

# Trainer's Guide: Support Services for Veterans Families Homelessness Prevention—Screening and the Threshold Score

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## About this Resource

### Purpose of Training

This document provides a framework for delivering training around SSVF homelessness prevention, including eligibility and targeting screening and use of the threshold score. This training covers information to help the audience:

1. Understand the importance of careful screening and prioritization for homelessness prevention.
  - a. Research shows that up to 80% of very low-income households experiencing a housing crisis will not become literally homeless, even if they are not assisted.
  - b. There will always be more applicants for assistance than funds available.
  - c. To end homelessness, funds must be carefully triaged to those at the very highest risk: Intake must be able to identify and redirect people with lower risk of becoming literally homeless to other community resources.
2. Utilize the threshold score effectively.
  - a. Determine the best threshold score for your program based upon target goals and number of eligible applicants.
  - b. Identify the implications of your score for your program design, staff training, and community partnerships.
  - c. Develop criteria for selecting among eligible applicants who meet the threshold score when there are too few openings in your caseload to assist all.
3. Determine appropriate supports for staff making intake decisions.
  - a. Assure clarity for utilizing intake criteria and process.
  - b. Consider shared/reviewed decision-making rather than a solo staff responsibility.

### Target Audiences

This training is targeted towards:

- SSVF Managers
- Supervisors
- Intake Staff
- Case Managers

This training can be used with audiences of 4-30+.

### Preparation

***Trainees must be able to work in small groups of 2-10.*** Chairs can be moved, but it's very helpful for the audience to sit around small tables.

There are three sets of materials, based on three different hypothetical SSVF programs (differing in terms of target population, number of applicants and geographic areas) and the applications from

SSVF-eligible Veteran families they received in one month. **Each small group will work on one of the three sets.** If the audience is very small, they may work on one or two sets; if the group is quite large, the same program can be assigned to more than one group.

Ideally, the training will include at least two small groups so that they can share similarities and differences for at least two programs (suggested: #1 and #2). Alternatively, if there is only one small group, members could work on two sets.

A **PowerPoint** explains the research, rationale, and process for SSVF Homelessness Prevention screening. The trainer can use a PPT projector or provide paper copies, but should talk the entire group through the slides before beginning the activity. Experience shows that few staff are familiar with this material and it's important as context for the activity.

*Each trainee should receive the following training materials (attached):*

- The PowerPoint
- One (or two, depending upon group size) of the three hypothetical program descriptions (divide groups in advance)
- The list of eligible households who applied for assistance in one month for that program
- Discussion Questions for Small Groups
- A copy of the Homelessness Prevention Eligibility Screening Disposition Form, which includes points associated with household situations and characteristics

## Training Agenda

### A. PowerPoint:

The PowerPoint explains the rationale for the SSVF homelessness prevention (HP) screening process and targeting criteria and how they are used to triage and prioritize eligible HP applicants. This is a difficult judgment to make, as it is impossible to predict “housing stability.” The SSVF screening process is designed to make intake decisions more objective and transparent.

### B. Explain the activity.

The PowerPoint includes the explanation. It’s very helpful to also stress:

- The attendees are acting as “consultants” to help the program select the best targeting threshold score; ***they are not actually deciding which households to assist.***
- ALL cases described in the exercise are already determined to be ***eligible*** (they are Veterans, with incomes under 50% AMI and have no other housing options/resources/supports). But the program cannot assist all of them; the threshold score helps the program prioritize among these households.
- The goal is not to end up with a score that screens in exactly as many applicants as open program slots. The list of cases in the exercise represents a specific month of eligible applicants, but next month the program may have more vacancies and fewer applicants (or vice versa). ***It will never be possible to select a threshold that results in a pool of applicants that precisely matches the openings in the program’s caseload.*** The goal of the threshold score is to come closer to this match. The hypothetical programs each have three openings but they have from 4-12 eligible applicants for each opening.
- Because there may still be too many eligible applicants after scoring, the “consultants” should recommend ground rules for selecting among those households who pass the threshold—such as “first-come,” most imminent housing loss, youngest children, or most vulnerable if homeless. It’s good to have a consistent way of making these decisions. The Shinn research included in the PowerPoint may be helpful here.
- In looking at the cases that pass the proposed threshold, what issues do the “consultants” notice that may affect the program’s design, partnerships in the community, etc.? For example, if the threshold score is very high and the ground rules recommend selecting the households with the most imminent housing loss, the program must be able to respond ***very*** rapidly, sometimes on the same day, and probably should have quick access to legal assistance.

