



# Strategies to Address Staffing and Service Shortages

During the COVID-19 pandemic, homeless service providers may face challenges in keeping sites open due to a shortage of staff or services. Staff, vendors, and healthcare partners may become ill or need to quarantine due to exposure, and supply chains may be impacted. To prevent shelter closings, programs should prioritize the delivery of shelter and basic need services for persons experiencing homelessness. This guidance identifies common challenges that may arise and possible solutions, as well as funding resources.

## Preventing Closure

Shelter is a lifesaving service for those in need throughout the pandemic.

**Considerations:** Determine the essential services or staff that are needed to keep the shelter open.

### Solution Steps:

- Before a shutdown is necessary, reach out to the Continuum of Care (CoC) to inform them of staffing issues and the minimum staff necessary for essential services (discussed below).
- The CoC should reach out to municipal partners and local emergency management to discuss the concern and identify staffing support.
- Have a shelter daily schedule ready to help temporary staff or volunteers understand critical roles and responsibilities.

**Remember:** After the shortage is over, acknowledge the staff, residents, volunteers, and vendors who helped with appropriate means to convey gratitude, such as praise or financial compensation.

## Staff Shortages Due to Illness or Exposure

Staff who are ill or exposed to COVID-19 need to follow [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) recommendations](#) and isolate or quarantine for ten days to prevent virus transmission to other staff, volunteers, and shelter residents. During a critical staff shortage, local public health authorities may advise that asymptomatic shelter staff may return to work after a shorter duration, provided they wear a mask at ALL times. They should not remove their mask on breaks or in common eating areas. This is in compliance with current CDC guidance. Staff should not be pressured to come to work if they are ill or exposed, nor should they bring children to work with them.

**Considerations:** In planning for staffing challenges, determine the minimum number of staff required to provide life-sustaining services, decide when contingency staffing plans should go into effect, and identify the key decision-makers who will make these determinations.

### Possible Shelter Staffing Solutions:

- Utilize existing staff from other parts of the organization (board members, leadership staff, program staff, and administrative staff).
- Utilize volunteers or volunteer groups who are supportive of the agency—possibly known volunteers that are within the organization’s networks.
  - Determine which critical responsibilities are most appropriately assigned to each volunteer.
  - Volunteers can work under the leadership of limited paid staff to augment staffing structures.
- Share staff between community programs and have the CoC facilitate this activity.
  - Programs can ask partner agencies to lend staff temporarily.
  - Pay another agency to temporarily use some of their staff.
- Seek out short-term employees through temporary staffing agencies.
- Reach out to former staff as appropriate, given separation circumstances, to determine if they would be interested in engaging in part-time work.
- Institute hazard pay, offer overtime to available employees, and offer additional compensation or paid time off for salaried staff. These techniques will incentivize existing, available staff to supplement the team.

- Use security vendor personnel to support daily activities. Programs can increase security contracts to provide temporary additional coverage. Recognize that additional training may be necessary to undertake new tasks.
- Ask residents if they are willing to help with some tasks. They should receive comparable compensation.

**Resources:**

- [Seattle Homeless Housing Project Models with Recommendations for Staffing and Roles](#)
- [Vermont Shelter Staffing Tool](#)
- [HUD Staff Capacity Considerations For Scaling Up](#)

## Food Shortages Due to Vendor Disruptions

There may be food delivery disruptions due to vendor staff illness or supply chain delays. Prepare now to utilize sole-source emergency contract vehicles for short-term substitutions as discussed below.

**Considerations:** Alternative ways to provide food for shelter residents.

**Solutions:**

- Order pizza or another delivery option; life-sustaining food with sufficient calories is the priority in an emergency.
- Contact local restaurants that may be able to provide food.
- Offer pre-packaged breakfast and lunch items that can be purchased in advance from grocery stores.
- Reach out to local emergency management to help identify disaster feeding resources for meal support like the Red Cross, community food banks, or feeding programs.

**Remember:** Homeless service providers need to share their COVID-19 protocols with any vendors who operate onsite in their programs.

## Lack of Available Health Care Partners

Healthcare partners may have staff who are ill or shifted to cover other services.

**Considerations:** Determine what equipment and training are necessary to monitor for COVID-19 and other illness symptoms in the absence of health care personnel.

**Solutions:**

- If staff are trained and accustomed to temperature checks and symptom screening, continue this practice.
- Purchase [automated temperature check machines](#).
- Check public health to determine if adjustments should be made to the threshold for when Emergency Medical Technician resources are requested.

**Resources:**

[Atlanta COVID-19 Client Triage Tool](#)

## Shortages in Supplies and PPE

Staff should not be asked to work in congregate settings without access to [proper personal protective equipment \(PPE\)](#).

**Considerations:** Determine the minimum amount of PPE necessary for staff to safely interact with shelter residents and carry out critical roles.

**Solution:**

- Ask current vendors, emergency management partners, or public health partners if they can provide needed supplies. Vendors have access to different suppliers and may be able to order items directly from these suppliers. For example, a food vendor may be able to order additional PPE supplies for a program.

**Resources:**

[CDC PPE Burn Rate Calculator](#)

## Funding Shelter Solutions

Emergency Solutions Grants program Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (ESG-CV) funding is available to cover eligible essential services and shelter operations costs for emergency shelters and temporary emergency shelters to prevent, prepare for, and respond to COVID-19. Review this resource for more information: [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Eligible ESG Program Costs for Infectious Disease Preparedness](#).