

# **HUD-VASH Best Practices – Version 1.0**

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**A Working Document**

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**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
Office of Public and Indian Housing**

# Introduction

Federal agencies and our partners around the country are committed to achieving our shared goal of ending Veteran homelessness by 2015. The successful implementation of the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program is essential to realizing this goal and other goals identified in the [Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#). Since the revival of HUD-VASH in 2008, we learn on a daily basis about new and better ways to implement the program and ensure that Veterans are stably housed. Because HUD-VASH continues to be a work in progress, we decided to compile these best practices into a working document that will be edited when effective new approaches are identified and not-so-helpful ones are discarded.

In the fall of 2011, a request for the submission of best practices was sent to public housing agencies (PHAs) and VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) that administer the program via the HUD-VASH [listserv](#). Over 50 best practices accounts were submitted in response to the request. The practices below have been compiled based on these accounts, which were cross-referenced with monthly data on agency performance and further developed through phone interviews. Subsequent emails, reports, and conversations exchanged among federal agencies, PHAs, and other partnering entities have informed and will continue to inform this best practices list.

The purpose of this working document is to spread the word about effective strategies for administering HUD-VASH, as well as highlight the innovation and dedication of HUD-VASH sites and our partners in the field. Because it was HUD that compiled this list of practices, the document is somewhat skewed to a PHA point-of-view, and it largely focuses on practices that enhance and streamline leasing processes. In the future, we hope to expand the section on successful retention and attrition, as well as create a section on strategies for best serving Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness.

For additional information on successful strategies from the VA point-of-view, a wealth of knowledge can be found in the VA's [HUD-VASH Resource Guide](#) and other helpful tools on the VA's National Center on Veteran Homelessness [website](#). General information on helping individuals and families experiencing homelessness can be found on HUD's [Homelessness Resource Exchange](#) and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) [website](#).

A list of individuals that have generously contributed best practices information can be found at the end of this document. Feedback, comments, and practices recommended for inclusion in future versions of our best practices list can be sent to [kaitlin.miller@hud.gov](mailto:kaitlin.miller@hud.gov). Thank you for your contributions and assistance with this project, and keep up the great work!

**Milan Ozdenic, Deputy Assistant Secretary**  
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## **1. Strategies for expediting application and leasing processes**

As noted by the Fort Worth Housing Authority, the expeditious processing of HUD-VASH applications “is important in establishing the relationship with the Veteran and maintaining the connection and their belief that they can be housed.” Partnering agencies have recognized this importance and have altered traditional practices in order to house HUD-VASH applicants as quickly as possible. A common denominator in these practices is the simultaneous completion of one or more tasks, which deviates from the linear, step-by-step methods that PHAs normally use to process Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) applications. Many of these practices also may help PHAs to streamline their application and admission processes for their regular HCV programs.

- **Trainings:** The West Haven and Fort Worth housing authorities both recommend holding trainings for case managers on income verification and the completion of HCV applications in order to further expedite these processes. In general, providing periodic trainings for staff from partnering organizations and agencies on PHA and VA topics helps the program to run more smoothly at all stages of Veterans’ participation. The Columbia Housing Authority and partnering VAMC provide short trainings on different topics at each monthly meeting, such as HQS inspections, the types of housing units that are acceptable, and the services and supports needed by Veterans.
- **Preparing for VA benefit applications and screening for HUD-VASH case management eligibility:** The Los Angeles VAMC and community partners have implemented a number of strategies to accelerate the application processes for VA case management. For example, non-profit organizations that work with homeless Veterans have been trained in helping Veterans to acquire their military service documentation, or the DD 214 form, and assessing whether or not the Veteran will be eligible for HUD-VASH. In addition, the Los Angeles VAMC has a consultation line that organizations can call with questions regarding Veterans’ eligibility for HUD-VASH and other VA benefit programs. The VAMC also has trained LA County staff answering 211 calls on the eligibility requirements for VA benefit programs, including HUD-VASH case management. As a result of these strategies, when Veterans arrive at the VAMC to submit applications, VA staff spend less time helping Veterans to acquire documents and determine whether or not they qualify for the program.
- **HCV application completed before meeting with the PHA:** A very widespread practice is for the PHA to provide all forms and a list of documents required for the HUD-VASH application to the VAMC. Case managers work with Veterans to fill out the forms and compile all documents prior to meeting with the PHA and submitting applications. The Kenner Housing Authority asks the VA case managers to fax copies of all documents prior to the meeting in order to review them (if PHA staff have time) and start a file for the Veteran.
- **Simultaneous HCV application completion and housing search:** The West Palm Beach VAMC gives Veterans the voucher application and housing search packet at the same time,

and the VAMC works with Veterans to complete the application while also searching for a unit. Subsequently, when Veterans attend orientations at the West Palm Beach Housing Authority, they submit both their applications and Requests for Tenancy Approval (RTAs). This has reduced the number of days in the leasing process by an average of 15 days.