**C. Allow about 30 minutes for the activity** (45 minutes if a small group is completing the exercise for two programs rather than one)

### D. Discuss as a large group.

Some points that may be inserted into the conversation as appropriate:

- Sometimes, even when acting as “consultants,” it’s hard to divorce the score from the person. Attendees may try to create a profile of the “ideal program participant,” score

that ideal person/household, and use that score as the program threshold. This approach rarely works as intended: the resulting score can be too low to effectively reduce the pool of potential intakes. Often, attendees feel bad about screening people out on the basis of a score when they really seem to need help. This reflects the difficulties of making intake decisions. ***How can the program help intake staff with screening and referring applicants to other community resources rather than opening an SSVF case?***

- The higher the score, the more applicants will be screened out. If the program is having trouble meeting its target, a lower score may be best. Or if there are many, many eligible applicants, a higher score will make more sense. One of the hypothetical programs must screen out 4 eligible households for every 1 they accept; another must screen out 12 for every intake. Does the comparison between the different programs in this activity demonstrate this?
- Most programs report that the screening process is helpful to Intake staff, giving them an “objective” reason for saying NO. What other processes can be built into screening so that one Intake staff is not solely responsible for making the final decision?
- What do attendees think of their own program’s threshold score? Is it too high (does it screen out too many households)? Too low (does it screen out too few)? Could an exercise similar to this be used to help them identify a more effective score?
- Do the attendees’ SSVF programs have ground rules that help select among equally qualified, eligible households? If not, should they develop them? Consistency and transparency in decision-making is not only fair, but it is also easily communicated to partners who make referrals to SSVF Homelessness Prevention.
- Does everyone understand the reason for the threshold score and the ground rules? Does it help the program? Does it help participants? Do you think it more effectively prevents homelessness?
- Does the threshold score suggest the hypothetical programs should undertake any specific staff training, program design, or program partners? Do the applicant households who would be screened IN with the new threshold resemble the target applicants in the program description? If not, how do they differ—and why?



## Handout—Program #1

The Veterans United program covers an extensive geographic area, including *nine large rural counties*. The program is funded at \$520,000 to serve 75 Veteran households. 30 families will be assisted with Homelessness Prevention with an average of \$2500/household in Temporary Financial Assistance.

The program assists *families with minor children*. The typical HP household has a parent(s) who is recently unemployed and is doubled up with family or friends. The focus is on connecting the parent(s) with employment, budgeting and possibly relocation to more affordable housing to avoid homelessness.

In an average month, *the program receives 12 HP applications from eligible Veteran households to fill 3 program vacancies*. The director has hired you as a consultant to recommend a threshold score that would help select among eligible individuals/households. You asked for a list of one typical month of eligible HP applicants to help you decide what score to select. The director also asked you to analyze any implications of the recommended threshold score for the program design, screening process, partnerships and staff training.

Refer to the list of eligible applicants for [Program #1](#)

## Handout—Program #2

The Every Veteran’s Home is one of two SSVF programs sharing a *city with a population of one million*. The program is funded at \$520,000 to serve 75 Veteran households. 40 households will be assisted with Homelessness Prevention with an average of \$2500/household in Temporary Financial Assistance.

The program assists singles and *households with children*. The typical HP household has an adult who is recently unemployed and is doubled up with family or friends. The focus is on connecting the Veteran with employment, budgeting and possibly relocation to more affordable housing to avoid homelessness.

In an average month, *the program receives 36 HP applications from eligible Veteran households to fill 3 program vacancies*. The director has hired you as a consultant to recommend the threshold. You asked for a list of eligible HP applicants for one month to help you decide what score to select and any implications of the threshold for the program design, screening process, partnerships and staff training.

