



## Guide for Effectively Engaging Landlords to Consider Renting using a Shared Housing Model

**Overview of Guide:** The purpose of this guide is to assist staff members who are actively engaging landlords to rent to individuals using a shared housing model, by accepting two or more adult individuals, who are not related, into a multi-bedroom unit. Key messaging points when engaging landlords in a shared housing model are below, and pages 2 through 5 provide more details on using this guidance.

### Key Points for Landlord Engagement with Shared Housing:

#### 1. Use Best Practices for Overall Landlord Engagement in any Housing

- Understand the perspective of landlords and seek to minimize their risks.
- Customer service is critical. Be available, consistent, and responsive.
- Describe whether the program will be the rent payor, to ensure timely payment.
- Explain any available landlord incentives, such as signing bonuses, damage/mitigation funds, and/or payment of deposits.
- Be strategic with housing placements. Find a unit that is going to be a good fit for the individual, landlord, and neighbors.

#### 2. Communicate to Landlords that Roommates Have Created Agreements or “house rules”

- Describe guidance that has been provided to potential tenants on how to be a good roommate, have jointly agreed to “house rules”, and have been trained in conflict prevention prior to sharing the unit.
- Highlight the availability of mediation, should that become necessary, between tenants and/or between tenants and the landlord.

#### 3. Explore Lease Options and Benefits

- Individual leases with each roommate ensure accountability of each roommate and easier on the landlord if one person has to leave.
- Shorter-term leases, such as month-to-month, allow more flexibility if the housing is not a good fit (the San Diego Continuum of Care has received federal waivers to allow for month-to-month rentals for some rental assistance programs).

#### 4. Highlight the Availability of any Ongoing Supportive Services

- Describe the availability of ongoing supportive services, including care coordination and conflict mediation.

#### 5. Be Up Front, Open, and Honest if one Roommate has to Leave

- Have a plan to identify a new roommate if one has to leave and convey it to the landlord from the start. Seek to cover the vacancy loss through contingency funds while finding a new roommate.

#### 6. Offer to Connect the Landlord with Other Landlords Who Currently Rent Units Through a Shared Housing Model

- Connecting landlords to their peers can be a good strategy if one is hesitant or has questions on renting using a shared housing model.

## **Guide for Effectively Engaging Landlords to Consider Renting using a Shared Housing Model**

### **Guidance Overview and Directions**

**Purpose of this Guide:** A critical aspect of expanding the concept of shared housing is effectively engaging landlords to opt in to leasing to persons experiencing homelessness in a roommate setting. The purpose of this guide is to help staff members providing housing search assistance for people experiencing homelessness throughout San Diego County to effectively engage, educate, and support landlords with opting in to renting using a shared housing model. For the sake of this guide, shared housing is defined as two or more un-related people choosing to live together in permanent housing and sharing housing costs. Simply defined as having a roommate(s).

Landlords are extremely critical partners in the work to address homelessness. Building and maintaining strong relationships between landlords and the homelessness response system is paramount in San Diego given low vacancy rates and the availability of rental units, especially at the lower end of the rent spectrum. Equally, many landlords, although business oriented, want to be a part of the community's efforts to end homelessness and can be champions. Many landlords already rent units to roommates, as approximately 40% of adult San Diegans live with a roommate.

This guidance details key points for staff to use to engage landlords with agreeing to a shared housing model. This guide was created based on input received from San Diego's homeless services providers as well as specific landlord engagement programs that solely focus on cultivating landlord partners to rent to people experiencing homelessness.

**General Landlord Engagement Tips:** This guide should be used within existing best practice frameworks for engaging landlords. Placing a strong emphasis on customer service and being responsive and available to landlords, having dedicated staff members responsible for housing location and landlord engagement, and the ability to offer flexible funds for housing lease up should be fully integrated into working with landlords. More details on best practice frameworks for engaging landlords can be found in HUD's [Housing Search Assistance Toolkit](#), HUD's recent guidance on [Landlord Engagement Strategies During COVID-19](#), and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness's [Landlord Engagement Core Components](#).

**When to use this Guidance:** This guidance should be used by staff members who are actively engaging landlords to rent units to people experiencing homelessness. Many organizations already have landlord engagement processes, programs, and staff that provide housing search assistance and are interacting with landlords to rent to persons in their programs. Some organizations may do this internally or some may partner with focused landlord engagement models in the region such as the San Diego Housing Commission's Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program (LEAP), the County of San Diego's Landlord Incentive Program, or the regional Flexible Housing Pool (FHP) operated by Brilliant Corners.

Staff members, commonly referred to as Housing Navigators, Housing Specialists, or Housing Locators – (referred to as Housing Search Assistance staff throughout this document) can incorporate this guidance into strategies currently in use to engage landlords, and specifically for leasing up units for roommates. It is important to note that the guidance below may need to be adjusted depending on the setting and resources that the staff have available.

### **Shared Housing Landlord Engagement Messaging Points and Guidance**

The following are messaging points and guidance to help engage landlords for opting into renting units using a shared housing model. Housing Search Assistance staff can use these messaging points in whatever ways makes sense for each landlord and roommate situation and feels natural within the landlord engagement process. The details of each of these points should be customized for each specific landlord.

It is extremely important that Housing Search Assistance staff using this guidance genuinely believe that shared housing is a viable housing option for most individuals experiencing homelessness and that people regardless of their challenges can be successful with a roommate. If staff members do not believe this, the likelihood of successfully engaging landlords to opt into a roommate model will be low.