- **Issuing of a provisional voucher while completing check for lifetime sex offender registration:** The Long Beach Housing Authority (LBHA) has found that it takes up to a week to confirm whether or not a Veteran is on a lifetime sex offender registry. In order to save time, the agency does a preliminary check on the [national sex offender search tool](#), and if the Veteran is not on the list, he or she receives a provisional voucher. The Veteran then begins looking for a unit to rent with a provisional voucher while LBHA waits for official confirmation on sex offender status from the FBI database. It is estimated that this practice has eliminated 7 days from the HUD-VASH leasing process. For more information, see the USICH online article [here](#).
- **Ensuring unit will pass the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection:** A NYHCR local administrator includes an HQS checklist in their “Move Packet” given to Veterans issued a HUD-VASH voucher. When a Veteran finds a unit, the owner initials the checklist stating that the unit meets those specific HQS qualifications. The checklist then is submitted with the RTA. It provides the owner and applicant information on HQS and allows them to walk through the unit ahead of time to ensure the items on the checklist meet those standards.
- **Simultaneous HQS inspection and rent reasonableness determination:** Instead of one department of a PHA completing the HQS inspection and another negotiating rent-reasonableness with the landlord, the Long Beach Housing Authority began allowing for both the inspection and rent reasonableness determination to be completed at the same time. It is estimated that combining these requirements has eliminated 21 days from the HUD-VASH leasing process. For more information, see the USICH online article [here](#).
- **Developing a pool of pre-inspected units:** The Washington DC VAMC contracted out case management responsibilities to the DC Department of Human Services, which then enlisted a local organization, the Community Partnership, to carry out the housing search process. Along with the DC Housing Authority, the four agencies worked together in order to streamline leasing processes for HUD-VASH. Among the new strategies the agencies applied was tasking the Community Partnership with recruiting landlords and identifying available units. Pre-inspections were completed, and a pool of potential units subsequently was developed from which HUD-VASH Veterans had the option of choosing. These and other strategies applied by the Washington DC HUD-VASH partners reduced the average number of days in the leasing process from 6 months to 1 month. See a more in-depth assessment of DC’s system redesign [here](#).
- **PHA contracting-out of referral to lease-up activities:** As the target population for HUD-VASH has shifted to chronically homeless Veterans, the City of Phoenix Housing Department (CPHD) began exploring opportunities to increase collaboration with

community partners for serving this vulnerable population. CPHD decided to contract-out the leasing functions of its 150 HUD-VASH vouchers from the FY 2011 allocation. After issuing an RFP, CPHD selected for the contract [HOM, Inc](#), the largest provider of permanent supportive housing for individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Maricopa County. Beginning in January 2012, HOM, Inc. began receiving referrals of eligible homeless Veterans directly from the Phoenix VAMC and determining eligibility for the HUD-VASH vouchers. HOM, Inc. conducts briefings, issues vouchers, assists with the housing search process, processes RTAs, determines rent reasonableness, calculates tenant rent and housing assistance payments, performs HQS inspections and facilitates the execution of leases between HUD-VASH participants and community landlords. CPHD uses money from its unrestricted net assets (UNA) account to fund the contract, paying nearly the same amount of money it costs to pay a CPHD staff person to complete the same activities. Because of HOM, Inc's experience and expertise in serving homeless individuals and families, chronically homeless Veterans have been housed more quickly.