Refer to the list of eligible applicants for [Program #2](#)



## Handout—Program #3

The Veterans Community program covers a *large metropolitan area*. The program is funded at \$520,000 to serve 75 *single female Veterans*. 30 women (with or without children) will be assisted with Homelessness Prevention with an average of \$2500/household in Temporary Financial Assistance.

The typical female Veteran is recently unemployed and is doubled up with family or friends. The focus is on connecting the Veteran with employment, budgeting and possibly relocation to more affordable housing to avoid homelessness.

In an average month, *the program receives 24 HP applications from eligible Veteran households to fill 3 program vacancies*. The director has hired you as a consultant to recommend the threshold. You asked for a list of the eligible applicants for one typical month to help you decide what score to select and any implications of the threshold for the program design, screening process, partnerships and staff training.

Refer to the list of eligible applicants for [Program #3](#)

## Eligible Applicants for Program #1

(One copy per participant assigned to Program #1)

<p><b>Case 1 (score—6):</b> The Veteran household is doubled up with a friend who has told them they must leave because her lease doesn't allow "unauthorized tenants" and the landlord is asking questions about whether the family is living there. The family has one child, 3 years old.</p>
<p><b>Case 2 (score—13):</b> The Veteran has income under 15% AMI, and has a court order to leave current housing within 14 days. The Veteran served in Iraq and has a 15-year old son; the household was homeless last year, spending three months sleeping in their car.</p>
<p><b>Case 3 (score—15):</b> The Veteran household lost employment one year ago, recently lost unemployment benefits and has no current income. The family, including 3 children ages 2, 3, and 4, is doubled up but has to leave within 3 weeks. They are also being sued by their prior landlord for rental arrears.</p>
<p><b>Case 4 (score—14):</b> The Veteran household (two parents and an infant) has moved three times in the past 60 days after losing employment and being evicted. The household's income is significantly reduced to unemployment benefits, which places the household at 20% of AMI. Their apartment building was foreclosed and they have 6 days to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 5 (score—9):</b> The Veteran household has two pre-school children, is doubled up with a family member, but the host's landlord has given them two weeks to leave or the host will be evicted.</p>
<p><b>Case 6 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household has one 11-year old child and will lose their housing in 6 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 7 (score—9):</b> The Veteran household has two children under six, income less than 30% AMI and is doubled-up temporarily with friends who have given them 30 days to find another place to live.</p>
<p><b>Case 8 (score—10):</b> The Veteran household is living in a hotel but they can only pay for three more nights and the hotel manager has told them they must be out by noon on the fourth day. They have one child (7 years old). The Veteran served in Iraq.</p>
<p><b>Case 9 (score—10):</b> The Veteran household is a single mom who is pregnant and has one child who is 2 years old. They will have to leave their apartment in 5 days. Their income is 20% AMI and they have both rental and utility arrears.</p>
<p><b>Case 10 (score—14):</b> The Veteran household, which includes one child (age 12), is doubled up due to job loss six months ago. Their host has given them one week to move out. Their income is 27% AMI and they owe significant utility arrears.</p>
<p><b>Case 11 (score—8):</b> The Veteran household includes 2 children, ages 13 and 15. The Veteran lost employment and they have been told by their landlord that they will lose their apartment at the end of the month (18 days) due to rental arrears.</p>
<p><b>Case 12 (score—11):</b> The Veteran household has two children under age 6, they are temporarily doubled up, and their income is under 30% AMI. They have been told by their host that they have 21 days to find their own housing.</p>

## Eligible Applicants for Program #2

(One copy per participant assigned to Program #2)

