



NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

# HOUSING GUIDE

How veteran serving agencies can continue to create individualized housing plans in the face of the pandemic and its potential lasting effects.



*Prepared with the generous support of  
The Home Depot Foundation*

## MAXIMIZE EXISTING HOUSING STOCK

### ***I. Keep an accurate and updated availability***

- Organize an active list of single-family and multifamily properties in the area that work with voucher holders, offer low-income housing or second chance housing
- Order these properties by date available for move-in
- Keep quick details about the properties including-rent, unit accessibility details, housing classification (single-family, multifamily, SRO, etc.)
- Include property contact information, a contact name, and the site where you found this property (maybe include direct link)



- *Delegate this task to specific staff and designate one day of the week to update this list and add new properties or take off properties that are no longer available.*
- *This list should not include every single property you see throughout the week; this needs to include properties you have already prequalified and established as possible housing options for the individuals you serve.*
- *Several search engines are out of date and do not contain the most accurate information on properties, this is a way to filter properties, so you are not asking veterans to spend time chasing down dead-end housing leads.*

### ***II. Circle back with previous partners and potential partners***

- Reach out to individual properties or landlords you have worked with in the past
- Connect with property management companies who work with partner organizations in other locations around the country to access potential housing leads in the areas your organization supports
- Connect with other VSOs, SSVF providers and housing authorities in your area to figure out where and how they are locating housing



- *This does not have to be a task your organization does alone. In fact, some communities have dedicated an agency, or specific agency staff to continue a unified landlord search that all "housers" can access.*

### ***Examples and Community Spotlight***

The Dallas VAMC and the Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance (the COC) coordinate to manage housing options available to veterans and other individuals exiting homelessness. Like many other localities have in the past, in 2019 North Texas conducted a "[veterans challenge](#)" to house 100 veterans in 100 days. The connections formed during this community-wide effort created partnerships that have become critical to housing veterans as the fallout from COVID-19 continues.

In addition to this, the Dallas VAMC is exceptionally organized when it comes to staying on top of unit availability. All of the case managers and their housing specialist participate in "housing team meetings" once a week to share where each HUD-VASH recipient is in their housing search, and what new housing leads are available. Dallas VAMC staff have been able to reconnect with landlords and owners that participated in their recruitment event to house more than 20 veterans since the pandemic started.

### **III. Work with PHAs to prioritize veterans who do not qualify for HUD-VASH**

- Establish a priority with the housing authority for veterans that way they can access public housing units, project-based vouchers and housing choice vouchers when necessary (a housing priority can also help if there is a waitlist)
- Work in the office to help veterans' complete applications that can be submitted online for units or programs the PHA operates

#### **Examples and Community Spotlight**

The Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo (HASLO) is leading housing education and prioritizing veterans in other ways when HUD-VASH is not an option. The Housing Authority of San Luis Obispo has a priority for locals and veterans, including those with other than honorable discharges, for all units where they are the managing agency. HASLO also maintains a close relationship with their county SSVF providers, that way all veterans have a clear housing plan that begins with immediate response and leads to permanent housing placement.

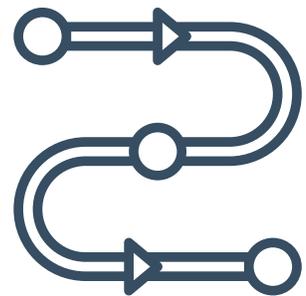
Additionally, the housing authority holds a meeting once a month to educate every individual wishing to participate in their programs; this meeting outlines what different affordable housing options are available, how they work, and who qualifies for each type of unit. This means veteran VASH holders as well as non-VASH holders get housed as quickly as possible. Since the housing authority started to transition to online operations through Rent Café and Yardi towards the end of 2019, all operations are still possible via email or online. This has helped process new housing applications, setting up online rental payment arrangements and continuing communication with landlords and renters.\*

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## **ACCESSING NEW MARKETS**

### **I. Establish a property preapproval process**

- Initiate this step when working with a new property management entity or individual landlord that inquiries about renting to veterans
- Create a quick checklist which outlines property qualifying criteria that apply for both SSVF and HUD-VASH
- Keep quick details about the properties including- rent, unit accessibility details, housing classification (single-family, multifamily, SRO, etc.)
- Go through this list when you begin to talk about available units with owners to figure out if the option is viable or not



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*\*HASLO is the managing agency or development partner for multiple properties located within their jurisdiction. Developers may choose to partner with the housing authority in order to utilize their expertise and experience, which creates a partnership for development that is more competitive for financing. In addition to this, the housing authority remains a partner for affordable housing properties that were constructed on land they owned prior to the development or redevelopment.*

