Washington State Department of Commerce

Reducing Barriers, Expanding Access:

Strategies for Low-Barrier Service Delivery

Consolidated Homeless Grant Program

HOUSING WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 2026

Invest. Build. Serve.

We foster resilient communities

















Introductions and Background

Who we are

Who you are

What You're Going to Learn:

- Intro to Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG)
- Low barrier approach
- Low barrier in practice
- Making the change

Consolidated Homeless Grant

The Consolidated Homeless Grant (CHG) is Washington's largest funding source for local homeless crisis response systems to end and prevent homelessness.

Low Barrier Approach and Why

- Reduce barriers to entry and increase access to safe and stable housing.



- Everyone deserves access to housing and support.

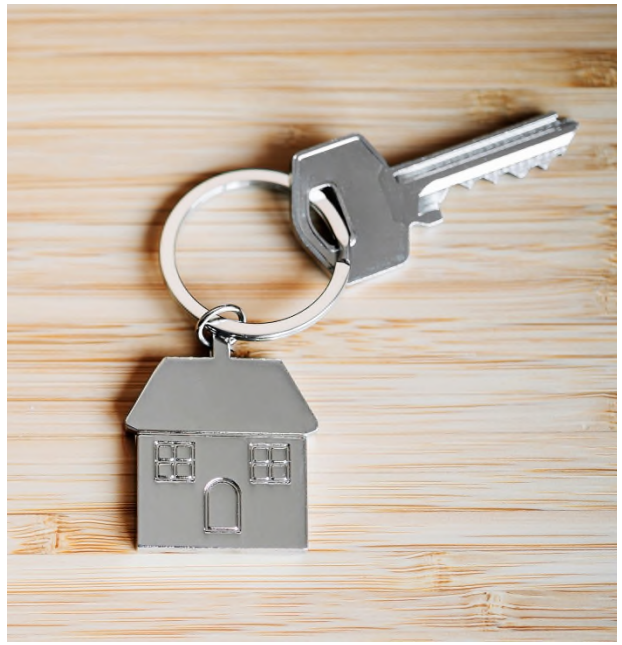
Screen people in, not out!

- Low barrier housing programs eliminate obstacles for households by having minimal requirements for:
  - Access/enrollment
  - Remaining enrolled in the program

- This approach aims to reduce barriers to entry and increase access to safe and stable housing.

Key Features

- Minimal eligibility criteria
- Focus on immediate housing needs
- Acceptance of households with high vulnerabilities
- Flexible support services
- Trauma-informed approaches
- Non-discrimination



Shift in Mentality

Low barrier service models are rooted in inclusion and person-centered practices, so that anyone seeking the safety of shelter or housing has access.

Access

Flexible Intake and Anti-discrimination

✓ Projects designed to serve families with children experiencing homelessness ensure equal access regardless of family composition and regardless of the age of a minor child.

✓ Projects that operate gender segregated facilities allow the use of facilities consistent with the person's gender expression or identity.

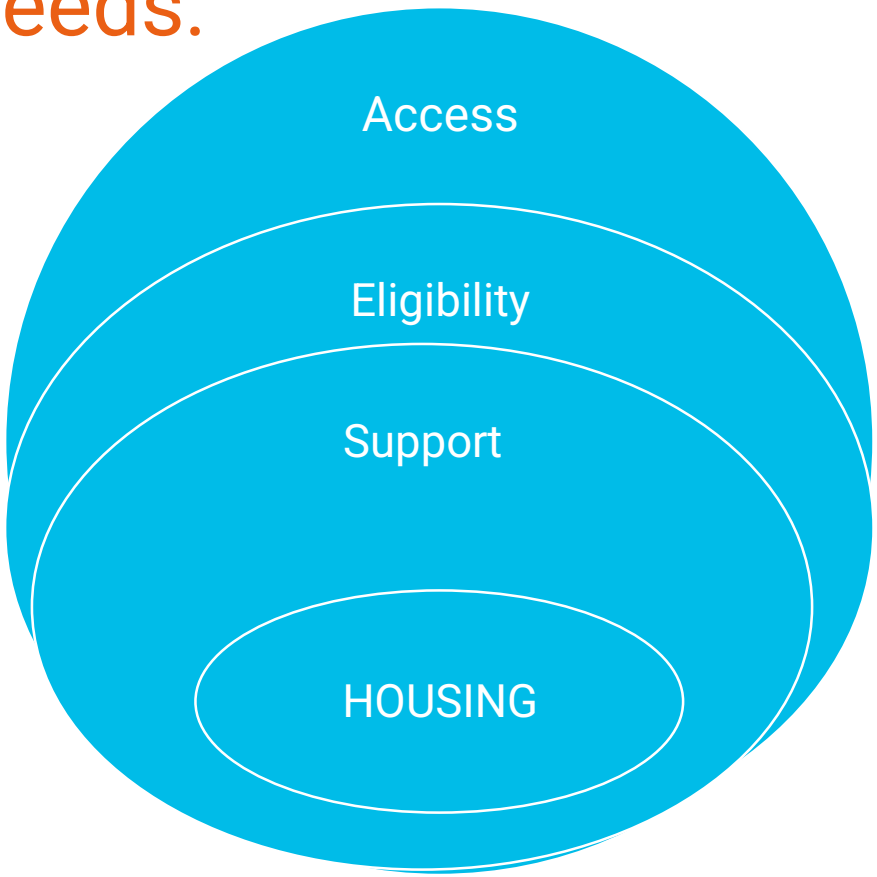
Households should not be screened out based on the following:

- ✓No or low income
- ✓Poor credit, rental history or criminal background
- ✓Active or past substance use
- ✓Lack of ID or U.S. residency status
- ✓Refusal to participate in treatment, religious services or labor
- ✓Perceived lack of “housing readiness”

Access – things to think about

Service Provider needs:

- Documentation
- Client file forms
- Good outcomes



Individual needs:

- Safe place to be
- Food to eat
- Transportation

Supporting Access

Service Provider



Lived Expert



Scenario: Rapid Rehousing (RRH) Project Access Requirement

- Outdated Practice

Program requires ID and birth certificates for children at intake.

- Low barrier practice

Programs should assist households with obtaining identification documents.

Participation

The relationship is the intervention!

Set the tone for services…

- Welcoming
- Clear expectations
- Building foundation of trust and understanding individual needs
- Set up for success – expect the best!

Voluntary support services

Mandatory Services- NO!

- Substance Use Treatment
- Religious sermon
- Budgeting class
- Group counseling
- Meetings on rigid schedules
- Mandatory # job applications

Case Management- YES!

- Meet case manager regularly
- Housing stability planning
- Housing navigation services
- Strategies to increase income
- Access to healthcare
- Access to treatment

CHG Low Barrier Participation Expectations

Service Provider



Lived Expert



Scenario: Shelter Project Participation Requirement

- Outdated Practice

Shelter program requires daily goal sheets are completed before accessing the shower in the morning.

- Low barrier practice

Participants should not have to complete a chore or task to earn a shower.

Support and Services

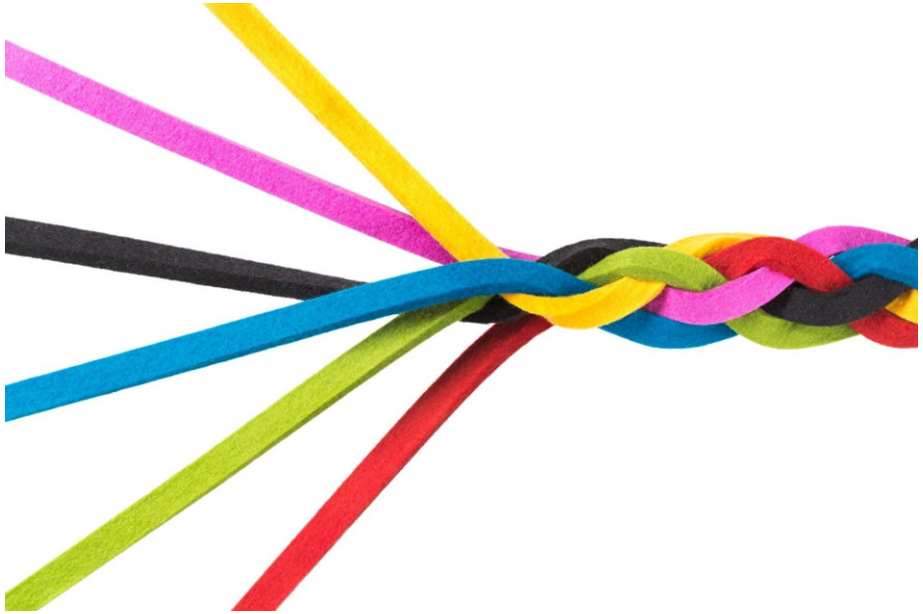
Support = Success!