<p><b>Case 1 (score—12):</b> The Veteran family is living in a hotel, after moving two or more times in the past 60 days, but they only have enough money for one more week at the hotel. The Veteran has been unemployed for nearly one year. Their income is less than 30% of AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 2 (score—6):</b> The Veteran household is doubled up with a friend who has told them they must leave because her lease doesn't allow "unauthorized tenants" and the landlord is asking questions about whether the family is living there. The family has one child, 3 years old.</p>
<p><b>Case 3 (score--3):</b> The Veteran lost employment 3 months ago, has two months of rental arrears and a thirty-day eviction notice from her landlord.</p>
<p><b>Case 4 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household lost employment 3 months ago, has rental arrears and has been given an eviction notice to move out. The deadline is 18 days from now.</p>
<p><b>Case 5 (score—6):</b> The Veteran served in Iraq, lost employment six months ago and recently lost unemployment benefits. He was unable to pay the rent and received a 30-day eviction notice. The household includes three children, ages 7, 9 and 11.</p>
<p><b>Case 6 (score—14):</b> The Veteran has applied for disability benefits but was denied. After doubling up with 3 different friends during the past 60 days, the Veteran spent a two weeks in a shelter before a relative agreed to provide temporary housing for one week only—the deadline for him to move out is now 5 days away. The Veteran was previously homeless in this shelter three times in the past year.</p>
<p><b>Case 7 (score--5):</b> The Veteran household recently lost employment, has rental arrears and has been given 20 days' notice to move out of his apartment.</p>
<p><b>Case 8 (score—14):</b> The Veteran, who served in Afghanistan, will be released in 8 days from a sentence of 30 days in jail and reunited with her two children, ages 5 and 8. She will be unable to secure utilities due to significant arrears from her last apartment.</p>
<p><b>Case 9 (score—6):</b> The Veteran lost housing when the landlord raised the rent beyond the amount she could pay. She is now doubled up with a relative but the relative's landlord says this is a lease violation and they must move out within 14 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 10 (score—4):</b> The Veteran lost employment and was unable to pay rent. The landlord has given a thirty day notice to move or be evicted.</p>
<p><b>Case 11 (score—13):</b> The Veteran has income under 15% AMI, and has a court order to leave current housing within 14 days. The Veteran served in Iraq and has a 15-year old son; the household was homeless last year, spending three months sleeping in their car.</p>
<p><b>Case 12 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household lost employment four months ago and is now doubled up with a friend who has given them 30 days' notice to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 13 (score—15):</b> The Veteran household lost employment one year ago, recently lost unemployment benefits and has no current income. The family, including 3 children ages 2, 3, and 4, is doubled up but has to leave within 3 weeks. They are also being sued by their prior landlord for rental arrears.</p>

<p><b>Case 14 (score—6):</b> The Veteran's income is 25% AMI; the Veteran is being evicted within 7 days for lease violations.</p>
<p><b>Case 15 (score—11):</b> The Veteran, who served in Iraq, is being discharged from detox within 24 hours. The Veteran has been homeless twice in the past year.</p>
<p><b>Case 16 (score—14):</b> The Veteran household (two parents and an infant) has moved three times in the past 60 days after losing employment and being evicted. The household's income is significantly reduced to unemployment benefits, which places the household at 20% of AMI. Their apartment building was foreclosed and they have 6 days to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 17 (score—8):</b> The Veteran household has an income below 30% AMI, is losing housing within 5 days, and is recently unemployed.</p>
<p><b>Case 18 (score—6):</b> The Veteran has moved twice in the last 60 days, is now doubled up temporarily with a friend and must move out within 30 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 19 (score—8):</b> The Veteran is recently unemployed and is now temporarily doubled up with a family member who has given her ten days to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 20 (score—7):</b> The landlord has informed the Veteran household that they must move out—the deadline is 3 days away. The household has rental arrears and income below 30% AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 21 (score 16):</b> The Veteran household has experienced 3 episodes of homelessness in the past two years, including one brief episode last month, and has moved 3 times in the last 60 days due to economic factors—from one doubled-up situation to another. The household income is zero. The host has given the household until the end of the month to move out (21 days).</p>
<p><b>Case 22 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household has one 11-year old child and will lose their housing in 6 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 23 (score—14):</b> The household is temporarily doubled up but must leave within 3 days. The Veteran was homeless and spent time living in her car three months ago and also one month ago. Her income is 15% AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 24 (score—7):</b> The Veteran served in Afghanistan and has recently lost employment. The landlord has refused to renew the month-to-month lease, so the household has to vacate within 9 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 25 (score—9):</b> The Veteran household has two children under six, income less than 30% AMI and is doubled-up temporarily with friends who have given them 30 days to find another place to live.</p>
<p><b>Case 26 (score—13):</b> The Veteran household has a history of homelessness but is now temporarily doubled-up with a friend. The host wants the household to move out tomorrow. Household income is 15% AMI and they have substantial rental arrears from their last two rental housing units.</p>
<p><b>Case 27 (score—10):</b> The Veteran household is living in a hotel but they can only pay for three more nights and the hotel manager has told them they must be out by noon on the fourth day. They have one child (7 years old). The Veteran served in Iraq.</p>
<p><b>Case 28 (score—6):</b> The Veteran household is doubled-up but the host's landlord has given them 10 days to move out or he will evict the host.</p>
<p><b>Case 29 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household is losing housing within 21 days due to recent job loss and has rental arrears.</p>