#### **1. Use Best Practices for Landlord Engagement Regardless of Shared Housing or Non-Shared Housing**

As mentioned above, engaging landlords to rent units to people experiencing homelessness whether for shared housing or not, should incorporate best practices. This includes seeing this work from the perspective of the landlord and seeking to minimize the risk for the landlord such as rent loss, high turnover in units, unit damage, or evictions. A strong customer service-oriented approach is needed, and being available, consistent, and making sure the landlord knows they are not alone and have someone to call if there is an issue is important. Housing Search Assistance staff should advocate on behalf of the person in their program as needed and describe why the person will be a good tenant and roommate. Staff members should be strategic with their housing placements and do their best to ensure that unit will be a good fit for the landlord, surrounding neighbors, and the tenant based on their needs. And as available, staff should describe the availability of incentives to the landlord such as signing bonuses or damage/risk mitigation, financial support for lease up costs like deposit and application fee assistance, and most importantly that the rent will be paid on time if rental assistance is going to be provided.

#### **2. Communicate to Landlords that Roommates Have Created Agreements or “house rules”**

Ideally prior to roommates moving into a unit, staff members (Not necessarily Housing Search Assistance staff) have worked with the roommates to do some planning on discussing or setting house rules or even creating written agreements. Housing rules or roommate agreements can outline what each roommate is agreeing to do or not do, with the goal to prevent potential conflict from the

beginning. It is important that Housing Search Assistance staff convey this to the landlord. They do not necessarily need to describe what each roommate has agreed to but rather than the staff and roommates have taken pro-active steps to ensure stability as best they can within a shared housing setting. Regardless, if staff have not gone through a roommate agreement process with individuals, at the very least the Housing Search Assistance staff should relay to the landlord why the roommates will be good tenants.

### 3. Explore Lease Options and Benefits

**Separate Leases:** Housing Search Assistance staff should explore with the landlord the ability to enter into separate leases for each individual. Many landlords are open to this approach if requested and explained the benefits. There are several advantages to having separate leases in a shared housing setting for both the landlord and the tenant. With separate leases, each individual is accountable for their housing including their portion of the rent and actions. For the landlord it ensures that each person is accountable and if for whatever reason there is a problem with one tenant within the shared housing setting, the landlord can address the problem directly with that individual. For example, if someone has to leave the unit, the landlord can take action with that individual to exit the unit without having to vacate all persons in the unit, ensuring ongoing rental income from other tenants and it ensures that their housing stability is not jeopardized by the behavior of their roommate(s).

It should be noted that the majority of rental assistance programs such as rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing require each person to have a lease in their name. For programs that are using rental assistance to house individuals in their programs, having a separate lease for each tenant will often be required, but does not preclude pursuing shared housing with landlords.

Lastly, if the landlord is willing to pursue separate leases, staff may also seek to include separate utilities within the leases.

**Shorter-Term Leases:** When pursuing shared housing settings with landlords, Housing Search Assistance staff may want to explore the option of shorter-term leases. Shorter-term leases allow for more flexibility in the shared housing setting if the roommate situation is not working out or if a roommate wants to move out of the unit and have their own place. The length of the lease is up to each landlord, but staff may want to bring this up and see if potentially willing to do shorter-term leases such as a month-to-month lease. Because of COVID-19 and waivers through HUD, many of the federal rental assistance programs such as rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing programs are allowing for shorter-term leases. For example, the San Diego Continuum of Care (CoC) program received a waiver for all CoC and Youth Homelessness Demonstration Grant Programs (YHDP) that waives the required lease period of one year and shortens to a minimum lease period of one month.

### 4. Highlight the Availability of any Ongoing Supportive Services

If available, it is critical to convey to the landlord the availability of ongoing supportive services to roommates once in the unit. It is known that not all programs will be able to offer landlords ongoing supportive services, but if the program can provide support, this needs to be messaged. The Housing Search Assistance staff should also clearly articulate if there is a central point of contact that the landlord can call if there are any issues with the tenants. The Housing Search Assistance staff should describe the type of supportive services that will be provided to the roommates and specifically for a shared housing setting, articulate the supports with conflict resolution and mediation. Depending on the program model, the conflict resolution supports can be done in-house by the supportive services provider or could be done by a third-party mediator if necessary. Regardless of the program configuration, it is important to let the landlord know the availability of supportive services, that they have someone to call in the case of a problem, and that mediation supports are a part of the supportive services package.

#### **5. Be Up Front, Open, and Honest if one Roommate has to Leave**

Housing Search Assistance staff need to be up front, open, and honest about what will happen in the event that one roommate has to leave. Staff should have a plan in place to manage this situation from the beginning prior to the roommate moving in and communicate this plan to the landlord. Staff need to be able to clearly explain the process. Ideally, staff will convey to the landlord that if one roommate leaves for whatever reason, that they will quickly identify another potential roommate that will be a good fit for the unit. Throughout this process staff should maintain strong communication with the landlord. Housing Search Assistance should also outline the availability of funding to cover vacancy loss for the share of the rent that the landlord is not receiving from the roommate who had to move out. Some programs such as SDHC's LEAP program and the FHP with Brilliant Corners have funds to cover vacancy loss in a shared housing setting in situations where one roommate may have to leave.

#### **6. Offer to connect the landlord with other landlords you are working with who are currently renting using a shared housing model**

Connecting new landlords to other landlords that your program successfully works with can be helpful. This is true for shared housing and non-shared housing. Housing Search Assistance may find it useful if landlords are hesitant about renting to roommates to connect them with another landlord your program is already working with and having success with housing roommates. The peer to peer exchange among landlords may help ease concern of the new landlord who may be hesitant.