

Housing Navigation and Property Engagement

May 2022 | Produced by Learning Systems and Evaluation (LS&E)

Purpose

The Domestic Proof Points team is gearing up to run a housing navigation and property engagement intervention for communities over the course of the next three months (May-July). To inform the design of this intervention, the Learning Systems & Evaluation team identified and analyzed prominent literature on the subjects in question.

Methodology

Literature was collected mostly by searching the following phrases in Google and Google Scholar: housing navigation or landlord engagement best practices, housing navigation, and landlord or housing developer or property manager engagement. Sometimes, "homeless" was added at the end of these phrases to refine the relevance of results.

Seven pieces of literature were identified as most important and relevant:

- 1) [a 2022 academic article on housing navigation as part of the healthcare system](#);
- 2) [a 2021 academic article on landlord perceptions of homelessness in Northern Utah](#);
- 3) a 2021 landlord engagement webinar hosted by the National Alliance to End Homelessness (slides found [here](#), recording [here](#), and the initiative website [here](#));
- 4) [a 2021 housing resource guide for helping to house people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(I/DD\)](#);
- 5) [a 2020 brief on landlord engagement in the Covid-19 pandemic by the Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#);
- 6) [a 2018 white paper on landlord engagement strategies by the Veterans Health Administration \(VHA\) National Homeless Program Office](#);
- 7) [a 2018 landlord engagement how-to guide](#).

This mixture of academic and gray literature and guides were chosen because they detailed how housing navigation and property engagement (via landlords and property managers and real estate agents) can be centered in system responses to homelessness. There is little literature that focuses exclusively on housing navigation, and far more on property engagement, which sometimes acknowledges housing navigation as a component.

Key Findings

The following themes were common across the literature reviewed:

1. To effectively place people into housing, there needs to be a separation in roles between people who engage landlords and property managers to ensure a pool of available housing (called housing coordinators or navigators or landlord engagement coordinators) and people who are more focused on a client's housing readiness (case managers).
2. The housing coordinator or navigator or landlord engagement coordinator cannot work in isolation to effectively help people get housed; they must be part of and potentially lead a landlord engagement and/or housing navigation committee in a community, which includes the various actors in clients' support teams, such as case managers.
3. One important outcome of landlord engagement is getting landlords to pledge or reserve units exclusively for people experiencing homelessness, meaning they will not rent these units to anyone not involved in a community's homeless services program. This increases the likelihood clients will get housing that best fits their needs, as they would have a variety of options to consider, and would get housed faster, as opposed to waiting around for the first option that presents itself.
4. Landlords are willing to rent to people with a history of homelessness if the process by which to do so is clear and with the right incentives and risk mitigation guarantees.

Below, each document is examined in greater detail.

1. Health system-based housing navigation for patients experiencing homelessness: A new care coordination framework

David E. Velasquez, Keizra Mecklai, Sajen Plevyak, Brendan Eappen, Katherine A. Koh, Alister F. Martin.
***HealthCare: The Journal of Delivery Science and Innovation* . March 2022.**

Summary:

Hospitals should embed housing navigation into their treatment of patients experiencing homelessness via the employment of two types of housing navigators: hospital-based and outpatient. A visual representation of this housing navigation framework can be found in [Appendix A](#). Examples of hospitals embedding housing navigation include: Boston Medical Center's housing family navigator for pediatric patients; Kaiser Permanente's increased

investment in its housing navigation program because of the Covid-19 pandemic; and Vanderbilt University Medical Center's outpatient housing navigator, who, as of 2019, helped house 53 patients experiencing homelessness. This last position is the [first homeless housing navigator in the country to be employed by and work from a hospital system](#).

