

COVID-19 and Flexible Funding

Flexible funding is a powerful way to support survivors' safety and housing stability as they seek to escape violence, establish independent homes, and move forward with their lives. Studies have shown that flexible funding is highly effective in helping survivors to avoid homelessness, maintain safe housing, and remain free from violence. The ability to provide survivors with targeted, flexible, and fast financial assistance can be the difference between homelessness or worse in dealing with domestic and sexual violence.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, helping survivors be safely housed has become exponentially more difficult, as programs have reduced shelter and service capacity due to public health concerns; the incidence of domestic and sexual violence has increased due to survivors' need to shelter-in-place with abusers or out of fear of exposure to the virus in public programs; and, there are fewer essential resources to support survivors due to the economic fallout of the pandemic, redirection of resources, and closure of community-based programs. These factors have demanded that programs serving survivors adapt quickly and creatively to help survivors find safety and stability when there is less to be found.

Flexible funding is one solution that many programs are adopting to respond to this confluence of events. In fact, as programs have struggled to manage the COVID-19 crisis, flexible funding programs have multiplied across the country, enabling victim-serving agencies to support survivors' access to essential goods and services while observing critical social distancing measures. Flexible funding allows programs to support survivors' safe housing without reliance on shelter by helping to offset the cost of safe housing options or facilitating survivors to remain safely in their own homes. It enables staff to help survivors remotely, without the need to meet face-to-face, and facilitates funding for needs such as medical, food, or cleaning supplies. It affords programs the ability to address survivors' atypical needs – such as funding for dental surgery, car tires, or back taxes – all of which, if unaddressed, could pose a threat to financial solvency and stable housing. Furthermore, it can enable programs to serve survivors who might not otherwise be interested in or eligible for traditional programming by providing short-term interventions, coupled with advocacy and safety planning, that does not require a long-term commitment to a program by the survivor.

Flexible funding, as the name suggests, is flexible enough to meet survivors' varied needs while also allowing hundreds of programs – whose mission is to assist survivors to achieve safety and independence from violence – to expand their impact at the very time that services are desperately needed but also severely limited. This has necessitated that organizations adapt their programs quickly and, in some cases, without the internal supports and tools needed to administer these funds and services sufficiently and swiftly. Organizations have had to innovate in real time and under stressful conditions. Technology to facilitate the administration of flexible funding is urgently needed to help programs making this shift.

Resilience in Real Time Project

The [National Alliance for Safe Housing \(NASH\)](#) is partnering with [Caravan Studios, a division of TechSoup](#) to develop the Resilience in Real Time (RIRT) project, which uses technology to facilitate the administration, dissemination, and documentation of flexible funding to support survivors by helping offset the costs of safe housing—from helping survivors to remain safely in their own homes to providing funding for the essential goods and services that help a survivor retain safe housing and mitigate threats to financial solvency.

The RIRT project will enable programs to provide flexible funding to survivors more comprehensively and safely, both currently and post-pandemic, by enabling advocates to remotely serve survivors in the community and support them with access to a variety of safe housing options thereby keeping scarce and urgently needed shelter space available for high-risk survivors. It will also enable programs to disseminate funding in a fast, flexible, and targeted way, quickly addressing the financial crises that lead to survivors' homelessness, and better reach survivors in marginalized communities who may not otherwise have access to mainstream housing programs and resources.

Additionally, the RIRT technology will enable flexible funding to be administered effectively while easing the burden of bureaucratic and fiscal demands related to providing financial assistance, by allowing agencies to distribute funds from a central source, effectively braid different funding sources, and provide survivor subsidies through a variety of means including gift cards, direct vendor payments, and prepaid debit cards. This will afford agencies with the ability to account for funds easily, ensure oversight for stakeholders and governing authorities, and support identification and analysis of the impact and uses of funds seamlessly.

Altogether, this project will facilitate the provision, management, dissemination, tracking, and documentation of the entire flexible funding process – from request to approval to payment to outcome – in one unified platform. And when programs can demonstrate success of the application and approach, they can also then use the technology to crowd-source additional resources to support survivors. We expect to pilot the app with multiple programs around the country in 2021, establishing another innovative means to invest in the resilience of survivors and their communities.



[Caravan Studios](#), a division of Tech Soup, builds technology tools and solutions that help communities organize, access, and apply local resources to their most pressing problems. Using a 5-step community design methodology, participating community members identify the issues they want to address and then help design and test potential solutions, thus ensuring that scaled solutions are made by and for the target communities.

Covid-19 and Flexible Funding: Redefining Resilience for Survivors

Founded in 1987, TechSoup provides both the digital platforms and in-person experiences that enable people to work together toward a more equitable world. Our programs and projects are designed to build capacity at a global scale with local care. We have brought technology resources and education to over 1 million individual users and 800,000 nonprofits and libraries around the world.

TechSoup is governed by a Board of Directors, which oversees all programmatic and organizational objectives, including those of Caravan Studios. The 9-person Caravan Studios division is led by Marnie Webb, who has over 20 years of professional experience in working with technology for social good.



National Alliance for Safe Housing, Inc. (NASH) - a national nonprofit organization, NASH's mission is to ensure that survivors of domestic and sexual violence have a full range of safe housing options, through improved access, increased resources, and innovative solutions, ultimately catalyzing a safe housing movement. Their vision is to create a world where safe housing is a human right shared by everyone. NASH advances their mission by: 1) Aligning systems and changing public policy to promote safe housing; 2) Engaging communities and supporting partnerships to support safe housing; and, 3) Advocating for programs and innovative practices to facilitate safe housing.

NASH was launched in 2015 to provide national-level training and technical assistance to a broad audience of stakeholders seeking to address the intersections of domestic/sexual violence and housing/homelessness. Through its role in the federal U.S. Domestic Violence and Housing TA Consortium (DVHTAC), NASH works with providers nationwide to create partnerships, capacity, and resources for local, state, and national organizations to adopt safe housing practices, policies, and programs for survivors. NASH's purpose is to shift the culture toward safe housing for survivors, families, and communities.