

**National Veterans' Technical Assistance Center (NVTAC)
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Community of Practice (CoP)
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Overview: Housing Homeless and
Imminently At-Risk Veteran Families
Wednesday, November 30, 2022, 3:00–4:00 p.m. ET**

NVTAC Staff

Sarah Chung, NVTAC Coach

Presenter

Nikki Barfield, Deputy Director for SSVF

Key Points

- **Introduction**
 - Sarah Chung welcomed grantees to the November HVRP CoP event on SSVF. Sarah asked attendees to introduce themselves in the Zoom chat.
 - This session provided an opportunity for grantees to learn about housing homeless and imminently at-risk veteran families through various SSVF programs.
 - Nikki Barfield shared her work history, explaining she has over 20 years of experience at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital and has been working as the Deputy Director for SSVF for a little over a year. She acknowledged she is still learning and plans to create a Frequently Asked Questions document to address any unresolved questions.
- **What is SSVF?**
 - SSVF puts out a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) inviting nonprofit organizations or consumer cooperatives to apply for funding that provides services to veterans and their families. There is a rigorous scoring process to ensure applicants meet the threshold prior to awarding the grants.
 - The grantees are expected to provide supportive services to veterans and their families based on their needs, which Nikki's office oversees.
 - SSVF provides services to various veteran populations (e.g., young veterans, women, veterans with dependent children, and disabled veterans). SSVF is unique because it can serve the entire household, meaning the program addresses the needs of non-veterans to support their housing stability. In fact, 20 percent of participants in the program are dependent children.
 - If a family is served where domestic violence is present, regardless of whether the veteran or their partner is the perpetrator, SSVF has provisions to re-enroll the family.
- **The History of SSVF**
 - SSVF started in 2011 with a budget of \$60 million and 85 grants that were reviewed through a competitive process. During the first few years, the focus was on developing policies and procedures. SSVF worked with the Commission on

Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) to develop rapid rehousing accreditation standards to demonstrate a grantee's competencies and practice standards to provide services.

- From 2014 to 2017, SSVF had additional funds available and offered surge grants to different communities. It also focused on community planning to end veteran homelessness, offered Continuum of Care (CoC) support, and encouraged grantees to work on federal criteria and benchmark efforts.
- From 2018 to 2020, the focus shifted to the affordable housing crisis. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) asked CoCs to develop coordinating entry systems, and SSVF asked grantees to start integrating within those systems. SSVF started the following new services:
 - Returning Home, which allowed SSVF to help veterans experiencing homelessness who are receiving support in another area return home with support through coordinated efforts;
 - Rapid Resolution; and
 - Shallow Subsidies.
- Since March 2020, SSVF has worked to respond to the COVID-19 crisis and expected grantees to increase coordination and rapidly expand their ability to get veterans off the streets and into hotels or motels. SSVF collaborated more closely with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH). It offered grantees in some communities housing navigation services to help veterans with high barriers obtain housing. New services were also introduced, such as healthcare navigation and legal services. Last year, SSVF had 261 grantees and a \$418 million budget. During the pandemic, SSVF received \$364 million of additional funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to start Shallow Subsidies and legal services and to help sustain healthcare navigators.
- **What Tools Does SSVF Provide Grantees?**
 - Grantees are expected to conduct outreach by going into the communities to find and help veterans experiencing homelessness. Grantees should also provide case management services and link with benefits assistance as often as possible. Although this is a specialized position, SSVF expects grantees to provide housing navigation for veterans by working hand in hand with them to help them find the proper housing to meet their needs. They can provide Temporary Financial Assistance (TFA) beyond rent and utilities, and help with transportation, employment and training services, credit counseling, and legal assistance (with the help of ARP funding) focused on getting the veteran housed.
 - SSVF can supply supplementary Notice of Fund Availabilities (NOFA) in communities with a high number of homeless individuals and unused HUD-VASH vouchers. Grantees serving these targeted communities can request additional funding to offer incentives to landlords worth up to two months' rent, with an additional \$100 for move-in costs on selected quality-of-life items. The Area Median Income (AMI) in those target communities has expanded eligibility

to 80 percent from 50 percent. Nikki hopes the funding availability will expand to other communities.

- **What Are SSVF's Priorities?**

- The top priority is rapid re-housing veterans who are experiencing homelessness. SSVF asks grantees to review their budget on an ongoing basis to determine how much money they can devote to providing rapid re-housing services.
- The remainder of the funding goes towards homelessness prevention, which targets veterans at imminent risk of homelessness to prevent them from entering the homeless system. The SSVF provides a TFA of up to 40 percent for homeless prevention cases without a waiver.
- Grantees should use a Diversion/Rapid Resolution approach. They are offered technical assistance to ensure they have the skills and additional resources to help prevent veterans from becoming homeless.
- Homeless prevention services and diversion clients are great target groups for HVRP grantees to work with. SSVF often works with veterans that do not have a steady income source, which can be frustrating for their support systems. By partnering with SSVF grantees, they can receive help in preventing homelessness.
- Homeless prevention is not the same thing as eviction prevention.
- If a grantee cannot provide financial services to a veteran or TFA, they can still offer case management and other services to help stabilize the household.

