



Best Practices for Transitional Housing Applications & Intakes

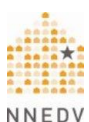
A good application is simple, and does not ask for more information than absolutely necessary. The application has two purposes: to determine if the applicant meets the basic and minimum eligibility criteria (i.e. is a survivor, needs housing, homeless as a result of fleeing the violence); and to determine 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 get in touch 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.

As an example, if your program does not require participants to pay rent or program fees, or contribute financially in any way, you likely do not need to know the applicant's source(s) of income at this stage in the process. If need be, you can easily get those details after she has been accepted into the program.

In addition, asking for other types of information may open the program up to liability and unwanted scrutiny. For example, if you ask personally-identifying questions about an applicant's race, ethnicity, height/weight, religious preference, marital status, disability, or educational status and then you deny the applicant services (for any reason), you may open yourself up to being accused of discrimination. How will you prove that the applicant was not denied due to these personal characteristics? And just as importantly, how can you justify that those personal characteristics relate to program eligibility?

Lastly, consider how the information you gather could jeopardize the applicant's safety or confidentiality. If your program has an outside referral process that includes completing an application at another program, then the document may change hands between staff and agencies. Never ask for social security numbers or specifics about her history of abuse, as this information could end up in the wrong hands and potentially endanger her, or be used against her in some way.





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 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 you build 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 your program. This is the first opportunity to build rapport and trust and is your chance to begin to identify the support you'll provide.

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

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

