



Technical Assistance Resource: Housing First

The statements below are from housing first checklists developed by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (see [here](#) and [here](#)). All Chicago has written descriptions below each one to aid conversations about housing first in our community. If you are interested in conducting an analysis of housing first in practice at your organization, here are two evaluation tools developed by federal agencies: [Toolkit from Health and Human Services](#) and HUD's [Housing First Assessment Tool](#).

1. Access to programs is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of a criminal record, completion of treatment, participation in services, or other unnecessary conditions.

What this looks like: Programs accept participants matched from Coordinated Entry and eligibility requirements to enroll in a program are as minimal as possible. Once matched, participants are enrolled regardless of current income or criminal record (unless otherwise instructed by federal oversight, i.e. individuals registered as sex offenders may not be housed at units located within a certain distance from schools).

If a participant does not have vital records or chronic homelessness documentation, staff work with participants *after* they are enrolled to obtain this paperwork. Participants have full legal rights of tenancy. When possible, case management services are separated from property management services. Staff engaging in case management services with participants are distinct from staff overseeing tenancy.

Actions that are not in line with a housing first approach: Rejecting participants because of criminal background, income, unemployment, or documentation readiness. HUD does not require CoC-funded projects to receive vital records such as identification and birth certificates from participants, and requiring these presents unnecessary barriers to program access. Not enrolling participants until chronic homelessness or disability documentation is complete is also a barrier to access. Projects have 45 days after a participant's housing move in date to confirm an observed disability with sufficient documentation. Projects have 180 days after a participant's housing move in date to obtain chronic homeless documentation.

2. To the extent possible, participants should be able to choose the type of housing they prefer. Some research (Tabol et al., 2010) shows that people have better outcomes when living in housing that meets their expressed preferences.

What this looks like: Participants decide who constitutes their "household." Multiple units are available for participants to select from. Staff respond respectfully and thoughtfully to tenant requests and work with tenants to identify a housing unit. Organizations actively pursue partnerships with landlords to increase level of choice for participants.

Actions that are not in line with a housing first approach: Requiring a participant to select a housing unit before accepting them into the project. If the project's housing program helps participants navigate the housing search and unit location, the participant must be enrolled when deemed eligible at intake, and then the project works with them to select a housing unit.

3. Programs or projects do everything possible not to reject an individual or family on the basis of poor credit or financial history, poor or lack of rental history, minor criminal convictions, or behaviors that are interpreted as indicating a lack of “housing readiness.”

What this looks like: Program enrollment criteria are as minimal as possible. There are no additional eligibility requirements to screen participants for program admission beyond those provided to Coordinated Entry. Everyone is treated as “housing ready” and should be housed as quickly as possible. Program staff work with participants *after* they are enrolled to address financial barriers, mental and physical health, or employment.

Actions that are not in line with a housing first approach: Rejecting participants because of eviction history, a participant’s health or mental health history, or level of care needed. Making determinations for participants about their ability to live independently. Rejecting participants because of a financial barrier to paying rent.

4. People with disabilities are offered clear opportunities to request reasonable accommodations within applications and screening processes and during tenancy, and building and apartment units include special physical features that accommodate disabilities.

What this looks like: All participants are clearly informed of their ability to request reasonable accommodation for disabilities and are provided with information on how to do so. Enrollment criteria have been reviewed to ensure that physical or mental abilities are not included as prerequisites for program enrollment. Program staff creatively work with participants to meet accommodation requests. When possible, offer participants a variety of housing choices that meet their accommodation request. Consider physical accessibility of units when partnering with landlords, to ensure a variety of options are available in the event a participant requests an accommodation.

Actions that are not in line with a housing first approach: Rejecting a participant from accessing the program due to physical or mental abilities or physical mobility requirements.

5. Participation in services or compliance with service plans are not conditions of tenancy, but are reviewed with tenants and regularly offered as a resource to tenants.

What this looks like: Program staff actively and intentionally incorporate Motivational Interviewing and Harm Reduction techniques into participant services. Staff demonstrate an understanding of the impact trauma may have on a participant’s engagement with services. Staff collaborate with participants to set client-driven goals and regularly offer participants a variety of services to assist them in meeting identified goals. Allow participants to choose which services they would like to receive, including the option of no services. Future use of a service is not contingent on having never previously declined it. Program staff creatively work to make services engaging and accessible to participants. Participant feedback on services is encouraged, welcomed, and incorporated.

Actions that are not in line with a housing first approach: Requiring participants to engage in services in order to receive housing from the project.