



THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON

March 1, 2016

A MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY SECRETARY

An Open Letter to the Grantees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program

The GPD Program has been providing community-based transitional housing with supportive services since 1994. The Department is grateful for the efforts of all our community partners who have worked for years to address the challenges facing Veterans experiencing homelessness. As VA and our Federal and community partners advance towards the goal of preventing and ending Veteran homelessness, and the landscape of needs and services change, it is important to make certain that the housing resources in each community are best-suited to ensuring that homelessness among Veterans is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

VA expects all grantees to work in partnership with local continuums of care and VA medical centers to make data-informed decisions regarding the types of housing interventions and approaches that will best enable your community to swiftly and directly resolve homelessness among Veterans. One innovation that we encourage grantees to pursue, which aligns with Housing First principles, is the utilization of GPD beds as Bridge Housing. The Bridge Housing model is transitional housing used as a short-term stay when a Veteran has been offered and accepted a permanent housing intervention, but access to that permanent housing is still being arranged. VA strongly supports GPD grantees examining the existing local housing resources and needs and, as appropriate, requesting a change of scope to convert a portion of their existing beds to Bridge Housing.

Through enhanced performance expectations, VA has seen continued improvements in GPD Program housing outcomes with more than 15,500 exits to permanent housing in fiscal year 2015. However, even with these improvements, we know that we need to continue to strengthen all parts of our homeless services continuum to resolve homelessness quickly. VA believes that all grantees should be taking steps to lower barriers to entry, reduce lengths of stay, and improve exits to permanent housing. I urge all grantees to consider how the suggestions outlined in this letter could best be incorporated into your programs, and expect that we will see continued progress on our path to transformation. Your agency's compassionate service to our Nation's heroes is commended, and we look forward to a continued partnership in this time of transition. Enclosed is a document that will provide additional information on VA's overall vision for the GPD Program.

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Questions or additional information about this letter should be directed to Mr. Jeffery Quarles, Director, VA GPD National Program Office, by email at Jeffery.Quarles@va.gov or Ms. Chelsea Watson, Deputy Director, VA GPD National Program Office, by email at Chelsea.Watson@va.gov, or by phone at 1 (877) 332-0334.

I appreciate your continued support and commitment to ending homelessness among Veterans.

Sincerely,



Sloan D. Gibson

Enclosure

**The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program
Vision Statement
December 2015**

The GPD Program has been providing community-based transitional housing with supportive services since 1994. As VA, our Federal and community partners advance toward ending Veteran homelessness and the landscape of needs and services for homeless Veterans evolves, it is important to ensure that the housing resources in each community are consistent with the Housing First approach; are being aligned with other programs and agencies; and are best-suited to ensuring that homelessness among Veterans is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

The Department's overall vision, in collaboration with Federal and community partners, for the GPD Program is to shift the program to eventually focus on and support three different types of transitional housing models:

- Bridge Housing – emphasizing short lengths of stay and rapid connections to permanent housing.
- Service-intensive transitional housing – transitional housing not being used as Bridge Housing, but in which Veterans are still actively working, with the assistance of appropriate services and supports, to achieve permanent housing as quickly as possible.
- Transition in Place housing – a housing model where Veterans are provided time-limited transitional housing assistance with the lease converting to the Veteran as their permanent housing after a short period of assistance.

The plan encompasses short-range, mid-range and long-range objectives for change to meet the current and future needs of homeless Veterans.

- *Short-range* plans include promoting improved access to services which can be accomplished with lower barriers to entry; promoting short-stay components which provide quick access to permanent housing, referred to as Bridge Housing; and reducing underutilized transitional housing beds.
- *Mid-range* plans involve examining the current transitional housing stock to ensure that transitional housing resources are aligned with the needs in each community.
- *Long-range* plans include those program modifications which would require legislative changes such as certain modifications to the per diem payment system and converting a portion of the national supply of existing transitional housing to permanent housing.

As these plans get implemented, VA is already actively encouraging community leaders—including GPD providers, the local Continuum of Care, and the VA Medical Center—to use data to determine how much and what type of GPD Program-funded housing, along with other housing interventions, will enable a community to most effectively and efficiently end homelessness among Veterans and to be able to meet future needs.