Key Findings

1. Hospitals should employ hospital-based and outpatient housing navigators for patients at risk of or experiencing homelessness.
2. Once a hospital-based housing navigator has access to the hospital's electronic health record and their community's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) or equivalent, they have three core functions: 1) connecting patients with appropriate housing arrangements like emergency shelter, respite care, or adult foster care; 2) connecting chronically homeless patients with a traditional housing navigator or case manager not at the hospital, as sometimes, considering their chronic status, they already have a housing navigator in the typical homeless response system and need only be notified of their client's status to move them forward toward housing; and/or 3) connect patients with a traditional housing navigator, embedded in a local housing service provider, if they do not already have one.
3. The difference between an outpatient housing navigator and a traditional housing navigator is that the former only works with people experiencing homelessness who frequently touch hospital systems. They have relationships with housing providers, landlords, and social service organizations to ultimately help their patients get permanent housing. To understand and ensure their patients' needs are met, these outpatient housing navigators regularly communicate with them, help them apply for needed documents and housing programs, and ensure transportation to and from housing-related appointments.
4. There are four reasons why hospitals should have outpatient housing navigators to supplement the work of traditional housing navigators: 1) the poor state or lack of housing negatively impacts the health of patients and is therefore part of caring for them; 2) hospitals have more funding and resources than strained social service organizations and would therefore be reducing the workload of traditional housing navigators; 3) hospital involvement in housing patients could increase their trust in the healthcare system and therefore improve the healthcare experience; and 4) it is morally right.

2. Landlord Perceptions on Homelessness in Northern Utah

Jayne E. Walters, Jessica Lucero, Claire Wever and Amber Post. *Social Sciences*. November 2021.

Summary:

It is crucial to understand how landlords perceive homelessness to develop effective landlord engagement strategies. Based on a survey of 134 landlords in Northern Utah, landlords' attitudes towards people experiencing homelessness varies depending on a variety of factors.

Key Findings

1. Landlords want to help eliminate homelessness but do not know "where to start."
2. Certain landlord characteristics meant more or less willingness to rent to people experiencing homelessness. The more properties a landlord had, the more willing they were. The older a landlord was, the less willing, even with people with "risk mitigation options" like a rental voucher.
3. Landlords favored renting to certain kinds of people experiencing homelessness over others, meaning they held biases: greater willingness to rent to people experiencing homelessness who had a physical disability or had experienced domestic violence and lesser willingness to rent to people experiencing homelessness with a history of eviction or substance misuse.

3. Effective Landlord Engagement and Unit Cultivation Strategies | Slides; Recording; Initiative Website

Hosted by Vice President for Housing Policy at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities Ann Oliva. Opening remarks by Senior Advisor for Housing and Services at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Richard Cho. Panelists: Chief Executive Officer of Brilliant Corners William Pickle and Director of Policy and Planning at the San Francisco Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing Cynthia Nagendra. 2021.

Summary:

Panelists explained the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool, a model where case management, tenancy supports, and landlord engagement are distinct buckets of work that work in coordination with each other. Tenancy support consists of a client working with a housing coordinator who ensures they have a positive relationship with the landlord and comply with the lease. The Pool exists in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego. For Los Angeles, where the Pool originally launched, the partners model is as follows: the county department

of health services; Brilliant Corners, the non-profit that coordinates the Pool; property owners around the county; and case managers. Housing coordinators are employed by Brilliant Corners. The process for the model is as follows: Brilliant Corners, the coordinating non-profit, engages landlords with properties that fit client needs → units are reserved for clients → partner organizations refer clients → Brilliant Corners matches clients to units → the client moves in and is assigned a housing coordinator and case manager. For visual representations of the partners involved, the model's staffing structure, and the model's process, see [Appendix B](#). The Pool housed 171 people its first year, 2015. As of 2021, the Pool had 9,259 cumulative housing placements.

Key Findings

1. The Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool, a public-private partnership led by the LA County Department of Health Services and non-profit Brilliant Corners, separates the functions of property engagement and housing acquisition, tenant support, and case management because each requires distinct skill sets. Separating these, but having them work in tandem, is what leads to rapid housing placements and positive experiences for clients and landlords.
2. The Pool works as follows: via landlord engagement, units are reserved based on a general sense of clients' needs; partners refer clients; clients are matched to reserved units; clients move in and receive support from a housing coordinator to ensure tenancy retention, and a case manager for all other needs.