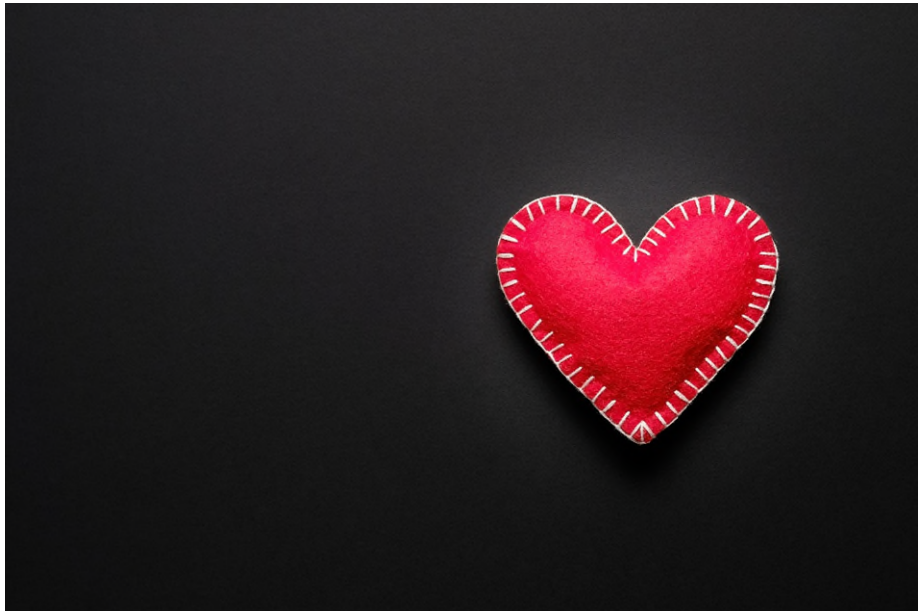
- Case Management is necessary.
- Progressive Engagement based on individual needs of households.
- Build alliance between service provider and individuals.
- Focus on client-centered goals and housing stability.

Case Management

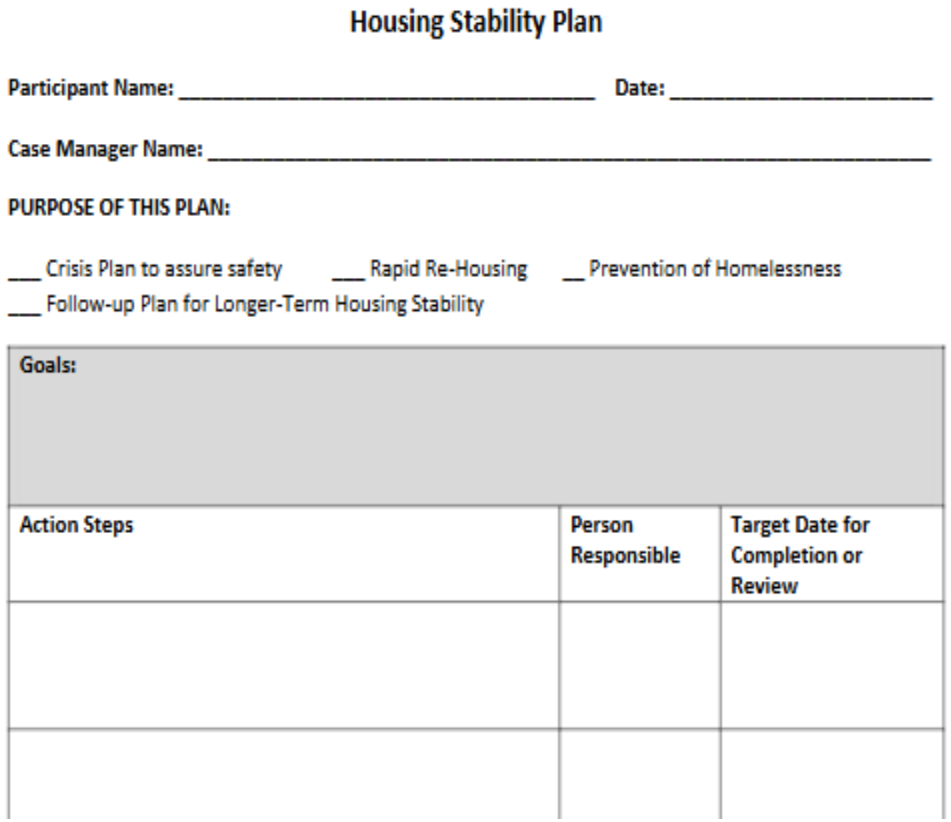
Service Provider



Lived Expert



Housing Stability Planning



Housing Stability Plan

Participant Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Case Manager Name: _____

PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN:

___ Crisis Plan to assure safety ___ Rapid Re-Housing __ Prevention of Homelessness
___ Follow-up Plan for Longer-Term Housing Stability

Goals:		
Action Steps	**Person Responsible**	**Target Date for Completion or Review**

Scenario: Housing Stability Goals

- Outdated Practice

Failure to make progress on housing goals will result in program exit.