Following is a list of frequently asked questions regarding the GPD Program. Interested stakeholders are always encouraged to contact the GPD Program office at (toll-free) 1-877-332-0334 with questions.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD)
Bridge Housing
Frequently Asked Questions

VA believes that all grantees should be taking steps to lower barriers to entry, reduce lengths of stay, and improve exits to permanent housing. One innovation that we encourage grantees to pursue, which aligns with Housing First principles, is the utilization of GPD beds as “Bridge Housing”. The bridge housing model can offer grantees a level of flexibility to maximize the utilization of their transitional housing beds. VA strongly supports GPD grantees examining the existing local housing resources and needs and, as appropriate, requesting a change of scope to convert a portion of their existing beds to bridge housing. The following are some frequently asked questions related to the bridge housing model.

Question: What is Bridge Housing?

Answer: Bridge Housing is transitional housing used as a short-term stay when a Veteran has been offered and accepted a permanent housing intervention (e.g., Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)-VA Supportive Housing (VASH), Housing Coalition/Continuum of Care) but, access to that permanent housing is still being arranged. Bridge Housing is generally provided for up to 90 days. Goals in the Individual Service Plan (ISP) should be very short-term with the focus on a move to permanent housing.

In order to be successful in Bridge Housing, certain criteria should be met:

- **The Veteran needs a permanent housing plan.** At the time of admission, there should be a reasonable expectation that the Veteran will move into permanent housing within 90 days, as in the following circumstances: Veterans who have and/or are in the process of obtaining a HUD-VASH voucher; Veterans who have permanent housing located, but need assistance and/or extra time before they move in; and Veterans who may be able to regain their permanent housing after resolving short-term issues (such as in the case where a Veteran has been asked to leave his or her family’s home).
- **Collaboration with other resources (SSVF, HUD-VASH, local Housing Coalitions/Continuums of Care).** As part of the permanent housing plan, Veterans in Bridge Housing should have the resources available (such as SSVF, HUD-VASH, or some other resource) to help them move into permanent housing quickly.
- **Lower Barriers/Expectations.** Given the short timeframe of Bridge Housing, there should not be an expectation that Veterans in this “track” will complete many parts of the grant project’s established program. Goals in the ISP should be very short-term with the focus on the move to permanent housing, rather than the completion of treatment goals. Many Veterans in this track may also have

unresolved mental health or substance abuse issues that might keep them from participating in a traditional grant project program. Those issues should not be regarded as reasons to not link Veterans to appropriate permanent housing options.

Question: Can Bridge Housing be implemented without a formal change of scope?

Answer: The VA GPD National Program Office encourages GPD-funded organizations to submit a written change of scope request prior to implementing a bridge housing model. This will ensure that changes that differ from what was stated in the original application are documented and approved. In addition, this will help our office to ensure that the proposed change to providing short stay services are in line with the guidance our office has provided on Bridge Housing.

Question: Can we convert all the beds in our project to Bridge Housing?

Answer: No, you can only use up to 50 percent of your beds at any given time for Bridge Housing. The addition of Bridge Housing services to the services provided in the original grant application is seen as an enhancement of services and would be allowable under a change of scope. Changing the entire grant project to Bridge Housing would be a substantial change to the original grant application that would likely affect whether the original grant application would have scored as well in the year it was funded and would not be approved.

Question: Do we have to designate a set number of beds for Bridge Housing?

Answer: No, you do not have to designate a fixed number of beds for the Bridge Housing component to your program. Organizations will have a level of flexibility to maximize the utilization of their transitional housing beds, subject to the prohibition discussed above on conversions of over 50 percent of your beds.

Question: If we add Bridge Housing, will our per diem rate change?

Answer: Your per diem rate is based on the daily cost of care for your grant project, minus other sources of income up to the current maximum per diem rate. The Bridge Housing component would only impact per diem to the extent that calculation changed for your grant project (for example, daily cost of care increasing from the addition of 24-hour staff to support the Bridge Housing).

Question: What should we do if we have additional questions about Bridge Housing?

Answer: Contact the VA GPD National Program Office at 877-332-0334.

**Veterans Health Administration
February 25, 2016**