4. The Housing Resource Guide

New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation. 2021.

Summary:

[People with mental disabilities disproportionately experience homelessness.](#) As such, this housing resource guide by the New York Alliance for Inclusion and Innovation, for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to find housing, is relevant, particularly in their use of housing navigators. The Guide advocates for the following actors in a person's housing plan team: a school transition officer (who helps connect a student exiting school to the appropriate supports, including housing); a care manager (also known as a case manager); a housing subsidy coordinator (an Office for People With Developmental Disabilities staff person who coordinates rental subsidies in a person's region); a housing navigator (the duties of which will be explained in more detail shortly); and others. A housing navigator is responsible for developing and implementing a housing action plan, finding housing, coordinating the move, developing a plan for housing retention

and continued support from the necessary service providers, and resolving any housing issues that arise. The position is designed so that involvement from a housing navigator lessens once the person is “settled” in their new housing.

Key Findings

1. New York state has housing navigators specifically for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), and they are primarily responsible for a client's housing plan, housing acquisition, moving to housing, housing retention, and housing issues resolution. Housing navigators work in coordination with other actors to get clients housed, such as a case manager and housing subsidy coordinator.
2. Having a housing plan that includes a dedicated housing navigator position for people with I/DD is not only relevant because people with mental disabilities disproportionately experience homelessness, but also because it is a model that can be adopted for effectively housing people in general.

5. Homeless System Response: Landlord Engagement in the Time of COVID-19

Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). May 2020.

Summary:

Landlords are facing unique financial challenges during the pandemic. To incentivize landlords, it is worth setting up mitigation funds, which minimize the perceived risks of renting to a person with a history of homelessness; this money is dedicated to potential damages in a unit, resolution of a person's debt from a prior eviction, and coverage of rent in case a person cannot pay. To ensure safety, agencies engaging landlords should coordinate contact-less lease-up's which consist of digital lease signings, virtual viewings, non-contact key handoffs, and physical distancing when in-person interactions are inevitable. Other incentives and tips a housing agency can implement to effectively engage landlords include: tenant screening for the best possible housing match; landlord-tenant resolution services; the assurance of on-time, direct payments from people who receive rental assistance; a written document clearly outlining an agency's support functions for tenants and landlords; reference information of other landlords that can vouch for the agency; referral bonuses for landlords who recruit other landlords; and coordinating with other landlord engagement initiatives in a community.

Key Findings

1. For effective landlord engagement during the Covid-19 pandemic, a housing agency should do everything in its power to ensure: contactless lease-up's, consistent rent payments via a rental subsidy or mitigation funds, property protection via mitigation funds, and conflict resolution services.
2. Washington State; Boston, Massachusetts; and Vermont each have effective landlord engagement strategies. Washington has a Landlord Mitigation Program where landlords who rent to tenants receiving rental assistance can submit claims for damages, unpaid rent, and pre-move-in costs to pass inspection. Boston has written standards for landlords who work with rapid rehousing providers, which include clear timelines for inspections, applications, viewings, regular check-ins, and when a landlord should expect to hear back after reaching out about a vacant unit or tenant concern. Finally, many agencies in Vermont used state funding for landlord liaison job positions for landlord engagement.

6. Landlord Engagement Strategies: An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

Veterans Health Administration (VHA) National Homeless Program Office. 2018.

Summary:

A landlord engagement drive at Chicago's Jesse Brown VA Medical Center aimed to house 50 chronic and long-term homeless veterans from October 1, 2017 to December 31, 2017. The drive ended up housing 34 such veterans during this time, and 34 more by the end of February 2018. The components of the drive were: a Landlord Engagement Committee comprised of the HUD-VASH Team Leader, the Landlord Engagement Coordinator from the city's Ending Veteran Homelessness Initiative, and other HUD-VASH clinicians; an assessment by the Committee of existing landlord engagement activities to ensure coordination; partnership with government officials and a landlord association to spread awareness; meetings with landlords and property owners and appearances at their conferences; two coffee talks with potential landlords; and a final large-scale event with landlords, property management associations, realtors, brokers, service providers, the Chicago Housing Authority, and federal partners. For each event, the Committee dedicated time for landlords to pledge housing units. The drive had no budget, put on by volunteers and in-kind donations.