- **Rapid Resolution Training**

- Family reunification can prevent veterans from experiencing homelessness. Grantees are trained for conflict mediation by calling family members and hoping to reconcile any issues to prevent the veteran from experiencing homelessness and the trauma associated with it.
- Temporary, modest financial assistance can help family members who are financially struggling to support the veteran while other services are provided to help them resolve their situation.

- **National Shortage of Affordable Housing**

- The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) estimates that the U.S. has a shortage of about seven million affordable rental homes for extremely low-income renters at or below the poverty level. The NLIHC revealed that only 36 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. Nikki argues that even higher-income people can have difficulty obtaining affordable housing.
- How do we improve this situation?
 - Ideally, we could build new units, but it is very expensive and can take years for plans to come to fruition.
 - Alternatively, you can identify new housing within the existing supply through Shallow Subsidy and shared housing.
 - You could also increase the veteran's income to meet the market needs with support.

- **Housing First Policy**

- SSVF expects grantees to provide services with minimal barriers and without preconditions by providing same-day screening and enrollment whenever possible. If the veteran does not have the necessary documentation, grantees have access to a program called Squares which can verify them so the grantee can more efficiently begin working on resolving the veteran's situation. The less time veterans spend on the street, the better.
- Grantees should provide emergency or general housing stability assistance.
- When HVRP grantees become aware of a veteran's emergency needs, they should try to connect that veteran with SSVF, particularly if it is a dangerous situation.
- SSVF is housing first, not housing only.
- Income is not a requirement of the program, but it is strongly emphasized to promote long-term stability.
- Emergency Housing Assistance
 - SSVF grantees are not clinicians and cannot provide clinical services. If a veteran is in a situation that is too much for the grantee to handle, they can provide the veteran with additional mental health services resources or refer them to the HUD-VASH program or other permanent housing programs that can provide more intensive case management services.
 - Those eligible for services face higher mortality and morbidity risks, and it is important to avoid additional trauma.
 - If there are questions about eligibility, the Squares program or self-certification can be used to start services while verification is confirmed. It is always best to err on the side of the veteran. If we start providing services to a veteran and find out they are not eligible after the fact, we still helped an individual and prevented trauma.
 - HVRP grantees should be aware of any emergency needs and link them to VA/SSVF.
- General Housing Stability Assistance
 - Provide all items necessary to ensure the veteran's safety, including employment assistance (uniforms, tools, certifications, licenses, etc.) and housing assistance (kitchen utensils, bedding, supplies, or even housing applications, tenant screening reports, background checks, inspection fees, etc.).
 - Since HVRP grantees can provide employment assistance, it is important to check with SSVF grantees to ensure services are not duplicated.
 - Before SSVF starts looking for housing, we try to determine what the household barriers could be. Grantees are given funding to hire housing specialists who know the local market (realtor or someone who is very familiar with the community or rental market) to find the appropriate housing area to address any barriers.
 - Veterans have the choice to pick wherever they want to live. Still, it is our responsibility to educate them about the affordability or other risks

associated with that area (e.g., if there is a history of substance abuse in that area).

- SSVF looks at sustainability. We want to ensure the veteran can afford the housing. If a veteran insists on living in an area they cannot afford, SSVF grantees will work with them on a plan to help them afford it. HVRP can also help if the veteran has a limited income.

- **Shallow Subsidies**

- Shallow Subsidies were started as a pilot program in high-rental communities but have taken off and are now available for all SSVF grantees. They offer a rental subsidy of up to 50 percent for two years, which increases the supply of affordable units. There is no disincentive to obtaining income because the subsidy is not affected even if the household income increases. The goal is for the family to save a little more money over those two years and get ahead. HVRP can help them obtain income stability since the veteran and their family will not have to worry about housing.
- Shallow Subsidies differ from rapid rehousing, which pays more money upfront but is short-term, while Shallow Subsidies are fixed for two years.
- Veterans can be re-certified at the end of the 24-month assistance period if income eligible and still in need of assistance.
- Shallow Subsidies can be used for one-bedroom, multi-bedroom, or shared housing situations.
- It has been a slow start due to the Stafford Act, which was enacted during the pandemic and allows grantees to pay additional money without many restrictions. Once the Stafford Act ends, there will be a shift to Shallow Subsidies, and we encourage grantees to start using them now.
- Who is a good candidate for a Shallow Subsidy?
 - The veteran and their family must be eligible for SSVF services and generally require minimal support services or tenancy supports. They may rely on more community connections, such as HVRP, to help with employment.
 - The veteran can pay the balance of the rent and only needs moderate rental assistance, differentiating it from HUD-VASH services.
 - The veteran should have a plan to increase their income and become self-sufficient after the two-year period.
 - Target populations for a Shallow Subsidy may be veterans who are employed with the ability to build income over time, have fixed incomes (such as retired seniors or disabled veterans), are on a waiting list for affordable housing, or are pursuing shared housing opportunities.