- Low barrier practice
- Revisit goals regularly, together and adjust.
- Is this still the client's goal?
- Is it time to create a new goal?

Rules and Policies- YES!

Accountability is not a dirty word

- Projects have participation rules and policies narrowly focused on maintaining a safe environment and avoiding exits to homelessness.
- Clear boundaries and safety-focused rules are essential to creating a predictable, safe environment for both clients and staff.

BOUNDARIES = FEELING SAFE

Support = Safety





The Nature of Rules and Behavior

What is this rule for?

- HEALTH
- SAFTEY
- ORDER

What are the behaviors we desire?

- Mutual respect
- Non-violence
- Cooperation
- Cleanliness
- Non-discriminatory
- Law abiding

A Note on Tone

What do YOU think?

- Will not tolerate
- Consequences
- Mandatory
- No exceptions
- Do not do this

What do YOU think?

- All are welcome
- Expectations
- Safety first
- To assist you
- Do this…

Example Expectations:

- Treat everyone with dignity & mutual respect.
- Be a good neighbor.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Smoke in the designated smoking area.
- Substance use not allowed on the property.
- No weapons allowed.

Dealing with behaviors

Is it one of the below or both?

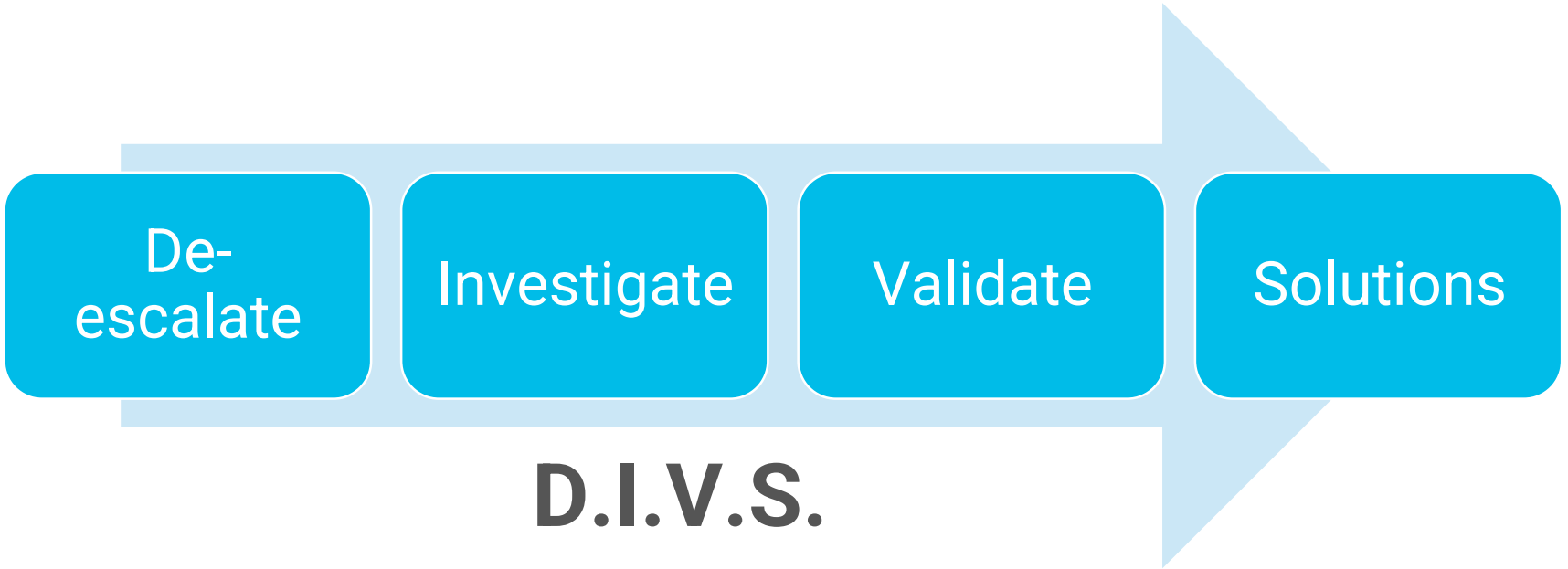
- Is it a safety concern for staff or other clients?
- Is this person having the worst day of their life?