Key Finding

1. The existence of a Landlord Engagement Committee with the necessary partners, inclusive of a position exclusively devoted to landlord engagement, and with a specific goal (house X number of veterans by Y date via Z activities) has the potential to effectively house veterans experiencing homelessness.

7. The Landlord Engagement Toolkit: A Guide to Working with Landlords in Housing First Programs

Jennifer Rae and Tim Aubry. *Employment and Social Development Canada*. 2018.

Summary:

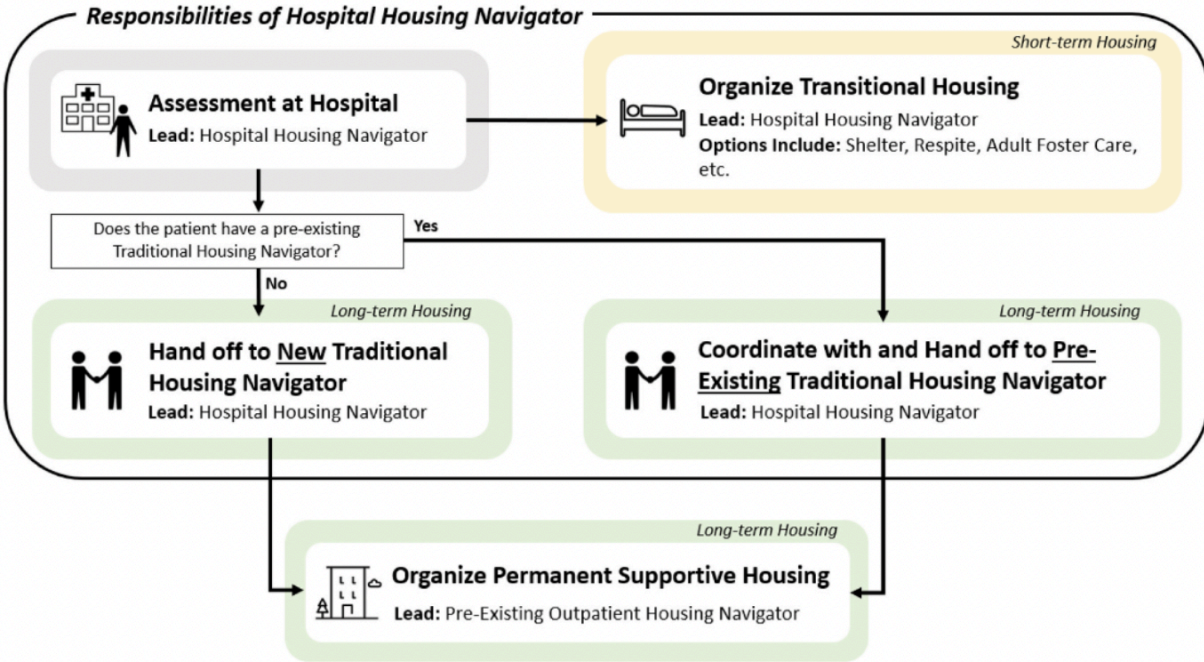
Canadian researchers compiled a how-to guide on engaging landlords to house people experiencing homelessness, based on interviews and site visits. The process of engagement is split up into three buckets: before engagement; the actual engagement (recruitment) of landlords; and maintaining relationships with landlords. In the first bucket, before engagement, a foundation needs to be laid: a landlord engagement committee with the necessary actors, including members of Indigenous communities; coordination with Housing First providers and/or existing landlord engagement efforts; a survey of landlords to understand their attitudes; securing of the necessary funds (mitigation fund, insurance, rental assistance, flexible dollars for moving expenses, putting on landlord engagement activities, etc.); and hiring and training separate staff (housing coordinator versus a clinical team member, or case manager—for a description of the differences in roles see [Appendix C](#)). For the second bucket, engaging landlords, providers and advocates need to: identify and utilize access points, modes by which landlords can learn about what it means to rent to people with a background of homelessness, such as landlord and/or property management associations and media releases; be persistent; arrange meetings between landlords, potential tenants, and housing coordinators; and educate tenants on what they need to do before, during, and after move-in, which includes receiving regular home visits. To maintain landlord relationships, the third bucket, a committee should conduct regular evaluations to assess effectiveness of landlord engagement strategies, via interviews, focus groups, and surveys with landlords and tenants and potential tenants, and analysis of quantitative outcomes data like length of time between a client's program entry and housing placement. Furthermore, landlords should be engaged in less traditional ways: as trainers to other landlords, as references for the homeless services program, as participants in marketing and outreach to recruit new landlords, as co-designers of tenant education programs, etc.

