



Jump Start Tool: Rapid Re-Housing for Youth

This Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) for Youth Jump Start Tool is intended to help Continuums of Care and providers quickly design Rapid Re-Housing projects that meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. The tool includes descriptions of RRH project strategies that embody key principles of youth-centered programming and incorporate the core components of: housing identification, rent and move-in assistance, case management and services.

The tool is supplemented by:

- Rapid Re-Housing for Youth Checklist focused on system, project, and participant-level considerations for RRH for youth
- Rapid Re-Housing for Youth Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) related to implementing RRH for youth
- Rapid Re-Housing for Youth Toolkit (coming soon) which is a library of sample tools and forms that can be adapted for use by RRH for Youth projects

Project Design Principles and Core Components of Rapid Re-Housing for Youth

Rapid re-housing is a promising strategy for youth experiencing homelessness who cannot return quickly to a family living situation and do not have other near-term housing options to pursue.

Rapid Re-Housing should be integrated into a CoC's broader homeless response system, so youth who need housing assistance to resolve their episode of homelessness can be prioritized appropriately and can consider RRH among other available options. The coordinated community response to youth homelessness may need to help youth overcome direct barriers to housing—such as obtaining identification, finding

ways to mitigate insufficient credit and/or rental histories, and searching for housing. These actions should take place as quickly as possible when youth have been identified by the homeless response system, whether while in emergency shelter or transitional housing, through street outreach or a day shelter, or directly by the RRH project.

The guidance in this tool builds on the [Core Components of Rapid Re-Housing](#), published by the National Alliance to End Homelessness and developed in coordination with the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the U.S. Department of

Veterans Affairs. While RRH projects are tailored to local needs and are intended to be participant-directed, at a minimum they all should offer the following core components:

- Housing Identification
- Rent and Move-In Assistance
- Case Management and Services

The RRH provider might not provide all of these elements directly with their own staff and funding, but instead may

Housing Identification

Outcome: Youth will be assisted in securing permanent housing based on their needs and preferences.

Landlord Recruitment and Retention

Being able to access permanent housing units is a critical component of Rapid Re-Housing. Projects serving youth have unique challenges when operating RRH projects, such as finding landlords who will lease to youth under the age of 18 or youth with extremely low incomes, poor or no rental history, and poor or no credit.

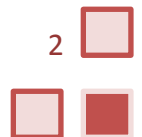
Strategies to recruit landlords might include hosting landlord recruitment and appreciation events focused on youth homelessness and reaching out to organizations that have an interest in serving youth such as faith-based organizations, LGBTQ groups, and affordable housing associations. There are probably providers in your community well-versed in securing

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work with community partners and mainstream resources to provide elements of the services. Regardless of whether the assistance is funded with HUD sources or provided by the RRH agency, all components should fit together seamlessly. While youth may opt out of certain components of the project, budgets and staffing should be established so that all enrolled project participants have access to the full range of housing assistance and services that RRH can offer.

private market units for youth. For example, projects that support youth in transitioning from foster care to adulthood deal with some of the same challenges and might have tips to share regarding finding good landlords for youth. Find them and talk to them! Landlords who are supportive of youth experiencing homelessness or who routinely rent to youth (such as near colleges or universities) can help create a pool of youth-friendly landlords.

Developing and maintaining partnerships with landlords is critical to expediting the housing search process. This is a time-consuming task, and many communities have found it beneficial to have specialized staff dedicated to recruiting and supporting relationships with landlords instead of delegating



this responsibility to their case managers. Using a team approach, these specialized staff can offer leads on housing vacancies in units managed by partner landlords. Other RRH staff accompany youth in visiting and applying for units.

The reality is that some youth will have a difficult time in their first (or second or third) housing placement. Mistakes will be made as a natural part of the learning experience. However, when there is limited access to housing, it especially makes sense that RRH projects would want to maintain good relationships with landlords, which includes calling the landlord to check if participants have paid their portion of the rent, providing a phone number that is staffed 24/7 in case a situation arises that requires mediation, and establishing an open relationship with the participant so that they feel comfortable problem solving challenging issues with their case manager.

Developing strong practices to mitigate risk such as a double damage deposit and home visits to reduce concerns about property damage or assisting the youth to move out without an eviction and the project's guarantee to fill the unit. Projects may also offer additional incentives to take youth who are perceived to be more risky if budget allows. Projects should never promise to help the landlord avoid all problems related to renting to youth; however, stressing that staff will do their best to help resolve problems that occur with participants—

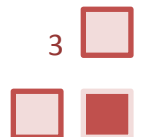
which is more support than other tenants receive. And always do what has been promised.

Help Youth Find and Secure Appropriate Rental Housing

Participants' preferences for housing should be taken into consideration when locating housing and staff should provide hands-on assistance in securing housing. Consideration should also include access to transportation, education and employment opportunities, and community services.

