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# California Cohort 100-Day Challenge Case Studies

## Alameda County: Simplifying Client Documentation Processes

Alameda County utilized the momentum of the 100-Day Challenge to help simplify and streamline documentation processes for verifying client eligibility for subsidized housing programs, helping to facilitate quicker transitions into permanent housing for Project Roomkey guests.

### HOW ALAMEDA COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, Alameda County identified accessing documentation to verify eligibility for subsidized housing programs as a challenge for persons experiencing homelessness. Limited access to in-person documentation and identification services during the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this challenge and created a barrier to facilitating timely housing placements for Project Roomkey guests. Alameda County leveraged the knowledge of the 100-Day Challenge Team and other experts in the community to identify ways that less restrictive documentation requirements could be implemented that would continue to meet the requirements of various subsidized housing programs – including those funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) – while reducing barriers for households experiencing homelessness to access these programs.

The Team also found that Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and rental subsidy administrators can accept an original document issued by a local government office as verification of social security number and income when the income is public benefits. Team members leveraged an existing partnership with the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) to develop a template letter that can be provided to housing providers in lieu of a social security card and can serve as verification of social security number and income from public benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and CalWORKs. Alameda County has had great success in working with PHAs and rental subsidy administrators to accept the SSA letter to verify program eligibility. This simplified documentation process has helped to more quickly connect Project Roomkey guest to permanent housing options and reduce the burden of documentation for clients.

### Key Takeaways:

- Documentation requirements often create barriers to housing for clients experiencing homelessness.
- Program-level documentation requirements are often more stringent than what is required by their funding source.
- Communities should work to evaluate what documentation is needed for subsidized housing programs and identify areas where documentation requirements could be simplified or streamlined.
- Partnerships with local government agencies, including County Social Services Agencies, can help simplify the process of obtaining client documentation.
- Communities should work to standardize streamlined documentation processes at the systems level when possible.
- Communities can generate buy-in for simplified documentation processes by providing a clear and easy-to-implement solution for housing providers and their staff.

## LESSONS LEARNED

*“This was an opportunity to set up an infrastructure change that will have a really lasting impact.”* – Colleen Budenholzer, Health Care Services Agency

### **1) Develop a Deep Understanding of Program Documentation Requirements & Regulations**

Alameda County has started to develop a deeper understanding of the regulations and program requirements for each local subsidized housing program in order to identify areas where documentation processes could be simplified or streamlined. This includes having a deeper working knowledge of what the documentation requirements are as set forth by the funders of subsidized housing programs, as well as an understanding of what documentation requirements have been formally or informally established by the program itself. It was through this deep research and knowledge development that the Alameda 100-Day Challenge Team was able to identify that an original document issued by a local government agency could be used to verify a client’s social security number and income from public benefits. This information and the level of knowledge regarding documentation processes and requirements among 100-Day Challenge Team members has been crucial for making the push to streamline and simplify documentation processes among housing providers in Alameda County .

### **2) Build Strong Relationships with Local Social Services Agencies**

The Alameda County 100-Day Challenge Team leveraged a strong existing relationship with the Alameda County Social Services Agency (SSA) to help develop a simplified documentation process for verifying social security number and income from public sources for clients experiencing homelessness. Prior to the 100-Day Challenge, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency had already established a partnership with SSA to provide documentation support for clients experiencing homelessness on a case-by-case basis. The 100-Day Challenge created momentum around expanding and standardizing this alternative documentation process with SSA in order to support Project Roomkey guests in more quickly transitioning into permanent housing options. 100-Day Challenge Team members worked with SSA to develop a standardized template letter that would meet the documentation requirements for local subsidized housing programs. The Team would also like to create automation of the process where possible – such as developing a method to conduct batch look-ups for multiple clients at once – in order to further increase the efficiency and speed of the documentation process while reducing the administrative burden for SSA staff. The Alameda County 100-Day Challenge Team noted that in other communities, information regarding social security number and income from public benefits may be held by more than one agency depending upon the structure of the County or jurisdiction. It is therefore important to identify and form partnerships with the relevant agencies in your specific community that hold the information needed to help simplify and streamline the documentation process for your clients.

### **3) Supply Housing Providers with Concrete Solutions for Improving Documentation Processes**

Alameda County was able to gain robust buy-in for their simplified documentation process by providing Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and rental subsidy administrators with a clear solution that would help overcome documentation barriers for clients without creating additional work for program staff. The 100-Day Challenge Team conducted outreach to PHAs and subsidy administrators to share what they found regarding documentation requirements and to provide a copy of the SSA letter they were requesting be accepted to verify income from public sources and identification in lieu of a social security card. The Team was able to generate significant buy-in from different programs willing to simplify their documentation processes by providing clear information on the exact documentation requirements established by HUD; being specific about what changes were being requested

in order to overcome documentation barriers for clients; and providing a clear solution in the form of the SSA template letter that was ready for implementation and would not create additional work or administrative burdens for program staff. Overall, the changes to program documentation processes have been mutually beneficial for clients and subsidized housing providers by shortening the amount of time it takes to verify program eligibility and accelerating the timeline for moving clients out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

#### **4) Be Strategic in Generating Early Buy-In for New Processes**

The Alameda County 100-Day Challenge Team worked strategically to generate support at different stages of their documentation efforts. This included having the right people at the table from the beginning of the Challenge, such as frontline staff who were able to help identify the documentation barriers that exist for clients, system leaders who were able to help push for and implement systems changes, and Team members who were able to serve as champions and generate energy around simplifying and streamlining documentation processes. The 100-Day Challenge Team was also strategic in conducting early outreach regarding the SSA letter to PHAs and rental subsidy administrators that had already expressed an interest and willingness to change their documentation processes in order to gain their early buy-in for the process. These early supporters allowed the Team to then reach out to more hesitant housing providers in the County and demonstrate that their outreach efforts had already been successful with other housing providers, including at least one provider that was well-known for having stringent policies regarding documentation requirements. The Team was also able to work with early adopters of the SSA letter to serve as peer influencers by sharing their support of the new documentation processes with other housing providers. The overall support for simplifying and streamlining documentation processes has been sustained by frontline staff, system leaders and a number of participating housing providers, creating an opportunity for these efforts to expand and solidify into more permanent systems changes.

#### **5) Develop Processes that Can Be Sustained as Infrastructure Changes**

Alameda County utilized the 100-Day Challenge to make systems-level changes to local documentation processes that could be sustained beyond the Challenge and COVID-19 for clients experiencing homelessness. Alameda County 100-Day Challenge Team members emphasized that they made a choice to invest time and effort into developing new documentation processes that could be sustained beyond COVID-19 and the 100-Day Challenge - rather than implementing quicker, more temporary solutions to reach the 100-Day Challenge goal that would not be sustainable in the long term. The 100-Day Challenge provided Team members with access to system leaders at the County level who were willing and able to support streamlining documentation processes in order to more quickly connect Project Roomkey clients to permanent housing options. Alameda County sees this work as opening the door for more community conversations around reducing barriers to subsidized housing for persons experiencing homelessness, including building greater understanding around what documentation is required and reevaluating program-level documentation requirements that create additional barriers for clients.