- **Carrying out a system redesign or process-mapping workshop**
  - The national non-profit, Community Solutions, and staff working on their 100,000 Homes Campaign, have organized [housing placement “boot camps”](#) in New York and Los Angeles to help HUD-VASH sites streamline their leasing processes. Facilitated through an incremental process-improvement method designed by the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement](#), boot-camp participants are divided into community teams and asked to map out the current housing placement process. The time to complete each step of the process then is estimated and included on the process road map. After reviewing the current processes, participants are then asked to create a more “ideal” system that streamlines activities, combines or completes multiple tasks at once, and helps homeless Veterans move into housing faster. Intense brainstorming sessions take place, with participants “accepting responsibility for driving change within his/her agency” in order to reduce steps and time involved in the process. Written individual and team action plans then are established.
  - External facilitators are helpful for system redesign events or “boot camps.” The 100,000 Homes Campaign staff from Community Solutions can be contacted about carrying out housing placement boot camps for HUD-VASH: [www.100khomes.org](http://www.100khomes.org).
  - System redesign efforts also can be carried out internally within a single agency in order to accelerate the steps in the referral and leasing processes for which the agency is responsible. For example, in August 2011, the West Palm Beach VAMC organized internal meetings and system review workshops with HUD-VASH staff from the VA's Veteran Integrated Service Network (VISN) 8 to explore ways that HUD-VASH activities can be accelerated.

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## **2. PHA management strategies**

The following management strategies are simple steps initiated and carried out by PHAs that have significantly influenced the overall success of HUD-VASH sites.

- **Identifying designated PHA staff to focus on HUD-VASH:** Eight responders emphasized the value of designating one or more staff people at PHAs to serve as HUD-VASH experts and points of contact for VA staff. PHAs have recognized the importance of having staff with skill sets and knowledge unique to HUD-VASH that develop strong working relationships with VA staff.
  - Columbia Housing Authority has assigned one staff person to be the VA’s contact for Veteran applications, another person to be the contact on leasing, and a third person to be the VA’s contact on inspections.
  - After identifying employees to focus on HUD-VASH, the Fort Worth HA arranged for the designated staff to be trained on effective approaches for working with homeless, disabled Veterans.
  - The Orange County Housing Authority designated a staff person to be a liaison with VA case managers. The housing authority also held a training for multiple staff members on VASH program objectives in order for staff to gain understanding and support for processing Veteran families differently.
  - The Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) emphasized the importance of “putting a ‘face’ behind the VASH program” on the PHA side to offer reassurance and a “communal element” for Veterans applying to the program. In the words of Andrew Ailes from MPHA, “from the shelter to program completion, Veterans know who their contact is at the PHA. There is a familiar and responsive person they know that sits behind their paperwork.”
- **Setting aside one day of the week for HUD-VASH intake:** A number of PHAs recommend designating one day of the week for Veteran application submissions and orientation. The regularly scheduled day for these procedures helps to establish structure and shared expectations for the application process for the PHA, VAMC, and most importantly, for the Veterans.
  - Kenner Housing Authority designates the entire day on Fridays to VASH meetings. The agency provides refreshments for Veterans and tries to personalize the process as much as possible to help Veterans feel comfortable.
- **Providing space for VA case manager(s) in PHA’s office:** Four PHAs that responded to our request for best practices reported that their agency provides an office or other type of workspace for VA case managers in their agency’s building. Such an approach enhances coordination, communication, and efficiency in administering the program.
  - The Longview HA reports that from the day the VA staff arrived and settled in, the agencies have created and maintained a symbiotic partnership that includes face to face

conversations/interaction, prompt exchange of documents, and follow-up Veteran engagement that has greatly lessened the Veteran’s stress level, their time on the street, and enhanced their overall housing experience.

- The VA partnering with the Myrtle Beach Housing Authority initially did not have a case manager located in Myrtle Beach. The travel to Charleston made it very difficult for the Veteran to comply with the VA program requirement in order to qualify for housing assistance. Therefore, the housing authority decided to provide space for the case manager in their office. When the housing agency’s waiting list was opened up for two days, the VA case manager being onsite made it easier to reach any Veterans who were applying for the regular HCV waiting list. Together they were able to reach many Veterans who did not know about the HUD-VASH program.
- The Butte County Housing Authority maintains that giving office space to the VA case manager enabled “both housing staff and the VA to meet with and see clients in the same building, in a coordinated effort, minimizing inconvenience and hassle to a population that has transportation issues and an aversion to working with multiple public institutions.”
- The Yakima Housing Authority reports that housing VA staff in their office “eliminates the Veteran needing to go to more than one place to meet with staff from either source. Think of a one-stop shopping place.”

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### **3. VA management strategies**

The following management strategies are simple steps initiated and carried out by VA facilities that have significantly influenced the overall success of HUD-VASH sites. Extensive lists and explanations of other VA strategies for HUD-VASH can be found in the VA’s [HUD-VASH Resource Guide](#).

