

Housing Search Assistance Toolkit - Welcome

Welcome to HUD's Housing Search Assistance Toolkit, a resource developed for case managers and housing advocates to assist clients with accessing and maintaining housing. This introduction to the Toolkit answers the following questions:

Why is providing housing search assistance important?

One of the primary challenges homeless people face is navigating the housing market. Most communities have a shortage of housing affordable to low-income households. As a result, landlords can afford to use strict screening criteria, and there is little incentive to work with individuals and families that have low incomes, credit problems, criminal histories, and/or unstable housing histories. However, housing search and placement services can address many of the barriers faced by homeless people.

How can this Toolkit help?

Few continuums have organizations (or even staff within organizations) dedicated to providing housing search services. However, given the complex needs of clients and the increasing demands on the homeless service system to address issues ranging from mental health and substance abuse to domestic violence and family reunification, addressing the most basic of issues - helping clients locate housing - often falls to the bottom of the priority list. As a result, this Toolkit was developed to help organizations provide more efficient, effective housing search services.

The Toolkit offers practical tips and advice, descriptions of model programs, and links to additional resources. Most importantly, however, the Toolkit provides a wide range of forms, contracts, checklists, marketing materials, and other tools that can be downloaded for use in local programs. The tools were created in Microsoft Word, so they can easily be modified to fit each program's particular approach. Organizations can also include a logo or print the tools on agency letterhead to personalize them.

Finally, each tool contains a brief introduction, including the purpose of the tool as well as tips and ideas for customizing and using the tool. This information should be deleted once the tool is ready for use. Remember, the tools contain ideas and examples, but it will be important for each organization to modify the information based on the specific services it provides.

Who is this Toolkit designed for?

The Toolkit is designed to provide case managers and housing advocates - or any staff working directly with clients - with the tools and resources they need to help clients obtain and maintain permanent housing. There is one exception, however. The first section of the Toolkit, Program Start-Up, is targeted to Continuum of Care (CoC)

administrators, system planners, agency directors, or anyone else who may be considering the best way to organize and provide housing search services within a community.

Note: This Toolkit uses the term "housing advocate" to refer to an individual that provides housing search services. Some communities may use other terms, such as housing specialist, housing placement specialist, or housing coordinator. All of these terms are interchangeable.

How is this Toolkit organized?

The Housing Search Assistance Toolkit is divided into five main categories:

- **Program Start-Up.** This section of the Toolkit examines different models for providing housing search assistance. It also provides tools and resources related to staffing and funding your program. While the other four sections of this Toolkit target case managers, this portion of the Toolkit is intended for CoC administrators, system planners, and/or agency directors.
- **Landlord Outreach and Recruitment.** Conducting landlord outreach and education will be vital to program success. This portion of the Toolkit provides resources to aid in recruiting and maintaining positive relationships with landlords.
- **Client Assessment and Case Management.** This section of the Toolkit will aid staff in assessing client needs, establishing service plans, helping clients address barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing, and providing tenant education.
- **Conducting the Housing Search.** This portion of the Toolkit provides tools that clients can use while conducting their housing search, including a script to use when calling landlords, a tool to help clients interpret their lease, and a tracking tool to help them follow up on apartment leads.
- **Client Retention and Stabilization.** The final portion of the Toolkit provides tips and resources to help case managers provide effective ongoing support, thereby enabling their clients to maintain their housing.

NOTE: Check out the Acknowledgements page for a list of organizations that contributed to this Toolkit's development.

Select each question above to learn more.