

COVID-19

Homeless System Response: Staff Capacity: Considerations for Scaling Up

Across the country, there is an urgent need to increase staff capacity for new and existing programs throughout communities' homeless crisis response systems. In response to a variety of emerging factors related to the coronavirus pandemic—including an influx of new resources, staff absences, and the need to scale up additional crisis response and housing services—many communities are focused on hiring and repositioning staff. This resource outlines a number of considerations for community leadership as well as program managers and directors involved in hiring processes.

Expanding & Diversifying Staff

- Consult with and hire people with lived experience, including former participants of shelter and housing programs.
- Ensure that your methods for advertising open positions are reaching a wide, diverse audience (e.g., expand to new listing sites, local newspapers, local groceries, laundromats, food pantries, and social media).
- Reduce barriers to employment so that potential, quality applicants are not unnecessarily excluded from your applicant pool (e.g., education or residency requirements).
- Engage local leaders, politicians, funders, and other supporters to help promote job openings and generate interest in homeless crisis response system employment.
- Draw new applicants from non-traditional sectors (e.g., laid off workforce from food service or hospitality, graduate pools from colleges and universities, temp agencies, mutual aid organizations, and [Medical Reserve Corps](#)).
- Assess and take inventory of strengths among existing staff to consider opportunities for repositioning to meet emerging needs and support staff coverage in the event of absences due to illness or personal needs.
- Leverage existing city, county, or state dept. staff whose roles may be on hold due to the pandemic.

Hiring Processes

- Use social media platforms to promote staffing needs and post position openings.
- Offer public-facing, virtual information sessions for interested applicants to learn more about the available positions.
- Operationalize remote hiring practices, such as using virtual employment application processes and reference check tools.

Hiring and Retention Incentives

- Offer sign-on bonuses and/or retention bonuses to incentivize applicants and new staff.
- Offer [hazard pay](#) for front-line staff at higher risk for exposure to coronavirus.
- Offer competitive salaries whenever possible to increase employee retention.

Assuring Staff Safety and Well-Being

- Assure prospective applicants that your organization is committed to their safety by promoting your adherence to state and local health department directives, training on personal protective equipment (PPE) and protective measures, screening staff before starting work, requiring staff to stay home if ill, and providing PPE to staff as needed—especially to those in medium- to high-risk positions.
- As applicable, ensure your sick leave benefits account for federal [Families First Coronavirus Response Act](#) requirements and inform applicants and staff of this important benefit.
- Offer accommodation and repositioning of staff with health risks away from high-risk positions.
- Foster a workplace culture that supports employee self-care and consideration for mental health needs.
- Adopt and actively promote Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and related services that support staff well-being.

On-Boarding and Training

- Use remote on-boarding and training opportunities for new staff (e.g., online learning management system).
- Incorporate infection control and mitigation and self-care topics into your staff training, such as proper use of PPE, engaging clients effectively while maintaining physical distance, secondary trauma, and taking care of yourself while taking care of others.
- Cross-train staff in roles similar to the primary position they were hired for to increase flexible staffing options in the case of staff absences or new program staffing needs.
- Stand up new projects by utilizing a blend of new and existing staff to embed expertise early on and accelerate ramp-up period (e.g., for temporary non-congregate shelter, new rapid rehousing).

Leveraging Partnerships to Build Capacity

- Engage in partnerships across systems to ensure access for participants to needed health and employment benefits, childcare, and other assistance, ultimately freeing up time for housing and shelter staff to focus on addressing immediate needs and increasing prevention and rehousing efforts.