similar range of housing choices in various geographic areas regardless of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including actual or perceived gender identity and sexual orientation), familial status, and disability. Programs should ensure that Affirmative Marketing and Outreach strategies align with the local or state participating jurisdiction Consolidated Plan. Programs should record their strategies and actions taken to affirmatively market the program and/or housing units using the sample log in Appendix B of the CoC's Fair Housing Policy.
- Assist households who may need to ask for a reasonable accommodation or a reasonable modification to fully access available housing units.
- Provide information to households who believe a housing provider has violated Federal, state, and/or local Fair Housing laws on how to connect to legal resources

and file a complaint. See the CoC Fair Housing Policy for information on how to file a complaint.
- Inform the local or state participating jurisdiction or consortium that a housing complaint has been filed with HUD. See the CoC Fair Housing Policy for information on how to find the participating jurisdiction or consortium.
- Submit pertinent household information to NCCEH within 5 business days of filing a housing complaint. See the CoC Fair Housing Policy for information on how to submit information to the CoC.

EVALUATION AND PLANNING

STANDARDS: Homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs will work with the community to conduct ongoing planning and evaluation to ensure programs continue to meet community needs for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness.

Benchmarks
- Agencies maintain written goals and objectives for their services to meet outcomes required by the HUD CoC and ESG programs or other funding sources. These written goals and objectives should strive to meet these performance benchmarks (for programs serving a high need population such as chronically homeless or no income, the CoC will take targeting efforts into account):
    o Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless. Households served by the program should move into permanent housing in an average of 30 days or less.
    o Maximize permanent housing success rates. Programs should ensure that at least 80% of households exit to a permanent housing setting.
    o Decrease the number of households returning to homelessness. Programs should ensure that at least 85% of households exiting the program do not become homeless again within one year of exit.
- Programs review case files of clients to determine if existing services meet their needs. As appropriate, programs revise goals, objectives, and activities based on their evaluation.
- Programs conduct, at a minimum, an annual evaluation of their goals, objectives, and activities, making adjustments to the program as needed to meet the needs of the community.
- Programs regularly review project performance data in HMIS to ensure reliability of data. Programs should review this information, at a minimum, quarterly.