

The Client Intake Process

Each community uses its own unique approach to delivering services to homeless families and individuals. Homeless service systems vary in how people enter the system, move through it, and access services. At the system level, the approach to client entry will fall into one of three categories: a single point of entry, streamlined entry (i.e., a limited number of entry points), or an "open door" approach (i.e., clients can enter the system through any agency). At the agency level, the approach to client intake will vary depending on how clients enter the system. If a community has an "open door" policy, client intake may be done by several different agencies. In contrast, if there is a single point of entry or streamlined entry, client intake may be done by one central agency or just a handful of agencies, which then refer clients to the programs and services most suited to the client's needs.

As a provider of housing search assistance, your organization may or may not have to conduct extensive intake of clients. If your community uses a centralized or streamlined approach to entry, your organization may only be taking referrals from partner organizations. In this case, you should not have to conduct an extensive intake, as the majority of the information you need about the client would ideally be provided along with a referral. If this is not the case, work with your partners coordinate the collection of information needed by the partnering organizations. Having one agency responsible for client intake can significantly reduce the burden placed on clients; it can also create a more open, communicative relationship between agencies serving the same clientele.

In contrast, if your community uses an open door model and your organization provides services to anyone who walks in off the street, you will need to have a more thorough intake process. Identifying the level of support your clients need will be critical to successful re-housing. As a result, you will need to have a thorough understanding of a client's housing and barriers to determine what kinds of services and support will be needed when he/she is placed in private market housing or needs to be referred to a different type of program.

Establishing Homeless Program Referral Guidelines

Increasing demands on homeless service systems, coupled with increased competition for resources, requires continuums to be more strategic about how they design their system and what type of activities they fund. Some continuums have found it useful to establish overarching referral guidelines for their continuum, and to subsequently have each provider (or program) define any program eligibility criteria and/or specify its target clientele. It is particularly important for housing search agencies to define program eligibility criteria, since maintaining its reputation with the landlord community requires that its client have the ability to pay for and maintain housing with limited support. Select the [Homeless Program Referral Guidelines](#) to review an example.

Select the paperclip icon above for additional information.