

# Housing for Victims using VOCA Funds

In July 2016, the VOCA Final Rule was published. One of the major changes was the ability to spend VOCA funds on different housing and relocation expenses for victims of crime.

In May 2017, the Housing for Crime Victims Special Project, funded through VOCA, launched eight sites around the state with the support of the Division of Criminal Justice Office for Victims Programs and CCADV. These projects are using the evidence-based Domestic Violence Housing First model (survivor-driven mobile advocacy, housing assistance, supportive services, community engagement, and financial assistance.)

Using information gathered from these housing sites since May 2017, we hope to assist other programs that may be interested in applying for VOCA funds through the next CVS application to do long-term housing work with survivors in their communities.

## Items for Consideration:

### Staffing:

- Having a dedicated Housing Manager/Coordinator/etc., has been instrumental in implementing a new housing model/program. This position can develop the community relationships (landlords, housing partners, funders, etc.), provide mobile advocacy to survivors in the community, and develop internal procedures.
  - Also, consider having a mobile advocate or housing advocate that can assist with the advocacy needs while the housing manager develops the relationships, processes, oversight.
  - VOCA is looking to remain steady over the next several years. This is a great time to consider pay increases for staff.
  - Trainings and conferences may be useful for housing staff:
    - Example: National Alliance to End Homelessness has two national conferences that focus on housing first and family/youth homelessness with may domestic violence workshops.
- Think about potential equipment needs for advocates:
  - For example, laptops, cell phones, mobile printer (for applications, resumes, etc.)
  - Agency cell phones for mobile advocates can be particularly helpful in assisting advocates in contacting survivors while in the community through phone calls and texts.
- If implementing the Domestic Violence Housing First model, consider the needs of mobile advocates such as, mileage reimbursement and equipment (above).

## Budget:

- Consider fair market rent (FMR) in your community and available housing stock.
  - When developing a potential rental assistance budget, consider the FMR in your community as well as a flexible time limit and rental amount for the survivors you serve. For example, some survivors may only need 1-2 months of rental assistance, while others may need 6+ months. Also survivors may differ in the rental amount they need and can sustain. This approach works best when tailored to the needs of each survivor served. Money goes quickly so consider these different tailored rental amounts and flexibility in length of assistance when developing your budget. The eight Housing for Crime Victims Sites have an overall rental assistance budget (20-month budget) that ranges from \$36,000 to \$110,000, and everyone is spending their money quickly and wishes they asked for more.
  - If your community has very low housing stock, rental assistance funds may be lower and staff time to build long-term relationships participate in community strategic planning around housing may be higher. The agency may want more financial assistance in other VOCA-eligible categories such as, relocation, utilities, emergency hotel stays, transitional housing, clothing/food/supplies, etc., that can still support survivors in long-term stability in a low housing stock community.<sup>i</sup> Or in these communities you may need more rental funds to assist survivors for a longer period of time before they can afford the rent on their own. Some housing projects have also been successful in housing single women with roommates. This approach is flexible because it may look different in every community.
- VOCA cannot cover all the financial assistance that survivors may need for long-term housing stability such as, security deposits, back debt, car repairs. Plan for additional flexible funding you can leverage to fill the gaps and maximize VOCA funds to assist survivors with their housing needs.
- Be specific in your budget categories:
  - E.g. \$100,000 for rental assistance, \$10,000 for relocation/moving expenses, \$10,000 for emergency hotel stays, \$15,000 for clothing, food, supplies, etc. Provide the estimate dosage and calculations for how you came to this figure, also.
  - Tie your budget to your goals and objectives.