Key Findings

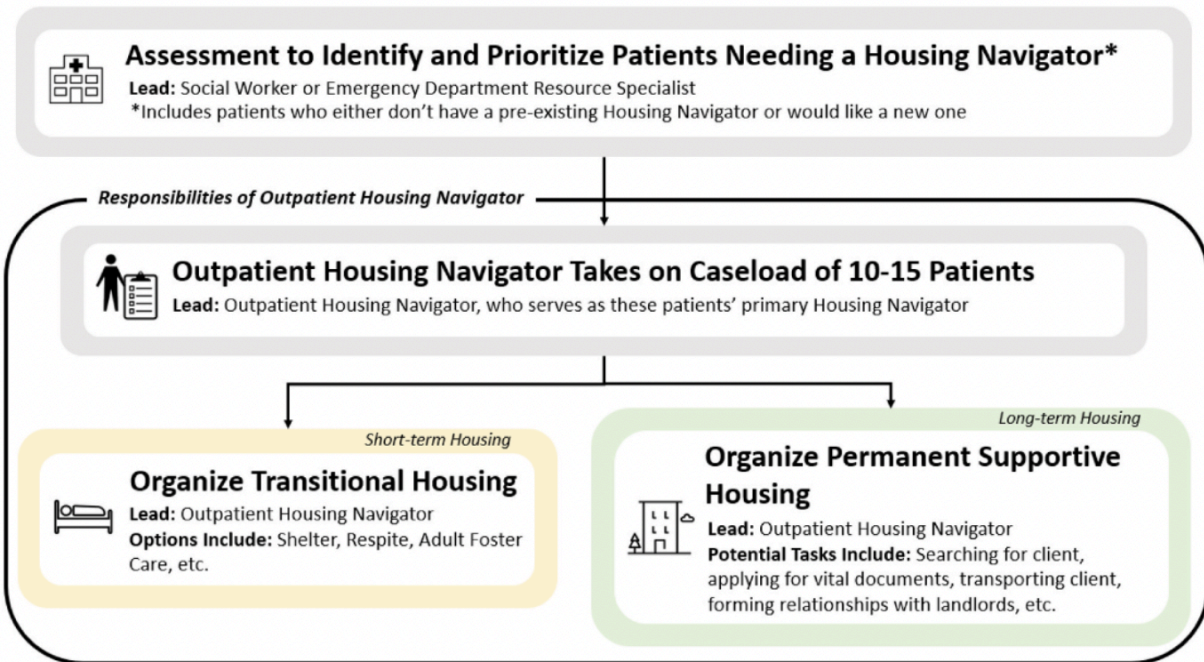
1. To effectively engage landlords, a committee of relevant actors in a community, including members of Indigenous groups, needs to think of the process as: pre-engagement, the actual engagement, and maintenance of landlord relationships. Pre-engagement consists of activities like setting up the necessary funding (for risk mitigation, rental assistance, insurance, flexible dollars) and hiring and training staff for separate functions (a housing coordinator independent of case management). In actual engagement, a committee needs to be persistent in getting the word out to landlords and meeting with them and educating tenants on how to function in a new living situation. After engagement, relationships are maintained through regular evaluations of the landlord recruitment strategies and involving landlords as recruiters of other landlords and co-designers of tenant education programs.
2. A housing coordinator is property- and landlord- focused. They do outreach and marketing; maintain a pool of available units; are the point of contact for the landlord; coordinate between the landlord, case manager, and participant; address housing quality and rent payment issues; and inspect units. A clinical team staff member or case manager, by contrast, is more tenant-focused. They ensure the tenant gets a unit that meets their needs, explains the lease to the tenant, advocates for the tenant, problem solves when the tenant's housing is threatened, accompanies a client to view an apartment, etc.