**Case 30 (score—17):**

The Iraq Veteran household has moved 3 times in the past 60 days because they couldn't pay the rent. They are now living in a hotel but can only pay for 3 more days. Their current income is \$0. The household stayed briefly in a shelter during the past 60 days and the Veteran has a long history of multiple episodes of homelessness with rental arrears owed to three landlords.

**Case 31 (score—10):**

The Veteran household is a single mom who is pregnant and has one child who is 2 years old. They will have to leave their apartment in 5 days. Their income is 20% AMI and they have both rental and utility arrears.

**Case 32 (score—14):**

The Veteran household, which includes one child (age 12), is doubled up due to job loss six months ago. Their host has given them one week to move out. Their income is 27% AMI and they owe significant utility arrears.

**Case 33 (score—8):**

The Veteran household includes 2 children, ages 13 and 15. The Veteran lost employment and they have been told by their landlord that they will lose their apartment at the end of the month (18 days) due to rental arrears.

**Case 34 (score—9):**

The Veteran is currently in hospital after being injured while living on the street for six months. He will be discharged within 2 days and has no housing options.

**Case 35 (score—7):**

The Veteran household is doubled up, has an income under 30% AMI and owes rental arrears.

**Case 36 (score—16):**

The Veteran household has moved three times in the past 60 days because they have zero income and cannot pay rent. They have moved from one doubled-up situation to another. Their current host's landlord says they have one week to move out or she will evict the host. The household has a history of homelessness, staying in a shelter four times in the past two years, including one episode a month ago.

## Eligible Applicants for Program #3

(One copy per participant assigned to Program #3)

<p><b>Case 1 (score—12):</b> The Veteran family is living in a hotel, after moving two or more times in the past 60 days, but they only have enough money for one more week at the hotel. The Veteran has been unemployed for nearly one year. Their income is less than 30% of AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 2 (score—6):</b> The Veteran household is doubled up with a friend who has told them they must leave because her lease doesn't allow "unauthorized tenants" and the landlord is asking questions about whether the family is living there. The family has one child, 3 years old.</p>
<p><b>Case 3 (score—3):</b> The Veteran lost employment 3 months ago, has two months of rental arrears and a thirty-day eviction notice from her landlord.</p>
<p><b>Case 4 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household lost employment 3 months ago, has rental arrears and has been given an eviction notice to move out. The deadline is 18 days from now.</p>
<p><b>Case 5 (score—6):</b> The Veteran served in Iraq, lost employment six months ago and recently lost unemployment benefits. He was unable to pay the rent and received a 30-day eviction notice. The household includes three children, ages 7, 9 and 11.</p>
<p><b>Case 6 (score—14):</b> The Veteran has applied for disability benefits but was denied. After doubling up with 3 different friends during the past 60 days, the Veteran spent a two weeks in a shelter before a relative agreed to provide temporary housing for one week only—the deadline for him to move out is now 5 days away. The Veteran was previously homeless in this shelter three times in the past year.</p>
<p><b>Case 7 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household recently lost employment, has rental arrears and has been given 20 days' notice to move out of his apartment.</p>
<p><b>Case 8 (score—14):</b> The Veteran, who served in Afghanistan, will be released in 8 days from a sentence of 30 days in jail and reunited with her two children, ages 5 and 8. She will be unable to secure utilities due to significant arrears from her last apartment.</p>
<p><b>Case 9 (score—6):</b> The Veteran lost housing when the landlord raised the rent beyond the amount she could pay. She is now doubled up with a relative but the relative's landlord says this is a lease violation and they must move out within 14 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 10 (score—4):</b> The Veteran lost employment and was unable to pay rent. The landlord has given a thirty day notice to move or be evicted.</p>
<p><b>Case 11 (score—13):</b> The Veteran has income under 15% AMI, and has a court order to leave current housing within 14 days. The Veteran served in Iraq and has a 15-year old son; the household was homeless last year, spending three months sleeping in their car.</p>
<p><b>Case 12 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household lost employment four months ago and is now doubled up with a friend who has given them 30 days' notice to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 13 (score—15):</b> The Veteran household lost employment one year ago, recently lost unemployment benefits and has no current income. The family, including 3 children ages 2, 3, and 4, is doubled up but has to leave within 3 weeks. They are also being sued by their prior landlord for rental arrears.</p>

