

GRANTMAKERS TOOLKIT ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Improving Housing Outcomes with Rapid Re-housing

This brief describes the most important impact that rapid re-housing approaches can have in shortening periods of homelessness and securing housing for homeless households. It describes the role philanthropic funders can have in promoting rapid re-housing approaches and provides examples of leadership and investments.

Among its many elements, the federal HEARTH Act will require communities to begin measuring their homeless system's performance on a number of critical outcomes. One objective is shortening the length of time people spend being homeless before regaining housing, which includes time spent in homeless programs such as shelter and transitional housing, as well as time on the street.¹ The emphasis on reducing time people spend being homeless means communities need strategies that help homeless people regain housing quickly and ensure that they are able to remain housed over time.

"Rapid re-housing" models work to quickly identify homeless households and help them get into housing in the community, whether that housing is permanently subsidized or market rate. Rather than providing services while someone stays in a temporary place, rapid re-housing helps the person or family get housed first and then provides supportive services directly or links families and individuals to other programs that may be needed to support stability goals, such as increasing income or supporting wellness. Though fairly new in most communities, rapid re-housing programs are typically less expensive than longer-term programs and report similar or better short- and mid-term outcomes.

Where We Have Been

Homeless programs have always focused on meeting the immediate crisis needs of homeless individuals and families, while working to help them regain housing. Under the old "Continuum of Care" model,² however, shelters typically placed primary emphasis on the provision of immediate shelter and basic needs, with some shelter seekers moving to other shelters or transitional housing programs and others leaving without further assistance, often to unknown destinations. Transitional housing provided longer-term stays and services designed to help households gain and sustain housing after finishing a program of up to two years. While these programs did focus on an exit to permanent housing at the end, few such programs had subsidy resources to help a family gain a foothold in the market when it was time for them to leave the program.

In the last decade, more communities have developed "transition-in-place" housing models, in which homeless households are aided to get an apartment in the community through a time-limited subsidy and support services. The transition-in-place model is a form of rapid re-housing, though it often provides longer support or deeper subsidies than may be necessary to secure the housing, potentially serving fewer households than a more flexible rapid re-housing model.

What Does Rapid Re-housing Look Like?

Rapid re-housing efforts can range from one-time assistance to get a homeless household into housing—such as help locating a unit and provision of a security deposit—to longer-term support with rent and services while a person works to increase income or awaits a longer-term subsidy. Some rapid re-housing programs are operated by an organization that also operates shelter or transitional housing. Others are offered by separate agencies that connect their services to shelters and transitional housing programs or directly to people on the streets. The hallmark of rapid re-housing is that it moves people out of homelessness as quickly as possible and then provides a flexible level of support, depending on the household's continuing (and sometimes fluctuating) needs.

The results of rapid re-housing across the country are very strong. Nationally, results of gaining housing for families hover near 90%.³ And this housing appears to be lasting for most people served. While not every community has been able to track the frequency with which people housed through rapid re-housing re-enter homelessness (another HEARTH measure), those communities that have report reoccurrence rates between 5 and 10%, and some even lower.⁴ Under the HEARTH-amended Emergency Solutions Grant program, HUD is strongly encouraging communities to invest in more rapid re-housing. Rapid re-housing is also an eligible activity with Continuum of Care funds, which allows communities to both potentially apply competitively for new rapid re-housing resources, as well as adapt or convert current programs to a rapid re-housing model.

The Role of Philanthropy

While rapid re-housing is now understood as a promising practice for addressing homelessness, communities and providers are still developing and learning about the new model. Funders provide critical resources to help agencies explore new ways of working, develop more effective strategies, evaluate success, and expand current practices. Philanthropy's leadership can help communities understand and promote models that are still in development, and foundation resources can fill gaps and provide incentives that help programs build these approaches and test them with different structures and population groups.

Examples of Leadership and Investments

Funder: The Hampton Roads Community Foundation (formerly the Norfolk Foundation)

Goal: Increase rapid access to housing for homeless individuals and families through the development of a Housing Broker Team

Homeless families often have difficulty competing in the rental market and finding units that they can afford. In 2007, the Norfolk Foundation made a critical grant to the nonprofit Planning Council to develop a Housing Broker Team. Housing specialists on the team connect with landlords to build relationships to expand rental opportunities for families and individuals who are seeking financial assistance from a service provider. The specialists facilitate the rental process and work with tenants to understand their responsibilities. The program moves quickly, re-housing families often in a matter of days after becoming homeless. Landlords like the program because they are reassured that clients will receive third-party assistance with links to other benefits, financial management, and stabilization services. Maintaining good relationships with landlords is key to the success of this program, and word of mouth referrals to other landlords and properties also increase the pool of affordable housing units. The program now has more than 300 landlords who own or manage 4,500 apartments and houses. Individuals and families assisted generally have more than one option for affordable housing to select from (e.g. closer to work, schools, transportation, and other). The Planning Council is among 17 organizations that have received grants since 2005, all of which have helped to build a regional system for solving homelessness. (www.theplanningcouncil.org)

Funder: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Goal: Build rapid re-housing capacity to serve survivors of domestic violence.