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Appendix A: Hospital-Based Housing Navigation



Model 1. Hospital-based Housing Navigator framework.



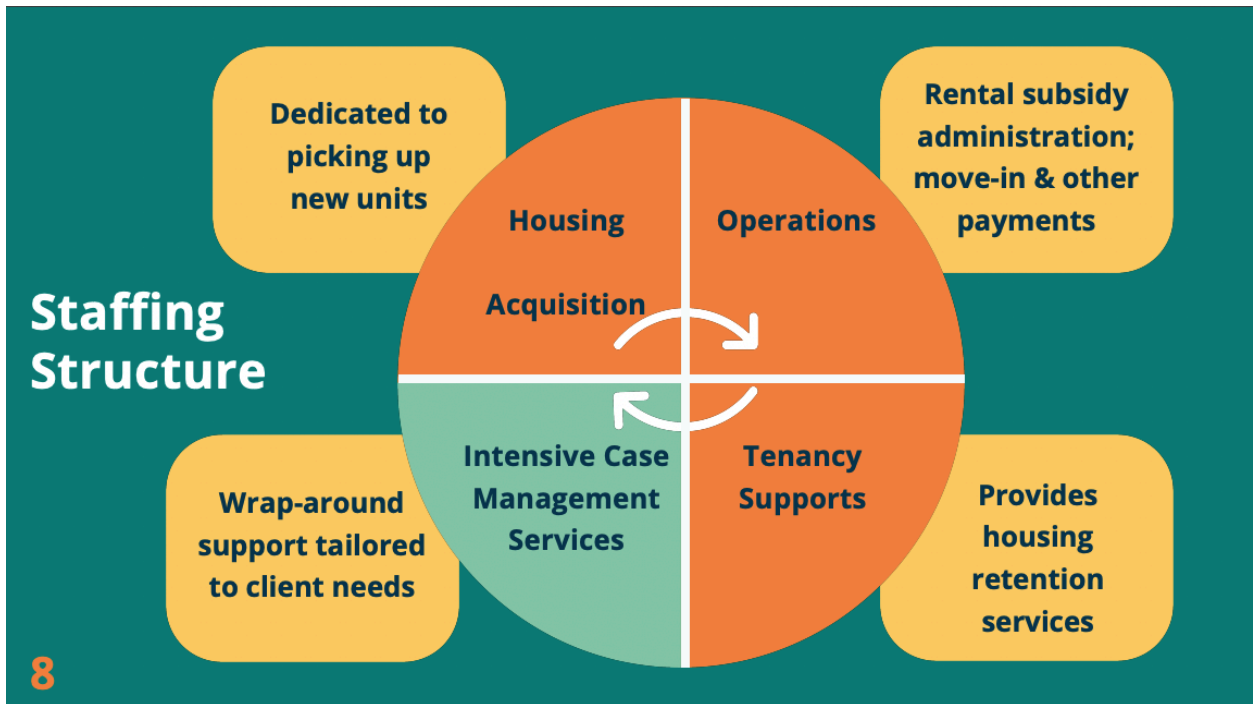
Model 2. Outpatient housing navigation framework.