- **Including peer support specialists on HUD-VASH teams:** For the Orlando VAMC, a combination of clinical case management and peer support services has proven to be extremely effective for engaging and assisting homeless Veterans. A peer support specialist is a Veteran that serves as a role model for HUD-VASH Veterans by sharing his or her own experiences with mental health issues and coping tools to overcome personal challenges. After being issued a voucher, Veterans in Orlando are matched with peer support specialists, who provide guidance and camaraderie throughout the Veterans’ participation in the program and help quell anxieties and uncertainties along the way. The peer support specialists are able to quickly relate to Veterans, build rapport, broaden Veterans’ social networks, and help Veterans stick to their plans and achieve their goals.
- **Dividing VA staff into teams that focus on specific communities:** The Greater Los Angeles VA Health System has divided HUD-VASH system into teams that focus on



serving Veterans that lease-up in specific neighborhoods within the metropolitan area. This strategy has enabled VA staff to become more familiar with the culture and politics of specific communities and develop working relationships with local organizations. As a result, VA staff have increased their engagement and enrollment of Veterans, and they are more effectively helping Veterans to navigate through community before and after leasing-up. This staffing approach, as solidified at the [Los Angeles HUD-VASH boot camp](#) in June 2011, is particularly helpful for HUD-VASH sites in large metropolitan areas with large allocations of vouchers.

- **Imbedding case managers in the communities where Veterans reside:** Typically, HUD-VASH case managers work from offices located in VA medical clinics. The VAMC in Bedford, Massachusetts, decided to place case managers in community shelters, PHA offices, and local Vet Centers, which enables the case managers to improve outreach to homeless Veterans, while still meeting the needs of current HUD-VASH clients. The VAMC has found that this practice has improved Veterans' attendance to appointments and adherence to treatment plans, and it has fostered more effective working relationships with community partners.

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#### **4. Assistance with security deposits and move-in costs**

Hands down, the most common obstacle faced by Veterans during the lease-up process as described by HUD-VASH sites is a lack of funds for security deposits and other move-in costs. The Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP) has served as an important resource for many sites across the country to address such needs of Veterans. However, HPRP funds have been depleted, and, as a Housing and Economic Recovery Act program, the funds will not be renewed. A few sites that found HPRP funds difficult to access developed unique strategies for assisting Veterans with these expenses, which can help those sites that previously depended on HPRP:

- **PHA revolving loan fund:** Butte County Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners authorized a \$10,000 revolving loan fund from its unrestricted General Fund to assist Veterans with move-in costs. The VA Services Coordinator determines the amount of funds necessary in each case, and determines the terms of the repayment agreement, based on any particular Veteran's capacities and need.
- **Revolving loan fund through partnership with local banks:** Yakima housing authority also provides loans to Veterans with funds secured through local banks' community reinvestment dollars. The money is repaid by the Veterans in small increments, which refuels the loan fund and acts as a revolving account.
- **Maryland Veterans Trust Fund:** The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) has set up the [Maryland Veterans Trust Fund](#) through legislation passed during

the 2009 session of the Maryland Assembly. The legislation authorizes MDVA to receive donations, then make grants and loans to Veterans in dire financial situations and to private organizations helping Veterans. Numerous corporations and individuals have made large donations to the fund, which are tax deductible under state law as well as Title 26, US Code, Section 170. MDVA has made a few donations to HUD-VASH participants for security deposits and other move-in costs. The agency has expressed interest in attending HUD-VASH briefings held by Maryland PHAs, at which HUD-VASH Veterans could submit applications for assistance from the Trust Fund. *Staff at MDVA collected information on 20 other states that have a Veterans trust fund.*

- **Community Development Block Grants:** Early in the program, the Myrtle Beach Housing Authority (MBHA) contacted the landlord and utility companies to ask for their help with security and utility deposits. This was not always successful and was very time consuming. MBHA subsequently applied to the Horry County Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and received funds to assist with the deposits. The VA caseworker determines the need and assists the Veteran with the required documentation. A check for all or a portion of the deposits is issued as part of the lease up process.