## ACCESSING NEW MARKETS

### II. Create new ways to search for housing

- Utilize your city's mayor's office to promote housing programs and recruit landlords (consider working with other VSOs or housing organizations in the area to put a request together for your mayor to promote participation in affordable housing programs)
- Check traditional and nontraditional websites for rental opportunities since the pandemic has caused market shifts in most communities, landlords may be more flexible and willing to rent to a voucher holder whereas before they were not
- Drive your community to look for newly listed rental opportunities
- Try new ways to find “word of mouth” rental listings (for example post to message boards, social media, and contact community groups)

### III. Conduct outreach and recruit new landlords or property owners

- Create talking points and practice cold calling landlords you have found on nontraditional sites to see if they would be interested in leasing to your client (come up a very basic way to explain how HUD-VASH works and how your organization or the veterans' case manager can be an ideal mid-point-of-contact)
- Have a way for landlords to contact your organization directly if they would like to inquire about leasing to veterans (for example have a tab on your organization website geared towards landlords, or a designated email address for landlords to contact someone at your organization)
- Consider a “staircase” approach and work with your housing authority to establish a process and possible incentives for leasing HUD-VASH vouchers on progressively longer lease terms



- For ways to explain the housing choice voucher program to landlords considering tenants in the HUD-VASH program please refer to [this website](#) from the VA which offers a high-level explanation of how it works and the benefits of participating in the program.
- Leverage the fact that veterans using the HUD-VASH voucher program have constant contact with a case manager and are participating in other supportive programs.
- Coordinate within your organization and with your PHA to have a part-time person dedicated to housing search and finding new options, that way case managers can focus on case management and this person can perfect ways of finding new housing leads.

#### Examples and Community Spotlight

The San Diego Housing Commission, and city leadership, worked together to engage landlords and create more partnerships, even during the ongoing pandemic. The mayor used his platform to call on landlords to rent to individuals, and more specifically veterans, experiencing homelessness. The city has created a [Landlord Engagement Assistance Program](#), which offers incentives for new landlords, a damage fund and financial assistance with deposits and utilities. They have also managed to create a preapproval process for properties which means units can be inspected and the owner holds a certificate of approval for up to 60 days, or until a renter moves in.

# PREQUALIFY VETERANS AND PROMOTE HOUSING CHOICE

## I. Create a way to “brief” veterans about available housing options

- Find three concrete ways to pitch a property you would suggest to a veteran
- Find out what additional information you can use to add appeal to the housing options you suggest, and try to include information that isn’t already included in the housing profile available online



- *TIP: Use veteran success stories that relate to the housing options you present, that way the options seem relatable to an individual transitioning from the known to the unknown. The way potential housing options are communicated to a veteran can create excitement and encourage them to search more actively on their own.*

## II. Create simple ways to talk about application criteria

- Translate rental criteria into plain language a first-time renter or someone not familiar with the housing process might understand
- Clearly communicate what the landlord is willing to accept and not accept from interested applicants, so veterans become eager to apply for housing they will qualify for
- Create points for each renter that might encourage landlords to work with your clients over other options
- Work with veterans to come up with talking points they can use to communicate openly with landlords about why they are interested in the property and what makes them an ideal applicant for the property
- Talk and think through ways to address common barriers to housing



- *Use conversations like these to discuss housing barriers. By initiating conversation in this stage, the experience becomes less awkward and more transparent.*



- *Consider completing a [rental resume](#) with your client. You can even create a [simple template](#) to have them fill out on their own. Use this to accompany the way you “sell the VASH program”, and to advocate for the individual veteran.*

## II. Work to understand and narrow down veterans top three “must-haves”

- Let your client talk through their ‘ideal’ living situation
- Help to distinguish between wants and needs



- *Working with veterans exiting homelessness may mean that they have a hard time distinguishing between their wants and needs, but by working through this proactively less time is wasted promoting nonviable options. Consider [these](#) characteristics as a guide when having a wants-vs-needs conversation.*
- *Consider creating [simplified worksheet](#) that individuals can work through on their own if it is not possible to include this in every conversation*

## PREQUALIFY VETERANS AND PROMOTE HOUSING CHOICE

### ***III. Create an in house “pre approval” process***

- Discuss individual veteran wants and needs in comparison to property management or landlord wants and needs
- Present all options but focus on most viable options
- Discuss application process in house, that way your client can understand what to expect and why their application is likely to be approved or denied at various locations



- *TIP: Use veteran success stories that relate to the housing options you present, that way the options seem relatable to an individual transitioning from the known to the unknown. The way potential housing options are communicated to a veteran can create excitement and encourage them to search more actively on their own.*

### ***Examples and Community Spotlight***

The Elle Foundation which provides SSVF services in the Bossier Parish-Shreveport area of northern Louisiana has done a great job of preapproving veterans, and fully equipping veterans with property specific information so they can make the most informed decisions. Case managers keep a list of available properties, note important characteristics and application criteria so they can work with veterans to narrow down the best options that meet their housing needs.

