



Best Practices for Transitional Housing Applications & Intakes

Applications

A good application is simple, and does not ask for more information than absolutely necessary to determine eligibility. The application has two purposes: to determine if the applicant meets the minimum eligibility criteria (i.e. is a survivor, homeless as a result of domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and/or stalking); and to determine if the support and assistance the program or organization can provide is a good fit for the applicant's needs (i.e. whether the program can serve the survivor effectively). The application should include contact information so the program can safely communicate with the applicant.

It is useful to keep these two components in mind when designing (or revising) an application - any information that does not pertain to at least one of these probably does not need to be included. Before adding a question to the application, it may be useful to consider the following questions: Does the program need this information to determine if the applicant is eligible? Does the program need this information to determine whether the applicant can be served effectively? If the answer is no, the question is probably unnecessary.

An applicant's income, employment status and level of education cannot be used to determine eligibility. These details can be obtained after the survivor has been accepted into the program. Additionally, collecting other types of information may create a liability for the program. For example, if personally identifying questions are asked about the applicant's race, ethnicity, religious preference, disability, marital status etc., and they are not accepted into the program (for any reason) the program could be accused of discrimination.

Lastly, consider how the information the program gathers could jeopardize the applicant's safety or confidentiality. If the program has an outside referral process that includes completing an application at another program, the document may change hands between staff and agencies. Never ask for social security numbers, birth certificates, driver's license, medical records, etc. or information regarding history of abuse, as this information could end up in the wrong hands and potentially endanger the survivor or be used against the survivor in some way. Personally identifying information, including date of birth, names of children, previous addresses, and any other information that could easily identify the survivor, should not be included on the application or case files.

Intake Forms

An intake should only be completed after someone has already been accepted into the program. The intake can be a process that occurs over a period of time through various



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meetings. It's extremely common for survivors to not want to share all the details of their situation in the first meeting, but may share more over time as the advocate builds a level of trust.

The intake meeting should provide an opportunity to begin to get to know each other, and for the program to gather some additional information about the survivor's immediate and future needs from the program. This is the first opportunity to build rapport and trust and is the advocate's chance to begin to identify the support the program will provide.

As with the application, the program only needs to gather information that is directly relevant to the program being able to serve the survivor effectively. The intake should be completed with the survivor and should be an ongoing discussion. An intake should be used as a guide for staff to facilitate conversation and may take multiple meetings to complete.

During the intake process and throughout their time in the program, it is important to consider each detail that is documented. Consider how any information written down could be interpreted and used against a survivor if the document(s) were ever court ordered or ended up in the wrong hands. Case management notes should be very limited in details.

** When working with survivors it is important to remember that it's their story and they are *the* expert in their life. They determine how much personal information they disclose and to whom.