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## **5. Assistance with furniture and other household items**

Most Veterans participating in HUD-VASH also need help with furnishing their homes and acquiring towels, sheets, silverware, and other household items. As described by the Butte County Housing Authority, “it was found that there is nothing more chilling to a program participant than to make it all the way through the lease-up process and then walk in to a home devoid of furniture and the things necessary to the keeping and enjoyment of a home.” Innovative strategies in this area include:

- **Community outreach:** Columbia Housing Authority’s (CHA’s) Homeless Programs Department began reaching out to the community to “recycle” gently used and new items for the VASH and PSH programs. CHA created a brochure, as well as carried out press releases, local radio interviews for this effort. As a result, CHA received the following donated items:
  - The Judicial Advocacy Center donated 2400 towels, 600 pillows, 400 bedspreads, lamps, irons, and chairs while doing a hotel renovation over the last 6 months.
  - The contents of a local hotel that had changed owners were donated to include bedroom furniture and televisions.
  - Fifty beds and side tables were obtained when Fort Jackson Military Installation was scheduled to demolish an old barracks.
  - Numerous donations from local citizens

Some items were distributed to low-income families served by CHA, but some were held in a warehouse to be used by VASH clients. CHA will be meeting with the hotel association and contacting all hotels in the area to replicate this practice.

- **Thrift store partnership:** The Butte County Housing Authority established an informal partnership with a faith-based entity, whose thrift shop serves as the source of furnishings and household goods for many program participants.
- **Furniture packages and gift cards:** A non-profit organization assisting with the HUD-VASH program in Washington, DC, the [Community Partnership](#), successfully negotiated furniture packages with local vendors for every Veteran participating in HUD-VASH. The organization also persuaded landlords to allow furniture to be delivered in advance of lease-signing and receipt of initial rental payments, so clients could move in to furnished apartments. Finally, the Community Partnership coordinated the provision of department store gift cards that were used by clients to obtain basic household necessities.
- **Free use of storage unit:** The VA clinic in Pensacola, Florida, partners with the organization, [Opportunity Inc](#), to assist HUD-VASH Veterans with furniture and other needs as they move in to their units. A storage facility in Pensacola has provided a free storage unit to Opportunity Inc, which the organization uses for storing household items donated by families and local businesses. After signing a lease, HUD-VASH Veterans visit the storage unit to pick up items for their new homes.
- **Adopt-a-room campaign:** Although not benefitting HUD-VASH households, this innovative practice by the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara (HACSB) is worth including in this report. In November 2010, HACSB launched the [Adopt-a-Room Campaign](#) to furnish the apartments of a new development for low-income families, disabled individuals, and youth aging out of foster care. Through the campaign, HACSB partnered with the non-profit, 2nd Story Associates, to request and receive \$350 donations from vendors, businesses and community members for furniture and other household items for the new apartments.

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## **6. Recruiting landlords and finding units**

Another primary challenge faced by many HUD-VASH sites is a lack of decent, affordable apartments with amenable landlords. A prolonged housing search puts at risk Veteran's trust and commitment to sticking with the program. Many responders cited strategies for recruiting landlords, while others described methods for helping Veterans to find units. For example:

- The Des Moines Housing Authority worked with the VA to develop a flyer to send out in monthly HAP checks to landlords leasing units to regular HCV program participants. The flyer informed property owners about the VASH program and described the support

provided by VA case managers to help Veterans pay rent on time, etc. As a result, property owners contacted the VAMC and expressed interest in renting to participating Veterans.

- Raleigh County Housing Authority held open forums in several different locations at which they explained the VASH program and how it serves homeless Veterans. Several landlords now only house VASH participants for the simple reason that they are Veterans.
- The Waco VAMC has developed and maintains an updated list of available units in the VA's catchment area that are potential housing options for Veterans.
- The Fort Worth Housing Authority (FWHA) has a staff member whose primary responsibility is to expand housing opportunities for the homeless through the education and recruitment of landlords. HUD-VASH Veterans benefited from this existing landlord outreach program, which FWHA had established to assist with other homeless housing programs.
- A NYSHCR local administrator always writes "VASH" on the vouchers when issued so that when a Veteran expresses interest in a property, the landlord recognizes them as Veterans and gives them first preference.
- The Oakland VAMC has a contractual agreement with the non-profit, Eden Information & Referral, to assist Veterans with their housing search.
- The New Jersey VAMC has compiled a resource book consisting of apartment complexes and landlords to assist Veterans and case managers with finding units.
- The VA has made available funding for VAMCs to hire **housing search specialists** that build relationships with landlords, keep track of available apartments, and help Veterans find and lease units. Case managers often assist with these tasks when the PHA does not have the capacity carry them out; however, case managers with full caseloads typically lack both the time and expertise to take on these tasks. Therefore, many VAMCs have taken advantage of this funding and have found and hired individuals with housing backgrounds for these positions. For example, the West Los Angeles VAMC hired a real estate agent with extensive knowledge of the area's housing market to serve as the site's HUD-VASH housing search specialist. The 100,000 Homes Campaign has provided a sample [job description](#) of a housing search specialist on their website.

