

California Cohort 2 100-Day Challenge Case Studies

Santa Barbara County: Landlord Outreach and Engagement Efforts

Santa Barbara County utilized the 100-Day Challenge to develop a strong, communitywide approach to landlord outreach and engagement in order to increase housing units available for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

HOW SANTA BARBARA COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Santa Barbara County recognized early in the 100-Day Challenge that the lack of affordable housing units in the region would create a barrier to reaching their goal of providing safe and stable housing to 75 Veterans experiencing homelessness. To help overcome this barrier, the 100-Day Challenge Team established a focus on increasing landlord outreach and engagement efforts to help identify landlords with available housing units who were interested in housing Veterans with histories of homelessness.

Santa Barbara County took a multifaceted approach to landlord outreach, education and engagement throughout the 100-Day Challenge. Team members leveraged existing landlord connections and utilized flyers, social media, and interviews with local news media to help share information about the 100-Day Challenge with the greater landlord community of Santa Barbara. In December 2020, the Team greatly expanded the reach of their landlord engagement efforts through a highly successful Prospective Landlord Information Session. This virtual event was designed to provide participants with information on the benefits of serving as a landlord to Veterans experiencing homelessness and to address potential questions or concerns that participants may have about serving this population of focus. The event was attended by over 40 landlords with whom the Team conducted follow-up outreach and recruitment efforts.

In addition, the 100-Day Challenge Team developed both a county-wide landlord list and a shared spreadsheet of available units for Veterans experiencing homelessness based on the results of their landlord outreach and engagement efforts so far. Santa Barbara County's robust landlord engagement campaign not only helped to increase housing availability for unhoused Veterans, it also laid the groundwork for a more coordinated regional approach to managing landlord relationships that will be sustained beyond the 100-Day Challenge.

Key Takeaways:

- Landlord outreach and engagement efforts can help to significantly increase housing stock available for persons experiencing homelessness.
- Housing partners such as rental property associations, Housing Authorities, and landlords themselves can strengthen landlord outreach and engagement efforts.
- Housing and service providers should coordinate to maximize outreach efforts and local utilization of landlord resources.
- Communities should create open and welcoming opportunities for landlords to ask questions, share concerns, and receive honest answer in response to their questions and concerns.
- Benefits and incentives help to demonstrate to landlords that they are supported as valuable partners in the housing process.
- Landlord relationships can help break down barriers in the housing process and improve equitable housing outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

LESSONS LEARNED

“For landlords, Housing Authorities, community partners, everyone...it is a lifechanging experience to be a part of the process of stabilizing someone’s life through housing.” - Rob Fredericks, Executive Director/Chief Executive Officer, Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara

1) Leverage New and Existing Housing Partnerships to Increase Connections with the Landlord Community

Partnerships with key housing stakeholders in the community were crucial for the success of Santa Barbara’s landlord outreach and engagement efforts. One of the Team’s sponsors was a local independent landlord, providing the Team with crucial insights into the landlord perspective on housing Veterans experiencing homelessness and facilitating communication with others in the landlord community. Local Housing Authorities were also able to leverage existing partnerships with landlords and property managers who participate in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program to identify landlords who would be interested and able to provide housing for this population of focus. Additionally, the Team connected with the Santa Barbara Rental Property Association (SBRPA) to share information and resources about the 100-Day Challenge with SBPRA members, including local landlords, property owners and property managers. Santa Barbara plans to continue identifying and engaging new partners with connections to the landlord community – such as local business owners and the Chamber of Commerce – as part of their efforts to increase housing placements for Veterans experiencing homelessness beyond 100-Day Challenge.

2) Coordinate Community-wide Landlord Outreach Activities

The 100-Day Challenge helped Santa Barbara increase county-level coordination around landlord outreach and engagement efforts by strengthening interagency collaboration and communication. The 100-Day Challenge brought a unique county-wide focus to the issue of Veteran homelessness by bringing together partners from across Santa Barbara County around a shared goal, helping to break down geographic silos and promote a more comprehensive community-wide approach to landlord outreach and engagement. The Team created a range of outreach materials, including flyers and social media posts, that could be utilized by agencies across the county to reach their local landlord community with information about the 100-Day Challenge. The Team demonstrated its commitment to a more coordinated community-wide approach to managing landlord relationships through the development of a shared spreadsheet of units available for Veteran housing placements and a cross-county landlord list. As part of its sustainability efforts, Santa Barbara County plans to engage service providers twice annually in trainings around best practices and resource sharing for landlord outreach and engagement to ensure that these practices are consistent and coordinated across the community.

3) Provide Open Opportunities to Share Information and Address Landlord Concerns

Santa Barbara County fostered significant success in engaging potential landlords by creating open and welcoming opportunities to have honest conversations around what it means to provide housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness. In December 2020, the 100-Day Challenge Team hosted a Prospective Landlord Information Session that engaged a range of panelists – including representative from the VA, both local Housing Authorities, and local homeless service providers –in an honest conversation about the benefits and potential concerns participants may have about serving as a landlord for Veterans with histories of homelessness. The panel provided candid answers to common landlord questions and concerns, including:

- What are the benefits of being a landlord to a previously unhoused Veteran?
- How do I navigate through the housing system?

- I want to develop housing for currently unhoused Veterans – can you help?
- What exactly are you offering in terms of case management?
- What other incentives are available to keep my tenants with experiences of homelessness housed?

Participants in the Prospective Landlord Information Session expressed gratitude for the wealth of information provided by panelists and felt that their questions and concerns were heard and honestly addressed without judgement. Building off of the success of this event, Santa Barbara plans to host quarterly landlord information sessions and to identify additional opportunities to directly engage landlords in conversations around providing housing for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

4) Promote Landlord Benefits and Incentives for Providing Housing to Persons Experiencing Homelessness

The Santa Barbara 100-Day Challenge Team recognized the importance of sharing information widely regarding landlord benefits and incentives for housing Veterans experiencing homelessness. 100-Day Challenge Team members increased their knowledge and understanding of existing landlord incentive programs within the community – including signing and referral bonuses, unit damage protection funds, and inspection assistance offered by local Housing Authorities – and shared this information widely with prospective landlords. The Team also provided landlord education on the benefits of working with Veterans receiving housing assistance, including steady rental income and tenant access to case management and supportive services. These benefits can be particularly beneficial for landlords who are in need of assistance filling their units due to the COVID-19 crisis. The Team recognized that landlords are crucial partners in the work to prevent and end Veteran homelessness and that providing them with education, information and support is crucial to their success in collaborating with the homeless response system.

5) Use Landlord Outreach and Engagement Efforts to Build More Equitable Housing Outcomes

Santa Barbara’s landlord outreach and engagement efforts helped build a strong foundation for the community to increase equitable housing outcomes for Veterans experiencing homelessness. Strong relationships with landlords can help break down barriers in the housing search and application process that make it more difficult and less equitable for persons experiencing homelessness, such as background checks or credit history requirements. Landlord outreach and education efforts also provide an opportunity for communities to begin addressing implicit bias and breaking down negative assumptions about persons experiencing homelessness that may exist within the landlord community. Additionally, housing units made available through partnerships with landlords help to increase local housing stock so that communities can take quicker action on increasing equitable housing placements for populations that are disproportionately impacted by experiences of homelessness.