- **Shallow Subsidy, SSVF Rapid Re-Housing, or Homeless Prevention?**

- Veterans can be in multiple programs and transition from one resource to another. A veteran may start in rapid re-housing and transition to a Shallow Subsidy.

- Grantees should use a progressive engagement approach to evaluate each veteran and their family's situation and use whatever resources and services are most appropriate for them at that time.
- **Implications for HVRP and Other Employment**
 - Veterans who can or are willing to work can continue to receive ongoing assistance for at least two years, even if their income increases significantly during enrollment.
 - Connections for employment services should be considered as soon as the veteran is housed or has expressed interest. Normal SSVF assistance can offer deeper and more flexible subsidies while the veteran is training or gaining employment. Once the veteran can pay 50 percent of rent (if they are still under the AMI cap), they can be offered Shallow Subsidy services while they continue to maintain or build their income.
 - HVRP and SSVF should actively coordinate cross-referrals for veterans who want to expedite their income growth.
 - HVRP eligibility is not affected since the veteran is still enrolled in the same SSVF program.
 - New SSVF legal services may pair well with income support for justice-involved veterans.
- **Next Steps**
 - Everyone must meet with their SSVF grantees to coordinate how to best utilize Shallow Subsidy services, including overall targeting of service and other program decisions to ensure there is no duplication of funding and to ensure resources are used more effectively.
 - Grantees can review HVRP's capacity to take new enrollments from SSVF and the timing of employment outcomes to help plan referrals.
 - Grantees can discuss a referral process for veterans seeking employment or training, including the overall demand, equity considerations for historically marginalized groups, and program requirements.
 - Grantees should establish a regular communication plan to review referrals, update the income trajectory of those enrolled in both programs, and other coordination matters.
- **Why Provide Shallow Subsidies?**
 - There is generally a lighter level of case management expected for veterans that consists of monthly check-ins to verify the tenancy in the assisted housing unit and to ensure the household can make the rental assistance payments.
 - Grantees must still be able to elevate supportive services for veterans as needed.
 - Connections to HVRP and other employment and income supports are critical, given the two-year certification flexibilities.
- **What Happens after Two Years?**
 - We hope the veteran will improve their income and no longer need a Shallow Subsidy. If a veteran still needs assistance after the two-year mark, they can

potentially be recertified if they are income eligible. They can also transition to a permanent housing subsidy.

- **When Is a Veteran Terminated from SSVF?**
 - If the veteran abandoned the unit and cannot be located, the SSVF provider may terminate after 90 days.
 - The veteran is also terminated if they are incarcerated for more than 90 days.
 - The veteran will not be terminated from SSVF if they are evicted; the grantee will still work with them to find new housing.
 - SSVF may continue to pay the landlord until the lease is terminated to preserve a relationship with them moving forward.
- **Progressive Assistance**
 - SSVF is not a one-size-fits-all program. Grantees are expected to begin with the least amount of assistance needed and scale up or down when appropriate.

Discussion and Q&A

- **Grantee Question:** How does the two months paid rent incentive work for homeless veterans when it is not provided for other homeless populations?
 - **SSVF Response:** SSVF receives additional funding through American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). We identified homelessness is a barrier to overcome for our veterans, and we advocated for it. The incentive is currently a pilot project. However, programs that start with the VA expand to other target audiences when they are successful. We hope it will spread to other populations (e.g., non-veteran homeless, families, children, etc.).
- **Grantee Question:** Where are the 2023 SSVF goals posted?
 - **SSVF Response:** The goals can be accessed through the [SSVF website](#).
- **Grantee Question:** Why do SSVF, HVRP, and the VA work with employment for homeless veterans?
 - **SSVF Response:** The reality is not all veterans want to go to the VA for services. The services may be similar but are still different. The more options we give them, the better it is for them because they will not feel forced to choose something if they are provided with options. It is important to remember different organizations need to collaborate to ensure they are not duplicating services.
- **Grantee Question:** Can a Shallow Subsidy be used for Single Room Occupancies (SROs)?
 - **SSVF Response:** No. The program's intent is permanent housing, while SROs are typically short-term.
- **Grantee Question:** If a veteran is in HUD-VASH, can they access Shallow Subsidy services?
 - **SSVF Response:** No. They already get a subsidy through HUD-VASH.
- **Grantee Question:** If HVRP is an SSVF program, does that mean they are double dipping federal funds?
 - **SSVF Response:** Although both HVRP and SSVF provide employment services, they are distinct programs. Grantees need to delineate between SSVF and HVRP

services for their records. SSVF does regular audits, and grantees must justify every dollar they spend.

Conclusion

- Nikki highlighted that SSVF hopes to expand. Their Fiscal Year 2024 NOFA is out, and they are looking to take on new SSVF providers. If you have an agency in your community that might be a good candidate to apply, they can go to the SSVF website. The applications are due on February 10, 2023. Once the grant is awarded, a lot of support is provided.
- The website has the current list of SSVF grantees. If you have questions, you can always email the SSVF team.
- The slides and recording will be posted on the [NVTAC Community of Practice webpage](#).