- Difference between who people are and what their behaviors are
- Address the root cause of behaviors
- Individual is frustrated because needs are not met
- Fear of losing services
- Power differentials

Scaffolding

→Unconditional positive regard

→Accountability and responsibility



How to get back into services…

- If a household is exited from a low barrier project due to violating rules focused on maintaining a safe environment, is there a way to get back in?



Program Exits and Re-enrollment



- When boundaries are crossed in ways that jeopardize safety, appropriate actions are taken to restore safety.

- Is there a clear policy in place for clients to return to services *if* they have demonstrated safety issues have been resolved?

Scenario: Program Rules

- Outdated Practice
- Low barrier practice

Time limit on…

- Shelter stay
- Housing search
- Rental assistance



Exit clients if they:

- Are no longer eligible
- Refuse to engage
- Are a safety threat to others

Making the change

Self-assessment

- Income required
- Good credit or rental history required
- ID required
- Must pass criminal background check
- Sobriety required
- SUD/behavioral Health treatment required
- Alcohol or substance use results in termination
- Participants must work or volunteer while enrolled

Is low barrier right for your organization?

- What does your agency believe about the causes of poverty and homelessness?
- What does your agency believe about a person's capacity for change?
- Does your organization actively solicit feedback from participants and use it to inform policies and service delivery?
- Does your approach to case management and housing stability planning promote personal autonomy and provide support without conditions?

Are you ready?

- Are there organizational supports that can be put in place to support and sustain staff?
- Is there a process in place to regularly review feedback and implement programmatic changes based on the feedback of the people you serve?
- Does your participant-to-case manager ratio support effective engagement in a low barrier service environment?
- Do staff have the training they need to be able to implement low barrier services safely and effectively?

Support for clients AND staff

ONBOARDING
TRAINING
SUPPORT
SELF CARE
TRANSITIONS

Support for clients AND landlords

Clients >>



<<Landlords

Administration



- FTE – staff up properly!
- Cleaning and maintenance
- Training and staff development
- Hire certified peers and community health workers
- Partner with other service providers

Staff onboarding and training

1) What questions are you asking during interviews?

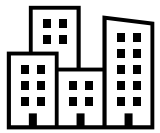
2) Have you considered a "job shadow" in lieu of 2nd interview to evaluate if LB environment is a good fit?

3) Staff onboarding, training and support are crucial.



Not in my backyard or anywhere

- Community outreach and response



- Data & Best practices



- Good neighbor Agreements



Scenario: to exit or not to exit?

- ~~Outdated~~ Practice
- ~~Low barrier~~ practice

Program exits participant for making threats to harm staff or other participants.



Exit! Programs have the obligation to keep everyone safe.

“If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together”

~African Proverb



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Low barrier sources and resources:

- CHG Technical Assistance
- CHG Guidelines Version 2 August 2026 SFY 2026-2027
- CHG Technical Assistance and Training – Washington State Department of Commerce
- CHG Low Barrier Technical Assistance Guide
- Housing Stability Plans and Case Management (Vimeo)
- HEN Evaluation COM 2025
- Low barrier self-assessment for programs

- Low Barrier Services & Shelters
- Inclusive Solutions: Lowering Barriers to Essential Services : The Gathering Place Resources and Blog
- Burien - Low Barrier Housing — People Power Washington
- Housing focused shelter works! Here are first steps. – YouTube
- This Shelter Model Changes Lives — Here's How
- Intro to Low Barrier Housing 9.13.22 - YouTube
- Free Training Videos — OrgCode Consulting
- So, You Think You're a Low Barrier Shelter...Let's Check — OrgCode Consulting

- Other
- CSH-Services-Budget-Tool
- How to Get Your Board Ready for the Shift to Low-Barrier, Housing-Focused Shelter - National Alliance to End Homelessness
- Property_Management_Engagement_SMI_SUD 09.2025.pdf | Powered by Box
- City of Spokane Good Neighbor Agreement City of Spokane
- Good Neighbor Agreement - Transition Projects Shelter Seattle.gov

Thank you!

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