In addition to this, case managers at the Elle Foundation work closely with those administering HUD-VASH to coordinate applications, pay moving fees and deposits, tour properties and cover other related expenses. Due to public transportation service suspensions, and properties adjusting operations around COVID-19, this coordination has been even more crucial to ensure veterans locate permanent housing quickly when in-person visits are not optimal. The Elle Foundation has been able to consistently house veterans within their goal timelines despite these closures and housing authority operational adjustments.

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## MATCHING VETERANS WITH HOUSING

### ***I. Assist with technology and paperwork***

- If your housing authority has established an ongoing approval process for new housing units then coordinate a way for veterans to attend virtual briefs in your office if possible
- Have a computer onsite for veterans to come and search for housing
- If the other organizations in your community are not offering in-person services, consider having a way for veterans to complete, pick up or drop off paperwork at your location, if it is required for them to move forward in securing housing
- If veterans need to conduct housing search on their own, have a designated phone for them to follow up with landlords



#### ***Examples and Community Spotlight***

The Dallas Housing Authority has been working very closely with its medical center since the onset of COVID. They have created a system to coordinate virtual inspections with landlords and hold virtual briefings with veteran voucher holders. VASH caseworkers at the medical center typically locate housing. Then the housing authority will send landlords a packet that outlines the resources needed to conduct a virtual inspection.

Landlords can confirm and schedule a time to do their walkthrough with housing authority staff via video. Lastly, the leasing packets are now sent via email and briefings have been made available online, which can be watched on a tablet or computer, from any location. While the housing authority traditionally has a VASH office onsite where veterans can access a computer, print documents, and fax forms; they are currently relying on the VAMC to provide this type of assistance since in-person services are still suspended.

### ***II. Create modified ways to tour properties***

- Organize ways to virtually tour properties and take videos or pictures
- Keep your own stock of materials that can be saved and shared with potential renters, so this does not need to be done time and time again (for example, pictures of the units as well as of the property's amenities)
- Suggest and formally schedule live virtual tours with landlords who cannot accommodate in-person tours at this time
- Arrange ways for no-contact touring

#### ***Examples and Community Spotlight***

In Cleveland, housing coordinators at the VAMC working with veterans using HUD-VASH have been able to house veterans during the pandemic by working with landlords to continue the process virtually. Where it's possible VA staffers have moved to virtually coordinate tours with landlords as well as find alternative ways to complete application and lease paperwork.



- Consider what technology can be used to virtually tour properties and the different ways that may look for live tours in comparison to taking pictures and videos to share with multiple potential renters at the same time.
- Try to make arrangements with landlords to do contact-free touring, for example, have them hide keys somewhere and allow you to let yourself in to tour, and then return the keys to the hiding space once you are finished.

## MATCHING VETERANS WITH HOUSING

### ***III. Create a follow-up schedule to maintain contact with landlords***

- Follow up on behalf of the veteran renters if they are having trouble reaching landlords or property managers
- Follow up if landlords may be “on the fence” about renting to your client and try to figure out how you can work in a mutualistic way



## ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

### ***I. Creating a form of tenant education***

- Streamline a basic form of renter education that highlights things typical first-time renters may not know
- Help renters to understand their responsibility as a leaseholder and how landlords will address various issues if something were to happen onsite
- Consider producing a guide that veterans can easily refer to if they have questions about how to handle onsite issues

### ***II. Maintain landlord relationships***

- Create a rotating schedule if need be to check in with landlords
- Keep your own schedule of lease renewal and end dates and make it a point to check in around these times to build a relationship with landlords or property managers (this would also be a good time to inquire about other properties or landlords that might be a good fit for future housing placements)
- Reach out to veteran tenants regularly throughout the duration of their initial lease term, to support their housing needs and to address any issues that arise between them and their landlord



- *Locating housing often happens by word of mouth through people sharing positive experiences. Consider some of these opportunities to build a more positive relationship between you, the veteran and the landlords.*

### ***II. Ensure that landlords are disqualifying applicants for reasons outlined in their tenant qualifying guidelines***

- If it is evident that a veteran should qualify for a property they applied to and they have been denied, ask for written proof that explains the reason for denial
- If the landlord denies a veteran renter based on their voucher status, and your locality or state has source of income protections, take the necessary steps to file a formal complaint against the owner of the property