Strategies for Coordinating the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program

About this Tool

This guide describes how Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) grantees and sub-grantees can coordinate HPRP services with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs.

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

HPRP funding provides a valuable new resource for communities to serve households that are homeless or at-risk of homelessness, and it is vital that individuals and families receiving HPRP support are also able to link into existing mainstream resources. For many households, a disruption in employment or health care may lead to financial or housing crises; conversely, housing crises can lead to employment or health instability. Therefore, access to TANF-funded services, including housing assistance, cash assistance and subsidized employment, may be an important strategy for preventing or shortening episodes of homelessness and stabilizing household income, housing and health. This guide includes an overview of TANF and HPRP, a description of strategies HPRP grantees and sub-grantees can use to coordinate with TANF providers and models from other communities.

FUNDING: SNAPSHOT OF ARRA FUNDING FOR HPRP AND TANF

The HPRP program, administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, provides $1.5 billion in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) resources for state and local governments to use to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless and help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized. Eligible grantees include metropolitan cities, urban counties and states for distribution to local governments and private non-profit organizations. HPRP may be used by grantees to assist eligible households with financial assistance (including rental assistance, security and utility deposits, utility payments, moving cost assistance and motel/hotel vouchers) and housing relocation and stabilization services (including case management, outreach and engagement, housing search and placement, legal services and credit counseling).

The Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program is a key mainstream resource that already serves some households experiencing homelessness or housing crises that could lead to homelessness. In addition to the annual TANF block grant allocations to states, up to $5 billion in ARRA resources is available for FY 2009-2010 through a new program, the TANF Emergency Fund. Under this program, each state can receive up to 50 percent of its annual TANF block grant allocation in additional funding. The TANF Emergency Fund can be used to reimburse states for up to 80 percent of increased spending to provide: 1) non-recurrent, short-term payments (e.g. up to four months of rental assistance for families experiencing homelessness, security deposits and first month's rent, utility assistance); 2) basic assistance (cash grants to low income families) if a state has increased caseloads; and 3) subsidized employment. Generally, states must show that they have increased expenditures compared to an equivalent quarter in FY 2007 or FY 2008, whichever is lower.

TANF: AN OVERVIEW

TANF provides temporary financial assistance to families in need, while simultaneously providing employment and training services to move program participants towards self-sufficiency. Families that receive TANF cash assistance are subject to time limits that vary by state.

States determine how families can apply for TANF assistance, and there are many different models among the 50 states. Some states have consolidated application processes for households applying for TANF, Medicaid, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits (also known as Food Stamps). In all states, TANF participants must attempt to find employment while receiving assistance,. Some state policies allow flexibility regarding time limits and work requirements. However, state policies regarding compliance vary widely, and many states have established assessment procedures and special programs to address the needs of families facing significant barriers to employment or obstacles to compliance with work requirements including serious illness, disabling health conditions and others.

Even before the recent economic downturn, a significant number of low-income families were neither employed nor receiving TANF or cash disability benefits. These families often have high barriers to employment, including limited education, poor mental health, or other disabling health conditions, and are likely to be at heightened risk for homelessness or housing crises. As a result, it is likely that some of the families seeking assistance from HPRP programs are potentially eligible, but not currently receiving TANF cash assistance or services. For some of these families, TANF application and assessment procedures and work program participation requirements may be daunting.

STRATEGIES FOR COORDINATING HPRP WITH TANF IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The HPRP program is a new resource designed to address the needs of families experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness. The following are examples of approaches HPRP grantees and sub-grantees can use to ensure HPRP clients are linked to TANF services for which they may be eligible.

Coordinated Entry

- HPRP programs should be implemented in collaboration with existing multi-service centers or agencies where low-income families can have “one-stop” access to a range of services including enrollment in TANF and other benefits. Multi-service centers are a particularly effective strategy for rural areas which typically have fewer community-based organizations. The **State of Virginia** ensured that HPRP program funding for rural and non-metro areas went to providers that participate in broad collaborations including community action agencies, food banks, veterans’ organizations, churches and government social services offices. In rural and non-metro areas, with fewer nonprofit agencies, the local department of social services may be the best location for clients to access or get referrals to HPRP resources. Strong linkages with local employers are also essential in rural areas, where the lack of job opportunities makes it very difficult for clients to comply with TANF rules requiring participation in work activities. Coordinating with local employment one-stop service centers is another good cross-system building strategy in these areas.
- To enhance access to TANF assistance, HPRP grantees may utilize an existing coordinated entry system, with case management assistance, standardized intake processes, guidelines and forms, or explore developing a new system in collaboration with mainstream resource partners. Coordinated entry programs provide a client-centered program intake system, allowing clients to apply for multiple benefits at locations where they are already being served. Not all states have coordinated, online application processes for TANF. However, in some states, such as **Ohio** and **Washington**, mobile benefits buses or vans provide improved

