

Western PA CoC Written Standards Training 2025


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MARCH 13, 2025

What are the Written Standards?

- Provide guidance for CoC and ESG programs related to service delivery
- Ensure that all programs are operating in a consistent, coordinated way that is compliant with HUD and CoC standards
- Required by HUD

Structure of Written Standards

- Standards for all project types
 - Includes recordkeeping and case management standards
- Standards by project type – specific standards that must be followed if you are operating PSH, RRH, etc.
- Appendices
- Optional Forms and Templates – separate document. Not required, but available as a resource



Standards for Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Joint Transitional Housing-Rapid Rehousing (TH-RRH)

Access

- Referrals must come through Coordinated Entry.
- Projects must follow CoC Order of Prioritization in filling vacancies.

Eligibility

- Literally homeless (Cat. 1) or Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV (Cat. 4)*
AND
- Must be unable to access housing without assistance

NOTE: There are no income requirements at the time of enrollment. ESG income requirements kick-in at annual recert.

Prioritization

- All CoC and ESG funded projects are required to prioritize households with the longest history of homelessness and with the most severe service needs for all available CoC resources through regional CE case conferencing.
- The determination of severe service needs will be based on the Housing and Service Needs Assessment Score, CE Assessment Tool score, and information presented during regional case conferencing.

Prioritization

| Priority Bracket | Criteria | Tie-Breaker |
|------------------|--|--|
| First Priority | Special populations designated by the CoC | HN/SN Score, LOT Homeless, then CE Assessment Tool score |
| Second Priority | People experiencing chronic homelessness | HN/SN Score, LOT Homeless, then CE Assessment Tool score |
| Third Priority | All eligible households not included under First Priority or Second Priority | HN/SN Score, LOT Homeless, then CE Assessment Tool score |

Prioritization

In applying the order of priority, households shall be considered for:

- all counties they've expressed interest in via the CE assessment; AND
- all counties in the region where they are currently experiencing homelessness

Transfers into RRH

- If the household was chronically homeless at entry into their current project, the household will be prioritized in the Second Priority Bracket.
- Within each priority bracket, it will be determined via case conferencing where a transferring household will be prioritized compared to currently homeless households.
- While TH to RRH transfers are eligible, TH participants will not be prioritized for RRH transfers (except specifically TH-RRH projects) unless there are no other eligible chronically homeless households for the available RRH opening.

Documentation (RRH Specific)

- Documentation of Homelessness*
- Executed Lease*
 - Including HUD VAWA Lease Addendum
- (ESG) Landlord-Agency Agreement*
- Passed Inspection
- Housing Plans*
- *See Documentation for All Project Types for additional requirements*

**there's a template for that!*

Duration and Amounts

- Amount of rental assistance is highly individualized.
 - Whenever possible, level of subsidy should lessen over time/ the project will pay less toward rent while the participant pays more until the participant is paying in full and exits the project.
- Average length of subsidy / rental assistance should be <12 months
 - Some extenuating circumstances may necessitate extending RRH assistance past 12 months.
 - Projects should create their own internal extension approval process for any households remaining in the project past 12 months.
 - If average length of stay within an RRH project exceeds 12 months, the CoC may engage the provider to offer technical assistance.

Duration and Amounts

- First month's rent can be offered in full to assist the household.
- Security deposits cannot exceed 2 months' rent.
- If the participant is responsible for paying their own utilities, grantees must follow the requirements for utility payments and reimbursement.
- For ESG-funded projects, unit rent must NOT exceed Fair Market Rent (FMR) AND must not exceed Rent Reasonableness.
- For CoC-funded Projects, unit rent may exceed FMR, but may not exceed Rent Reasonableness.

Using RRH Funds for Rapid Exits

- Requires approval from CoC Governing Board and/or Funding Committee
- RRH funds can be used during Diversion and Rapid Exit Phases of CE for:
 - one-time financial assistance (such as first/last/security deposit/utility deposit); and
 - light-touch case management focused on housing search and ensuring a household is connected to the mainstream benefits and resources they qualify for (Medicare, Medicaid, SSI, Food Stamps/ SNAP, local Workforce office, early childhood education, TANF, substance use disorder programs, employment assistance programs).

Using RRH Funds for Rapid Exits

- Rapid Exit funds are prioritized for households with a source of income who need minimal financial assistance to exit homelessness, and who have identified a unit or are in the process of identifying a unit, and do not require ongoing supportive services/ case management.
- Rapid Exit funds may be used to assist households with housing search.
- Households identified for Rapid Exits are not required to go through the full CE prioritization, case conferencing, and referral process.

Enrollment & HMIS Project Start Date

- Households should be enrolled into rapid re-housing once it is mutually agreed upon (by the participant and the provider) that the two parties will be working toward permanent housing together.
- Providers should not wait until permanent housing is found to enroll the household in HMIS/program.
- If it takes 60 days for a participant to find a unit after you begin working together, the move-in date would be 60 days after the start date.

Enrollment & HMIS Project Start Date

- **Start Date** = Date the client was admitted into the project. To be admitted indicates the following factors have been met:
 - Information provided by the client or from the referral indicates they meet the criteria for admission;
 - The client has indicated they want to be housed in this project; and
 - The client is able to access services and housing through the project. The expectation is the project has a housing opening (on-site, site-based, or scattered-site subsidy) or expects to have one in a reasonably short amount of time.