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## **7. Ensuring Veteran Retention and Positive Attrition**

The first version of this document focuses mainly on activities that help streamline and expedite the HUD-VASH leasing process. In future versions, an equal if not stronger focus should also be placed on retention and making sure that Veterans, if and when they exit the program, do so for positive reasons. We will not be able to realize our goal of ending Veterans homelessness by 2015

if the Veterans we serve do not achieve and sustain housing stability. Therefore, to expand this section, HUD will continue researching and soliciting contributions on retention and helping Veterans become more self-sufficient.

A preliminary practice that should be highlighted under this section is the linking of HUD-VASH with HUD's Family Self-Sufficiency program.

- **Connecting Veterans with the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program:** FSS is an employment and savings incentive program for families receiving Section 8 HCV or public housing assistance. It consists of 1) FSS coordinators hired by PHAs to help participants pursue employment and other goals, and 2) interest-bearing escrow accounts established for each participating family. The PHA credits to the escrow account increases in rent that a family normally would pay due to increases in earned income during the FSS contract of participation. The PHA may make a portion of this escrow account available to the family during the term of the contract to enable the family to complete an interim goal. If the family completes the contract and no member of the family is receiving cash welfare assistance, the amount of the FSS account is paid to the head of the family. More information on the FSS program can be found on HUD's website, [here](#).

HUD identified two PHAs with high numbers of HUD-VASH families participating in FSS and called the PHAs to learn more about their programs: the Cecil County Housing Agency (CCHA) and the Housing Authority of the City of Long Beach (HACL B). Nearly 20% of the Veterans participating both agencies' HUD-VASH programs have also participated in the agencies' FSS programs. More research and assessment needs to be completed on the extent to which the linking of the programs help Veterans to remain stably housed and successfully "graduate" from HUD-VASH. However, *it is clear that HUD-VASH and FSS are mutually beneficial and the gains made by Veterans are enhanced and accelerated when the two programs are linked.*

Below are key points that PHAs made regarding the value of linking the two programs and effective practices for doing so.

- The FSS coordinator and VA case manager positions compliment each other, broaden the support provided to Veteran, and increase the likelihood that Veterans are able to achieve personal goals. As stated by HACL B, the FSS coordinator is a member of the "village" that cheers Veterans on and helps them to be successful.
- CCHA stated that many of the HUD-VASH Veterans participating in FSS are a bit rusty at first with literacy and math and sometimes have trouble completing forms. However, the Veterans often are more driven and disciplined than other FSS families that are not in HUD-VASH. They also have more training, education, and credentials than the average FSS participant.
- Constant dialogue between the FSS coordinator and VA case manager is key. CCHA asks the Veteran to officially confirm his or her interest in FSS by filling out a form,

which the case manager then signs. This helps to ensure that the FSS coordinator and VA case manager are on the same page from the start.

- A VA case manager is a member of CCHA's FSS Coordinating Committee, which the housing agency states is valuable for ensuring that the FSS program effectively meets needs of HUD-VASH Veterans.
- Both PHAs stated that it has been helpful having FSS staff attending HUD-VASH briefings in order to inform Veterans to FSS and encourage them to participate.

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## **8. System development and maintenance through regular communication**

The establishment and maintenance of regular communication practices was mentioned by almost all respondents as a key factor influencing long-term program effectiveness. Providing information to all partners about the status of each applicant, as well as Veterans already leased-up, ensures that no Veteran slips through the cracks and that potential problems can be prevented. Many respondents described the importance of PHA staff and VA case managers copying each other on every email and other types of correspondence related to Veteran applicants and participants. Respondents also stressed the importance of having regularly scheduled meetings in order to discuss and address problems, explore strategies for improvement, and ensure understanding of policies and responsibilities.