access to services, including TANF. Washington's mobile benefits buses will start service in early 2010, and will be staffed by case managers who can screen families for TANF eligibility. Households that pass the initial screening will be referred to a local office to complete the process. These models provide potentially eligible clients with broader access to programs and services and show promise for increasing rates of access in rural and other underserved communities. See State of Ohio example below.

Tailored Services

- By coordinating TANF and HPRP funding, communities can help ensure that housing assistance provided to eligible families is at the appropriate level and duration. For TANF programs, homelessness is often assessed as a barrier to work, so case workers assist families experiencing homelessness to obtain housing assistance in an effort to help them comply with the TANF work requirements. Households that require only minimal rental assistance to sustain or access new housing, but are eligible for TANF assistance, should utilize housing assistance options through TANF. Households requiring more than four months of housing may be better served by medium-term rental assistance funded through HPRP. Families who receive short-term rental assistance through TANF can also be referred to HPRP programs for housing search assistance, landlord mediation, or case management services. TANF and HPRP funding can be coordinated and administered by a single agency, allowing families a "seamless" application process. For example, in **Alameda County, California**, families experiencing a housing crisis can complete a single application without having to figure out whether they should apply for TANF or HPRP housing assistance. Program staff will use standardized assessment tools to determine the most appropriate source(s) and type(s) of assistance based on the family's needs and eligibility.

Staff Training

- Training on TANF eligibility requirements and enrollment procedures can help HPRP staff to better assist program participants in applying for benefits for which they may be eligible. In addition, HPRP program staff can work with local TANF staff to raise awareness of their clients' housing status and make timely referrals for prevention or rapid re-housing services. For example, the **State of Utah** has held full-day training for all HPRP service provider staff regarding availability, eligibility, and referral procedures for mainstream resources. See State of Utah example below.
- HPRP training for TANF staff would also help them identify potentially eligible program participants and make appropriate referrals. TANF staff should have a good understanding of HPRP resources, eligibility criteria, access locations, and referral procedures. If TANF staff is informed about HPRP resources, they are more likely to identify clients with housing crises and make timely referrals for prevention or rapid re-housing services.

Case Study: Coordinated Entry and Service Provision

The **State of Utah** is working with local jurisdictions to align HPRP activities with funding from other ARRA sources, including TANF and Medicaid. Beginning in April 2009, the State embarked on a mission to streamline the existing services system and develop a standardized intake process, guidelines, and forms to better serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness. As part of its statewide, collaborative strategy, Utah has organized and formed the Centralized Intake Task Force, which has developed a virtual centralized intake system for each area of the state. Individuals and families may access available assistance at any entry point, including Medicaid, TANF, Food Stamps, SSI/SSDI and the State's General Assistance program. The intake system will streamline administration of assistance programs by limiting the number of agencies actually providing the assistance but offering multiple points to access services in a "one-stop" setting. Case managers and homeless shelter staff will be able to determine eligibility for multiple programs, including HPRP and TANF assistance, using a standardized intake form. Agencies administering mainstream resources have signed an information sharing agreement. In conjunction with HPRP funding, Utah plans to target its $4 million in TANF Emergency funding, to serve families experiencing homelessness. Clients will be able to access this assistance through the coordinated intake system in each region.

Case Study: Coordinated Entry

In **Ohio**, the Ohio Benefit Bank is a web-based computer program which screens low- and moderate-income residents for eligibility for a variety of assistance programs, including TANF, health insurance, food assistance, child care, and housing assistance . The program is offered through a public-private partnership that includes the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food banks and more than 400 faith-based, non-profit, governmental and private sector partners. The program operates a mobile benefit bank van (the "Mobile Express") to reach underserved communities and to provide the flexibility to set up at public events. The Ohio Benefit Bank has more than 2,700 trained counselors who are staffing the more than 700 Benefit Bank sites across the state. One site, the Community Action Agency of Columbiana County, became involved because many residents who utilize their food pantry or winter heating assistance program will not go to the Department of Job and Family Services to obtain services. Residents can do a quick check, and if they learn they are eligible, they can continue the process and complete the application. Staff provides the results of the initial assessment and then the resident determines if they want to continue the process.