RRH-Specific Standards

- Exit planning should start upon Project entry with regular discussions about moving towards maintaining housing stability without a rental subsidy or with a permanent subsidy resource such as Public Housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, affordable housing developments, etc.
- Income is reassessed at least quarterly for the purposes of adjusting rental payments. Although these quarterly income assessments should be accounted for in HMIS, they generally will not have a bearing on determining eligibility for ongoing RRH assistance.
- Note: ESG has income eligibility guidelines that kick in at annual assessment.

RRH-Specific Standards

- If the household identifies as stabilized, they may be successfully exited from the project at any time.
- Some indicators of stability could be:
 - Goals cited in previously created goal plans will be realized
 - The household will be paying rent in full (or to the level agreed upon as described above).
 - The housing crisis is resolved.
 - The household feels as though they have enough support in place to maintain stabilization without supportive services.

RRH-Specific Standards

- RRH projects must provide housing search/ locator assistance. At a minimum, this should include:
 - Recruitment of landlords to provide housing opportunities
 - Provide education and outreach to landlords to address potential barriers
 - Assist households to find and secure appropriate rental housing. This may include developing lists of participating landlords and rental units and accompanying participants on their housing search.
 - Help households negotiate manageable and appropriate lease agreements

RRH-Specific Standards

- Some households may need more assistance than others, due to barriers to tenancy (such as criminal record) or lack of experience with rental housing. RRH providers should be prepared to provide a higher level of assistance to households who may need more support to identify an eligible unit. This may include:
 - Assisting the household to look up eligible units online or via other local resources
 - Assisting the household in calling landlords to inquire about available units
 - Accompanying the household to view units and meet with landlords
 - Assisting the household in reviewing and understanding lease terms

RRH-Specific Case Management

- Case management meetings are required monthly, although additional meetings can always be offered by the case manager as needed and/or scheduled as requested by the participant.
- Meetings should be in the participant's home or in a mutually agreed-upon community setting, as opposed to an office setting, to the greatest extent possible.
- Reminder: Housing First is not "housing only". While it is acceptable for RRH projects to require all participants to meet with a case manager, a participant must not be evicted from, or terminated from, the project for failure to meet with the case manager.

RRH-Specific Case Management

- RRH providers are encouraged to explore and support shared housing arrangements if this would support the long-term housing stability of project participants.
- Shared Housing arrangements may be particularly helpful in areas with high costs of living where renting an SRO or 1BR apartment may not be financially viable long term for individual participants.
- Each household must have its own lease.
- HUD has guidance on calculating rent contributions in shared housing.

RRH-Specific Case Management

- Shared housing is broadly defined as a living situation where two or more household units share a single housing unit, including sharing housing costs like rent and utilities.
- Each household unit has its own personal sleeping space, and there are common spaces that are shared such as bathrooms, kitchen and living room.
- Housing can be any unit with multiple bedrooms.
- The homeowner can live on the premises or not, but if the homeowner is related to the tenants, CoC and ESG dollars cannot pay rent.

RRH Performance Measures

- **At least 88% of households** who exit RRH exit to permanent housing.
- **At least 48% of adult participants** will increase their income through either employment or benefits.
 - **22% of adults** will increase earned/ employment income.
 - **30% of adults** will increase non-employment income.
- At least **60% of households** will be linked to mainstream resources.
- **No more than 6% of households** that exit to permanent housing after being homeless should become homeless again within 12 months.

TH-RRH Specific Standards

- Grantees administering Joint TH/RRH projects should follow RRH and TH specific standards.
- Projects must offer both components: participants are able to choose TH Only, RRH only, or both TH and RRH.

TH-RRH Eligibility

- Literally homeless (Cat. 1); or
- Fleeing/Attempting to Flee DV (Cat. 4); or
- Those residing in a TH project that is being eliminated; or
- Those residing in TH being funded by another Joint Component project

TH-RRH Prioritization

- TH-RRH projects should follow the Order of Prioritization for TH and RRH projects, depending on which project component participant will be entering.
- Projects should target and prioritize people experiencing homelessness with higher needs (i.e., multiple barriers to obtaining and retaining housing and/or those who are most vulnerable).

TH-RRH Amount and Duration

- The maximum duration of support for both components combined is 24 months per household.
- The project will provide enough RRH assistance to ensure that at any given time a project participant may move from TH to permanent housing.

TH-RRH HMIS/ Reporting

- TH/RRH projects must be set-up in HMIS data system as two-different Projects: one TH project and one RRH project.
- CoC-funded TH/RRH must submit one APR for TH and one APR for RRH.

TH-RRH Case Management

- For projects with operating or leasing dollars where occupancy agreements or sub-leases are used, the role of the case manager and the role of landlord should be separate and distinct to ensure the case manager can engage with the participant to build trust and rapport instead of focusing on holding the participant accountable to their lease.

Next Steps

- All CoC- and ESG- funded programs sign off by April 30, 2025 that their program(s) have reviewed the WS, understand them, will implement them, and will ensure that all new hires review the standards and recorded CoC trainings within 60 days of hire:
<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/8216721/Western-PA-CoC-Written-Standards-Acknowledgment-Form-2025>
- If there are standards that programs are not implementing, make a plan to implement those standards by June 30, 2025.
- Feedback on the standards is welcome year-round:
<https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/7127925/Western-PA-CoC-Written-Standards-Annual-Feedback>