

SSVF COVID Response Staff Considerations

The COVID-19 public health crisis and resulting regulatory relief and budget increases for the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program have placed a tremendous amount of pressure on SSVF Grantees to increase capacity and expand the types of services they can offer in a very short period of time. Most grantees have responded to this pressure by increasing the number of Veterans they are serving, expanding the types and duration of services being delivered, and coordinating efforts to meet the needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in new and creative ways. To meet this increase in enrollment, grantees are encouraged to expand their capacity across relevant departments, including but not limited to: direct support, management/administrative or finance staff. Considerations for ramp up staffing:

Demand and Urgency

- The urgency of the COVID-19 health crisis demands that SSVF grantees **do not wait to increase staff capacity**. Don't wait until the demand is too over-whelming to plan and implement enhanced staffing.
- Grantees should **look at their current staffing patterns across their agency** and assess where the increase in demand is going to be felt the most and hire or contract accordingly.
- Grantees are **highly encouraged to increase their administrative capacity** to support the new staff and increased caseloads, and to process higher volumes of Temporary Financial Assistance requests.
- While temporary financial assistance is a key driver of SSVF's COVID response, the **SSVF Program Office recognizes that spending the TFA will require additional administrative, service and management capacity** to ensure SSVF can fully meet the needs of eligible Veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Quick Hiring – create jobs in a bad economy!

Hiring, either temporarily or permanently, or reorganizing staff quickly to support SSVF is critical. Here are some suggestions for increasing staff and adding capacity:

- **Ensure equity considerations inform your hiring and overall staffing activities and decision making.** Reach out to people with lived experience and strive to hire people who represent the Veterans you serve. Further, ensure a culture of equity supported by training is fully incorporated in your onboarding and ongoing professional development protocols.
- **Move people around or reallocate within your agency** to meet demand and back-fill gaps. Due to the crisis, staff in other departments may have been furloughed or have time to commit to eligible SSVF activities. Consider internal staff who can fill gaps in SSVF operations while resources are available.
- **Hire your volunteers.** Volunteers may already be familiar with many of your agency's mission, policies, practices and culture, which can help reduce training and onboarding demands.
- **Use volunteers strategically where it will be helpful.** Many people are looking for ways they can volunteer. Volunteers may be needed to support administrative staff, they can help with data entry, and they can convert paper documents to electronic ones, which supports staff working remotely.
- **Use temporary staffing agencies for quick hiring and onboarding.** From finalizing the contract to first retaining temp staff can take as little as one week. Coordinate with the staffing agency to ensure paired staff meet your specific needs.
- **Consider other organizations in your area that may have staff capacity to commit,** either through hiring or subcontracts. For instance, outreach workers or other social service staff who are furloughed or otherwise have capacity could support case management and administrative needs while more senior SSVF staff focus on higher level services and demands.
- **Consider temporary subcontracts or per diem with individuals to support administrative activities.** Similarly, hiring staff on as per-diem may help to obligate funds without the complexities associated with hiring full-time staff. For instance, you could hire temporary staff focused on EHA efforts and supporting food delivery and coordination of essential needs.
- **Project future funding considerations or typical staff attrition rates.** Given the current increase in resources and remaining FY20 funds from the normal grant cycle, grantees may be able to hire full time staff knowing that those costs will be absorbed into normal SSVF/organizational costs and staffing turnover over the next 6-12 months.

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Staff Management and Care

- **Invest in necessary and appropriate technology** to support your staff in staying connected with their clients and agency leadership and management. An 'open door' policy is tough to support virtually, but ensuring staff have the technology to attend virtual video calls and check-ins can help staff to feel supported.
- Check-in and Self-Care
 - Self-Care is not just a suggestion it is a necessity, make time to check-in with:
 - **Brief, daily video-based staff or team meetings** to report out on what they did that day, continue a culture of accountability, quality, and team building.
 - **Feel Good Fridays (FGF):** Don't talk about work. Games, charades, etc. Staff take turns being in charge of a FGF.
 - **Talk about our mental health and be honest about the stressors on front line staff and managers alike.** It is not taboo. Times are hard for everyone, acknowledging the stress is important and beneficial.
 - Refer staff to the **Employee Assistance Program** through HR as necessary and available.
 - **Model self-care** (for real) with your Team: "walk the walk/talk the talk", take days off, and make sure personnel policies are reflective of the current public health crisis.
 - **Sends monthly emails or written notes** with health tips, weekly video; weekly staff "walks" where staff talk while walking separately; Virtual Talent Show; photo contests; Fun Fridays: share best tv binge-watching shows; recipes; scavenger hunts in their own home office.