Appendix B: Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool

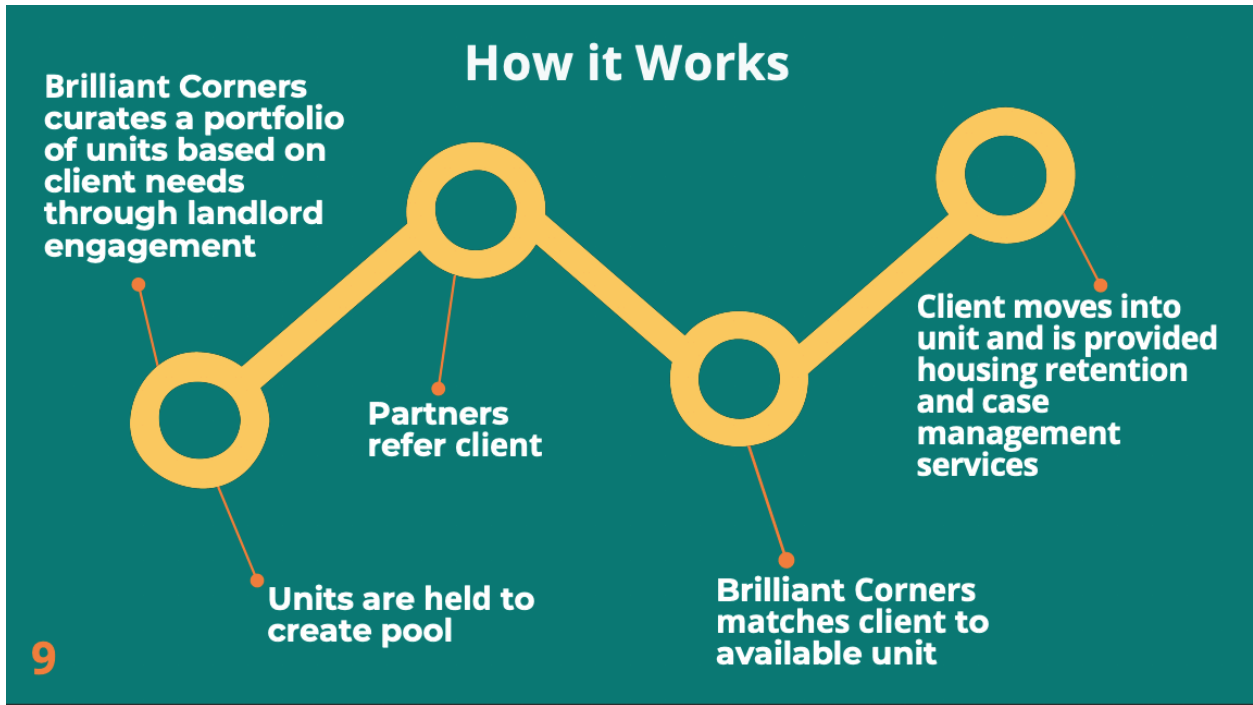
In Los Angeles County, the Flexible Housing Subsidy Pool (also known as the Los Angeles Department of Health Services Supportive Housing Rental Subsidy Program) has the following partners structure:



The staffing structure of the Pool:



The process:



Appendix C: Housing Coordinator versus Clinical Team Role (or Case Manager)

Housing Coordinator Role	Clinical Team Role
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct outreach and marketing• Identify available units – maintain a database• Serve as primary point of contact for landlord• Act as a go-between with the landlord, clinical team, and participant• Address issues related to maintenance, health and safety, housing quality concerns, rent payment• Inspect units• Assess damages and arrange for repairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accompany the participant to view the apartment• Help to match the participant to the right unit – ensure good fit• Explain the lease to participants• Ensure the apartment is furnished• Develop a monthly budget with the participant• Educate the participant on his or her rights and responsibilities as a tenant• Advocate for participant• Problem solve in situations where tenancy is threatened• Provide regular home visits