## Program Model:

- This approach requires flexibility and low-barrier services. As we know, each survivor has their own unique needs and services must allow for flexibility to fit individual survivors needs. This approach should offer survivors “What can I do for you?” rather than “Here is what we offer.” Survivors may need long-term housing at many points in their journeys. This approach should not be limited as to when the violence or crime occurred. Nor should there be income requirements.
- Relationship building is key. Having community-based advocacy programs at the table when discussions/decisions around housing in the community take place will make a large impact over time. The education that landlords and community partners are getting on the housing need for survivors is invaluable. We have project sites that get referrals from landlords now for potential clients for the program.
- You don’t have to reinvent the wheel. Talk to CCADV, DCJ, and/or one of the eight housing sites that used VOCA funds to do long-term housing work and utilize state and national data on effective strategies for assisting survivors with their long-term housing needs.
- Consider the additional planning you can do with survivors to help them be successful, if they choose to access additional services. E.g. Economic empowerment options, tenant readiness, housing protections, etc.

## Sample Goals & Objectives from Housing for Crime Victims Special Project:

- Goal: Our program will assist crime victims in meeting their long-term housing needs
  - Objectives:
    - \_\_\_ crime victims served by the housing program will receive rental assistance in the \_\_\_ grant period.
    - \_\_\_ of crime victims, will have accessed long-term housing (apartment or home in the community, housing vouchers, affordable housing, tribal housing, permanent supportive housing, etc.) by the end of the \_\_\_ grant period.
    - \_\_\_ crime victims will be provided with VOCA-eligible financial assistance (that may include utility support, transportation or relocation costs, eligible childcare or other emergency assistance) to support their housing stability and safety during the \_\_\_\_\_ grant period.
- Goal: Our program will enhance and expand community support for the safety and stability of crime victims among internal staff, housing stakeholders, and community partners.
  - Objectives:
    - The Housing Coordinator and/or project staff will facilitate \_\_\_ collaborative meetings with housing stakeholders and partners in the community during the \_\_\_ grant period. These meetings will help to increase access to housing for crime victims through stronger partnerships with housing and homelessness stakeholders and raise awareness on the housing needs of crime victims.

- The Housing Coordinator and/or project staff will outreach to \_\_\_\_ landlords during the \_\_\_\_ grant period. This outreach will include education and advocacy on behalf of crime victims to assist the crime victims in obtaining or retaining long-term housing in the community of their choosing.
    - The Housing Coordinator and/or project staff will provide \_\_\_\_ trainings on the housing program, mobile advocacy, and the implementation of the low-barrier and survivor-driven practices to internal staff and volunteers to ensure these practices are fully implemented as appropriate within the organization.
- Goal: Our program will provide survivor-driven, low-barrier mobile advocacy to crime victims.
  - Objectives:
    - \_\_\_\_ crime victims will receive mobile advocacy [Meet survivors where they are in the community, home, or wherever is most convenient and safe for the survivor. The survivors have a say in how and where the contacts will take place (e.g. home visits, coffee shop, etc.) and advocates along with survivors can safety plan to determine where meetings will occur, including accompanying survivors to meetings and appointments such as, assisting in the housing application process, if needed] in the \_\_\_\_ grant period.
    - \_\_\_\_ % of crime victims assisted with mobile advocacy through the housing program in the \_\_\_\_ grant period will report increased safety for themselves and their children.
    - \_\_\_\_% of crime victims assisted by the housing program in the \_\_\_\_ grant period will receive low-barrier access to supportive services (examples: safety planning, counseling, transportation, legal advocacy, immigration advocacy, long-term advocacy, referrals, etc. These services will not be mandatory, but available and offered to all survivors. Access to high-quality services will be available regardless of language, disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, culture. Screening for programs will be survivor-driven and have as few eligibility requirements as possible, e.g. survivors are not required to be sober for a certain number of weeks or months prior, or file for a protection order, or attend counseling sessions or groups in order to be eligible for the housing program or services.)

Resources for further information:

Stevi Gray, Housing Program Manager, CCADV, [sgray@ccadv.org](mailto:sgray@ccadv.org), 303-962-3321

Safe Housing Partnerships: [www.safehousingpartnerships.org](http://www.safehousingpartnerships.org)

Domestic Violence Housing First Toolkit: <https://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first/toolkit/>

---

<sup>i</sup> VOCA funds must be used as a payer of last resort and programs must assist eligible victims with accessing victim compensation in their area prior to using VOCA funds for needs that their local Victim Compensation Program will cover.