Helping to identify and select among various permanent housing options based on the unique needs, preferences, tenant screening requirements, and financial resources of the youth is key to obtaining housing. A key element of developing housing stability plans is helping youth think through potential options. Staff should have conversations with youth to determine what is important to them regarding housing—location, safety, disability accommodations, etc.—to provide choice and protect youth.

However, helping youth navigate tradeoffs and consequences of choices relative to their needs and preferences is also important. This includes helping youth understand the local housing market, including costs included in the rent versus those that will need to be paid separately, rules associated with available properties, transportation options, etc.



Even when the available properties do not match all youth needs and preferences, staff can help youth prioritize what is important to them in the short- and long-term to ensure youth are positioned to thrive.

Did you know that shared housing is an option?

Both the CoC and ESG programs can be used to support project participants who want to live in shared housing, defined as housing with at least one other person who is not considered a part of the participant’s household. The project participant must still have a lease or sublease that meets all applicable requirements. All housing for which rental assistance payments are made must meet FMR and rent reasonableness standards. The FMR for shared housing is the lower of the FMR for the family unit size or the pro-rata share of the FMR for the shared housing unit size. The size of the bedroom, (i.e., if it is a large master bedroom versus a small bedroom) is not considered in the FMR determination but is considered in the rent reasonableness determination. Any roommate that does not meet the project’s eligibility assistance would not be allowed to receive rental assistance or supportive services through the RRH project.

Living with roommates or family members in shared apartments is a common strategy for people with low and moderate incomes and young people in general. Youth might

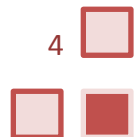
prefer to live with roommates, partners, or family members to meet their needs for companionship and shared housing costs. It is important to be open to a young person’s preferences in this area. Case managers should expect to help youth through issues that might come up related to living with other people, and mediation is a role that staff should be prepared to offer. Written “roommate agreements” can cover—and minimize—some of the issues that are the source of conflicts: chores, visitors, food, noise, etc. Projects should also be able to accommodate people who prefer to live alone—no one should be required to live with a roommate.

Address barriers

In order to quickly obtain permanent housing, youth will need assistance to overcome barriers such as lack of rental or credit history, low or no income. They may also need help navigating the move-in process.



Leasing to a minor or young adult can present challenges, but is possible. Local laws dictate the age at which people may enter into contracts such as leases. A first step for communities planning RRH projects for youth is to develop an understanding of the circumstances under which youth under 18 may obtain leases. Landlord-tenant organizations or legal aid programs can be good partners in navigating this issue.



Young adults in general have difficulty finding landlords who will lease to them if they have no prior rental or credit history. Landlords often require parents or other adults to co-sign leases. Rapid Re-Housing projects for youth may take on this role, in order to help youth secure housing. The RRH provider may be able to co-sign leases with youth, enter into three-party lease agreements, or may be required to use a lease-sublease model with certain youth such as minors. Regardless of the structure, the lease or sublease should specify the responsibilities of each party. The intent is to define and increase a participant's ability to manage tenant responsibilities to the point that the youth will ultimately take over the lease.

Assisting with lease up and tenant move-in can help the lease up process go more smoothly and be a hands-on learning experience for youth. For many youth, this is the first time they've secured a lease, and it will help them develop the skills they will need to obtain housing in the future. The lease-up process is also a great opportunity to employ Positive Youth Development practices! Staff can help youth think through the questions they should discuss with their landlord or property manager to understand the requirements for moving in—the move-in date, paying the deposit, etc. Youth should be able to make decisions about the types of items they need in their housing—e.g., for someone who knows how to cook, pots and pans might help the youth eat on a tight budget; for someone who is busy with school, a microwave might be a priority.

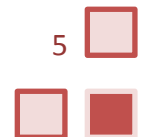
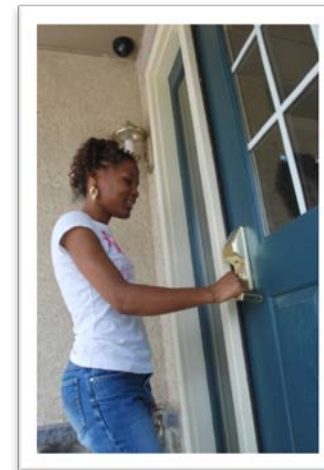
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Reviewing lease requirements together helps mitigate risk and understand what is required of them as tenants.

In partnering with youth during the move-in process, be sure to help them:

- Understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants
- Build their commitment and a sense of ownership of their housing situation
- Make sure move-in details are planned out and locate needed household items

While staff should be supporting the young person to navigate the move-in process, they must also be visible to landlords and establish lines of direct communication with landlords so they will reach out if there are signs of a problem – well before circumstances escalate and the landlord is considering eviction.



