

City of Portland Strategy

HOUSING ACCESS & STABILIZATION: PREVENTION & RAPID RE-HOUSING

The goals of these programs are to assist households that are homeless to obtain permanent housing and to assist households at risk of homelessness to maintain permanent housing.

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND RAPID REHOUSING NEEDS

There is a rising demand for homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services from both individuals and families. These services address a number of barriers low-income individuals and families face that increase their risk of homelessness or prevent them from becoming rapidly re-housed after an episode of homelessness, including:

- Lack of income to pay monthly rent, utilities, etc.
- Lack of funds to pay initial move-in costs
- Inability to retain housing over time
- Involuntary displacement due to economic gentrification

One of the key factors behind the increase in homelessness is housing cost burden, or “rent burden.” 32% of Multnomah County households and 32% of Portland households are considered rent burdened, meaning they pay more than 30% of their gross income for rent/mortgage and utilities. Furthermore, 19% of Multnomah County households and 14% of Portland households pay more than 50% of their gross income for rent/mortgage and utilities.

Federal policy recommends that a household should not pay more than 30% of its gross income on housing costs. Households with rents that exceed this affordability standard frequently have to choose between paying rent/mortgage and purchasing other necessities like food and health care. Any crisis, from a medical emergency to job loss, can put a household with an extreme rent burden at risk of homelessness. (Refer to the cost burden table in the Housing Needs Assessment chapter.)

A recent evaluation of the Short Term Rent Assistance (STRA) Program, administered by the Housing Authority of Portland, supports the need for short-term rent assistance. Every agency that administers STRA funds exhausts its funds shortly after receiving them, and continues to turn away households requiring assistance.

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION AND RENT ASSISTANCE DESCRIPTION

The program provides flexible funding to community-based agencies for short-term or shallow rent assistance. These agencies provide financial assistance to clients facing eviction, and to households that are already homeless, so that they can obtain safe and decent housing off the streets and outside of the shelter system. Sometimes this will help re-house someone who is awaiting approval for long-term housing/rental assistance, such as Public Housing, Section 8, or McKinney-Vento funded Supportive Housing Program (SHP) or Shelter + Care.

Funding covers expenses such as move-in and move-out; first and last month's rent and security deposits; short-term monthly rent (full or partial); and other related expenses. Funds may not be used to subsidize other rental assistance programs such as Section 8.

The program also provides supportive services to participants who need help and intervention to maintain current suitable housing and/or to avoid displacement or eviction. Supportive services include linking clients to other community service providers who may be able to help participants overcome barriers to obtaining or maintaining housing.

Efforts are made to provide culturally appropriate services that will engage people with diverse backgrounds and needs.

PROGRAM TOOLS

- Flexible funds for short-term rent assistance and related expenses
- Supportive services

PROJECT SELECTION

The Housing Authority of Portland administers the Short Term Rent Assistance Program (STRA). At the time STRA was created, HAP held a competitive RFQ/RFP procurement process to identify the provider agencies that would distribute the funds to households in need. HAP selected 19 agencies. HAP expects to conduct a new RFP in the next 12-18 months.

Selection criteria will be included in the RFP materials. Consistent with the previous RFP, each applicant will be asked to:

- Identify the population it intends to serve;
- Demonstrate its experience with serving the identified population;
- Describe the needs of the identified population;
- Demonstrate adequate funding for supportive services;
- Describe funding sources for supportive services;
- Provide commitment letters from the service funding sources;
- Describe how interventions will be conducted;
- Describe how an individual or household's need for services will be assessed; and
- Describe how post-placement assistance will be provided.

PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Agencies that serve individuals, couples, and families with a gross household income below 50% MFI at the inception of assistance are eligible to apply for funds.

To receive short-term rent assistance and services, project participants are screened to ensure that they meet certain criteria at the inception of assistance:

- Household income at/below 50% MFI;
- Not already receiving Section 8 or other long-term financial assistance for permanent housing; and

- Homeless or at risk of homelessness.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS

- Limited funding for short-term rent assistance
- Insufficient funding for housing services to support housing success
- Insufficient funding for case management services that assist in the coordination and delivery of housing services.
- A decline in vacancy rates, reducing the likelihood that housing owners and managers will rent to individuals who do not meet standard tenant criteria.

PARTNER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Housing Authority of Portland: administers STRA, a tenant-based short-term rent assistance program

Multnomah County Human Services: partner in STRA

City of Gresham: partner in STRA

Many community-based non-profit agencies currently participate in STRA, providing shallow rent assistance, move-in costs, security deposits, and other flexible financial assistance to support households at or below 50 % MFI in permanent housing.

COMPLEMENTARY LOCAL, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL EFFORTS

Homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing activities were key components of the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. HUD intends to realign the Emergency Shelter Grant to carry out these critical activities. These activities are also key components of the local ten-year plan: *Home Again: A 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness in Portland and Multnomah County*, other local 10-Year Plans, and Oregon's 10-Year Plan.

GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AREAS (INCLUDING AREAS OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES AND/OR RACIAL/MINORITY CONCENTRATION)

Prevention and Rapid Rehousing services are available county-wide.

MONITORING

A description of PHB's Monitoring program is in Section One.