- The HUD-VASH Coordinator of the Waco VAMC gathers the status of every Veteran in the catchment area and forwards the information on a weekly basis to every case manager and to the Waco Housing Authority.
- The Lexington VAMC keeps staff at the Lexington Fayette Urban County Housing Authority informed via email of any changes in income, household composition, or other issues that may affect Veterans' housing.
- The HUD-VASH partners in DC developed an automated communication system in which all partners exchange information on the status of Veterans' housing applications and the identification and availability of units. The Department of Human Services enlisted the help of the D.C. Office of the Chief Technology Officer to develop customized, web-based project management software for the purposes of enhanced data sharing that would track both housing identification and client movement through the housing process. The VAMC in Tampa reports that the facility's HUD-VASH Coordinator has developed a similar automated system for tracking Veteran's status in the housing process.
- For smaller HUD-VASH programs, the spreadsheet developed by staff from the Harrisburg Housing Authority and Camp Hill VA facility is an example of a simple but very useful tool for keeping track of Veterans' status. Veterans' names are listed vertically in the first column, then horizontally are listed different types of information on the Veteran, such as



voucher issuance and expiration date, sources of income, inspection date and whether or not the inspection passed or failed, reinspection date, etc.

- The Des Moines Housing Authority management staff meet quarterly with VAMC case managers in order to identify barriers to finding housing or address other issues that Veterans and VA staff are facing.
- The Columbia Housing Authority and VAMC meet together to improve the program on a monthly basis. At each monthly meeting over the last year, the two agencies have educated each other on how these programs can work together. Topics discussed at meetings include HCV rent calculations, HQS inspections, and what kinds of housing units are acceptable. Representatives are also available at the monthly meetings to discuss the supportive services needs of the clients and possible community resources. The housing authority maintains that all of these efforts have helped obtain and keep Veterans in the program.
- Beyond having regular meetings and exchanges of information, the Vermont State Housing Authority maintains that the success of the PHA and VAMC partnership “hinges heavily on understanding how each organization works and the interpersonal relationships developed between VAMC staff and PHA staff.”
- The Oakland Housing Authority emphasizes the need for communication to be both open and honest, ensuring that partnering agencies have the freedom to let each other know when mistakes have been made. Flexibility and willingness to try different approaches also ensures that the partnership remains strong and the system continues to improve.

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## **9. Establishing, supporting, and relying on new partnerships**

Successful HUD-VASH sites work with a variety of program partners that often go beyond the traditional networks of social service providers and government agencies. Such partners include continuums of care, homeless shelters, Veterans Halls, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) offices, county and state offices of Veterans’ services, private businesses, private housing developers, faith-based institutions, and school district homelessness liaisons.

- Prior to the hiring of a VA case manager, the Butte County Housing Authority conducted outreach with dozens of such entities and was able to establish a substantive list of homeless Veterans interested in program participation.
- The Des Moines Housing Authority recommends maintaining contact with many different service providers in order for them to keep HUD-VASH in mind when they are working with a Veteran.
- The [Community Partnership](#) in Washington, DC developed relationships with a number of businesses, including Target, which has provided gift cards to HUD-VASH Veterans for

the purchasing of household items after signing a lease. As described under Practice #6, a number of PHAs and VAMCs have made similar connections with local vendors to help Veterans with furniture and other household items.

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## **10. Effective coordination between city, county and state PHAs**

All housing agencies work with other housing agencies that operate in a nearby community or that serve the county or state area. Establishing a system for ports and other shared activities involving HUD-VASH among PHAs with adjacent jurisdictions can eliminate future headaches and confusion. Many PHAs emphasized, as well, the value of sharing best practices and strategies for addressing common problems with other HUD-VASH PHAs in the same metropolitan, county, or state area.

- The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA), the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA), and the Long Beach Housing Authority have created a uniform HUD-VASH housing application for use by all three agencies in order to reduce time and confusion on the part of VA case managers.
- In addition, HACLA and HACoLA have signed an MOU that allows the agencies to execute HAP contracts for HUD-VASH in each others' jurisdictions. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (the Georgia State PHA) and the Fulton County Housing Authority signed an interagency agreement to similarly administer vouchers in the other PHAs' jurisdictions. Such arrangements eliminate the administrative burden of portability and give Veterans a wider selection of housing options nearby. PHAs interested in a such an arrangement need to verify that leasing in another PHA's jurisdiction is allowable under state law.
- The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the state public housing agency, serves as a leader and coordinator of other PHAs administering HUD-VASH in Massachusetts. DHCD hosts a quarterly working group for all HUD-VASH PHAs, VAMCs, and other stakeholders in the HUD-VASH program. The meeting serves as an open forum where participants provide updates on leasing rates, challenges, and best practices. DHCD also provides information and facilitates discussion on topics timely to the program, such as the FY 2010 Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for project-based VASH vouchers. This assistance has allowed PHAs, VAMCs, and developers to better coordinate their efforts to prepare successful proposals and bring more Veterans' housing to the region.