By many estimates, domestic violence (DV) has impacted a majority of homeless families, yet the DV and homeless service systems have not typically worked together. In the traditional homeless system, DV survivors may not receive services responsive to their experience of trauma, while in the DV system the connection to re-housing resources and approaches has been limited. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Pacific Northwest Initiative made significant investments in both research on the effectiveness of rapid re-housing for DV survivors and in building capacity of DV providers through the Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) project. In 2009 and 2011, the Foundation select 13 DV providers for support to increase staff awareness of housing needs and options, develop relationships with landlords, and offer flexible subsidies to clients. The goals of this effort include increased adoption of rapid re-housing strategies among Washington State DV providers and increased access to and sustainability of housing for DV survivors. Results show high rates of stability for those served by the Initiative, with 86% of those assisted in the DVHF Project retaining housing for a year or more. (www.gatesfoundation.org/topics/Documents/family-homelessness-strategy.pdf)

What You Can Do

- ◆ **Assist community agencies and local governments to learn more about rapid re-housing.** This model is still fairly new in many communities, and stakeholders may be unfamiliar with the extent of the different models. Grantmakers can provide help for providers and local representatives by hosting or helping send stakeholders to training, conferences, and retreats, and also by creating opportunities to learn about what other communities have done first-hand through site visits and webinar exchanges.
- ◆ **Fund rapid re-housing programs.** Rapid re-housing is eligible under certain federal grants, but such resources are currently scarce, and local funding is critically needed to support more rapid re-housing and to cover gaps. Consider supporting the direct financial assistance/subsidies to serve more households, or the work of housing specialists to do landlord outreach and engagement for a program or an entire community.
- ◆ **Link shelter/basic needs funding to rapid re-housing approaches.** Some grantmakers fund the basic operations of shelters or transitional housing programs but don't require that their grantees have a strategy to help move residents quickly into housing. Grantmakers can offer or condition funding for shelter or other basic needs services on the inclusion of rapid re-housing approaches in the program or through partnerships.
- ◆ **Support research and experimental designs for different populations.** Rapid re-housing has been very successful, but in many communities rapid re-housing services have only been offered to households anticipated to be successful in a short period of time. Some communities have targeted rapid re-housing more deeply but little has been done to systematically design rapid re-housing for populations such as ex-offenders and persons with mental illness to see if these models can be as successful for them.
- ◆ **Support program conversion efforts.** As more programs and communities look to see how they can incorporate rapid re-housing strategies, some programs may need to make structure, staffing, budget, or other adjustments. Foundations can provide support for the planning and implementation of program conversion efforts to build in rapid re-housing.

For more information about rapid re-housing models and successes: www.endhomelessness.org and www.usich.gov

For more information about rapid re-housing and domestic violence survivors: www.endhomelessness.org/section/training/rapidrehousing/domesticviolencetoolkit

For more information about the role of philanthropy in ending homelessness: www.funderstogether.org

¹ The preamble to the HEARTH Act establishes a national goal that people who become homeless will return to housing within 30 days.

² In the 1990s HUD first introduced the concept of a “Continuum of Care” for addressing homelessness. Under this model many homeless people were expected to first enter emergency shelter, then reside in a transitional housing program for a period of time to work on preparing for housing before becoming housed in either subsidized or unsubsidized housing. This model was associated with the concept of “housing readiness.” Rapid re-housing, and other “housing first” approaches, in contrast, focus on immediate re-housing as the primary goal, with services provided as needed after housing is obtained to support housing stability.

³ National Alliance to End Homelessness, “Rapid Rehousing: Successfully Ending Family Homelessness” <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/4574>

⁴ Summarized from communities reporting return rates on the map at “Rapid Rehousing Successes” <http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/article/detail/4578>



Funders Together
TO END HOMELESSNESS

89 South Street, Suite 803
Boston, MA 02111
617.245.0314
www.funderstogether.org