<p><b>Case 14 (score—6):</b> The Veteran's income is 25% AMI; the Veteran is being evicted within 7 days for lease violations.</p>
<p><b>Case 15 (score—11):</b> The Veteran, who served in Iraq, is being discharged from detox within 24 hours. She has been homeless twice in the past year.</p>
<p><b>Case 16 (score—14):</b> The Veteran household (two parents—mom is the Veteran--and an infant) has moved three times in the past 60 days after losing employment and being evicted. The household's income is significantly reduced to unemployment benefits, which places the household at 20% of AMI. Their apartment building was foreclosed and they have 6 days to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 17 (score—8):</b> The Veteran has an income below 30% AMI, is losing housing within 5 days, and is recently unemployed.</p>
<p><b>Case 18 (score—6):</b> The Veteran has moved twice in the last 60 days, is now doubled up temporarily with a friend and must move out within 30 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 19 (score—8):</b> The Veteran is recently unemployed and is now temporarily doubled up with a family member who has given her ten days to move out.</p>
<p><b>Case 20 (score—7):</b> The landlord has informed the Veteran that she must move out—the deadline is 3 days away. She has several months of rental arrears and income below 30% AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 21 (score 16):</b> The Veteran has experienced 3 episodes of homelessness in the past two years, including one brief episode last month, and has moved 3 times in the last 60 days due to economic factors--from one doubled-up situation to another. Her income is zero. The host has given her until the end of the month to move out (21 days).</p>
<p><b>Case 22 (score—5):</b> The Veteran household has one 11-year old child and will lose their housing in 6 days.</p>
<p><b>Case 23 (score—14):</b> The Veteran is temporarily doubled up but must leave within 3 days. The Veteran was homeless and spent time living in her car-- three months ago and also one month ago. Her income is 15% AMI.</p>
<p><b>Case 24 (score—7):</b> The Veteran served in Afghanistan and has recently lost employment. The landlord has refused to renew the month-to-month lease, so the she has to vacate within 9 days.</p>



## Homelessness Prevention Screening Activity

(One copy per training participant)

### Questions for Small Group

1. What threshold score are you proposing for this program?
2. How did you decide the threshold score? What factors did you consider?
3. *How many of the applicants would pass this threshold score?* How many would **not** qualify for SSVF Homelessness Prevention (i.e. they would be screened out and referred elsewhere because their score was too low)?
4. If your proposed threshold score results in many more qualified applicants than vacancies, what should the program do to select participants? For example, if on a specific date the program has one vacancy and four applicants meet all of the eligibility criteria and meet or exceed the targeting threshold score, how would the program decide which applicant to accept? What **“ground rules”** could be used to help make the final intake decision?
5. If you propose a high threshold, in what ways would this affect the program’s design, budget, supervision, training, program partners, etc.? Does the pool of accepted program participants fit with the program’s description of their target population? If not, how could the program be modified to fit the participants who would be accepted under this new threshold?
6. How well is your **actual** program threshold score working? Do you think it needs to be changed? Raised or lowered? Why?
7. Does your program have ground rules for deciding among eligible applicants when there are fewer openings than households? Do you think this would be helpful?
8. What is your program’s process for making Intake decisions? How does (or could) the program support Intake staff when they have to make these tough decisions?