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## **11. Dedication to Veterans served**

The most common denominator among all effective and efficient HUD-VASH programs is a high level of dedication and commitment to the Veterans served. Drawing on this dedication, successful agencies put a great deal of effort into the program at the front end, with less activity and urgency required later in the program after Veterans have been housed and the majority of vouchers have been utilized.

- **Making an extra effort:** Other PHAs make special efforts to go the extra mile to ensure that Veterans are comfortable. For example, the Oakland Housing Authority conducts in-home briefings if requested by clients, while the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority holds initial intake appointments at the VA so that new clients' introduction to HUD-VASH is in a comfortable environment. For Western New York partnering agencies, when a Veteran wishes to live outside of Erie County, staff from the Belmont Housing Resources for Western New York drive with the VA Case Manager to meet up with the Veteran. The agencies gather paperwork, orient the client, meet the landlord and conduct an inspection of the prospective unit. As described by Sean Lindstrom of Belmont Housing Resources, "I have a very close working relationship with the case managers of the homeless program at the Buffalo VA. If it were not for our mutual dedication to our Veterans we would not be able to communicate and work as effectively as we do."
- **Prioritizing HUD-VASH:** Many PHAs reported efforts made to prioritize all activities related to HUD-VASH applications, such as income verifications and HQS inspections. The Fort Worth Housing Authority clearly marks "VASH" on the files of Veterans so that staff in all departments know that processing should be expedited when a VASH file or document hits their desk.
- **HUD field offices chipping in:** All HUD field offices around the country have demonstrated extraordinary commitment to HUD-VASH and to helping partnering agencies ensure that Veterans are stably housed. It is impossible to list here all of the innovative practices implemented by field offices in support of HUD-VASH partnering agencies. A few examples, however, are provided below.
  - Staff from the field office in Louisville, KY, have organized a "Dash for VASH" initiative that involves outreach efforts at shelters, community centers and church soup kitchens to spread the word about available HUD-VASH vouchers. Individuals working in multiple HUD departments, as well as VA employees, participate in these periodic events.
  - In Jacksonville, FL, staff from the Public and Indian Housing (PIH) field office have reached out to organizations that are military friendly (such as the American Legion and Fleet Reserve Association) to inform them about gaps in program funding. The organizations now provide funds for security deposits and other move-in costs for homeless Veterans participating in HUD-VASH.

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## **12. Dedication to ending homelessness**

Another common denominator among the most successful HUD-VASH sites is a high level of dedication not only to the HUD-VASH program, but also to broader efforts to end homelessness. Effective agencies have demonstrated their understanding of the interconnectedness of HUD-VASH and these broader community efforts, as well as how homeless programs depend on each other for addressing client-specific needs, exchanging knowledge, attracting resources, and building community support for a common cause.

- **PHA homeless programs:** The Butte County, Columbia, Fresno, and Fort Worth Housing Authorities all have staff and/or offices designated specifically to serving homeless families and administering homeless programs. These agencies have demonstrated heightened awareness of the importance of HUD-VASH within their communities' continuums of care for the homeless. Their HUD-VASH programs have benefitted from the knowledge base, relationships with landlords, and partnerships with service providers that had already been established, enabling the efficient processing of HUD-VASH applications and leasing of new vouchers.
- **Alternatives to VASH:** For those homeless and/or low-income Veterans that do not qualify for VASH, other housing assistance options often are limited or difficult to access. With this in mind, the Las Vegas VAMC, the HUD field office in Las Vegas, and community partners organized a "HUD-VASH Alternatives" housing fair for those Veterans that did not qualify for HUD-VASH and were homeless or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. The event took place on November 21, 2011, and 61 Veterans attended. Participating vendors included grantees of the Supportive Services for Homeless Veterans (SSVF) program, Habitat for Humanity, and Consumer Credit Counseling. The partnering agencies will hold another HUD-VASH Alternatives fair in May that applies lessons learned from the first fair, which include:
  - Ensure that the vendors that attend can offer housing assistance and other resources that Veterans can access immediately.
  - Have a sufficient number of VA staff and other agency staff or volunteers on-hand to help Veterans fill out applications.
  - Hold separate fairs for different groups of Veterans (i.e. women, older Veterans, etc) with the vendors that attend offering services and assistance that meet the unique needs of each group.
  - Ensure that the space for the event and resources offered can accommodate the number of Veterans that are likely to attend.

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