Rent and Move-In Assistance

Outcome: Youth may be assisted with financial assistance, including rental assistance, in order to maintain permanent housing.

Providing financial assistance for rent and utility deposits.

Assistance should be available for every participant, but actual amounts and duration may vary based on each youth's needs. Housing assistance should be determined on a case-by-case basis using a consistent assessment method. While some youth will not need the full amount available, projects should be as flexible as possible and should avoid arbitrarily capping assistance at lower levels than funders require. Paying deposits and other costs related to obtaining housing is essential, especially when youth might require multiple application fees, security deposit, first and last month's rent, and utility connect fees. The provider must be prepared to pay these costs immediately following the signing of a lease or during the application process, in order to help youth exit homelessness as quickly as possible. If possible, projects should try to identify flexible funding that can be used to provide financial assistance for other needs that pose a barrier for the youth to obtain housing – this flexible funding is sometimes referred to as “whatever it takes” funding, meaning providers can do whatever it takes to get the youth into permanent housing. It's important to note that these expenses require supplemental private funding if they are not eligible costs under federal grant programs.

Structuring rental assistance so youth pay no more than 30

percent of their income helps youth build savings or pay for other necessary items. A “progressive” assistance model should be used to determine the amount of rent to be paid by youth on a monthly basis. Progressive financial assistance means that the youth is assisted with the least amount of subsidy necessary, for the shortest period of time necessary to maintain housing. Financial assistance must also be flexible, depending on income fluctuations and the youth's spending decisions. Some projects also create and maintain savings accounts for youth in lieu of rent increases, and participants gain access to savings upon project exit.

When first working with a participant, it can be difficult to predict the person's longer term needs for rental assistance or supportive services. Project experience indicates that awareness of critical needs can take as long as 3 to 6 months. For this reason, securing tenant-based rental assistance or other longer term housing subsidies might be identified as a need as the housing plan evolves. Rapid Re-Housing providers should be formally linked to their CoC's coordinated entry so that if case managers and participants determine that longer-term subsidies or support are needed, additional supports can be obtained without returning to homelessness.

Case Management and Services

Outcome: Youth will be offered case management and supportive services that contribute to housing stability, promote permanent connections, link to education and employment, and promote well-being.

Case management and supportive services are the third core component of RRH projects; however, services should be voluntary. Project supports should be focused on helping youth maintain stable housing and connect with needed resources in the community.

Intensive services (anywhere from 2-3 times per week to daily) may be needed initially and service needs may continue even after a youth appears to have stabilized in permanent housing. Even when youth participants have significant service needs, staff need to respect youth and allow them to determine which services they want and the intensity of their participation. Case managers can actively work to engage participants to communicate high expectations and should strive to make the services appealing and accessible, so participants are willing and able to participate.

To help implement youth-centered programming, staff should be trained in strategies such as Positive Youth Development, Harm Reduction, Trauma-Informed Care, and Motivational Interviewing. It may sometimes be easier to learn about these approaches than to implement them in practice. Staff should receive coaching as they begin to apply these practices and as

they work directly with youth and need support on specific issues. Routinely reviewing case notes and housing stability plans, asking for youth feedback, and observing staff interaction with participants and landlords helps supervisors identify areas where staff might need assistance in improving. Hiring staff that can empathize with youth while maintaining professional boundaries is important.



To increase the accessibility of services, staff should propose meeting in locations that are convenient to participants, such as at neighborhood businesses (assuming the space is conducive to holding potentially sensitive conversations), at nearby supportive service providers, or in the young person's home. Youth can contribute to the project design by providing input for how best to communicate with youth (for example, via text message), though projects may need to refine ideas to ensure they are consistent with agency policies and professional standards (e.g., establishing appropriate staff boundaries during service provision).



Case managers should have a case load ratio that allows them to adequately support participants. The more a young person feels like their case manager cares about them and works to support their needs and preferences, the more likely the youth will succeed. Oftentimes, obtaining housing is the first time youth have had a safe and stable place to be, and the

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transition can be challenging. Time and intensity of services must be considered to have the most successful outcomes for the project and youth.

Case load sizes are dependent on a variety of factors—how far the case manager has to travel to meet with participants, how intensively specific youth need to be served, and the roles of other supportive staff involved in serving participants.

Supporting youth in maintaining housing is the primary goal of rapid re-housing case managers. This means case managers or other staff need to foster independent living skills (budgeting, food, basic property maintenance, considerations related to having guests in the unit, etc.), support youth to understand and comply with lease obligations, and coordinate other supportive services as needed and desired by the youth. Case managers can help mediate problems and hopefully create a space that will allow youth to make mistakes and learn in a supported environment where consequences are not devastating.

Developing housing stabilization plans establishes goals and action items. Youth and case managers should develop plans together and ensure that they account for goals that evolve with the youth and are developmentally and personally appropriate.

