

Boston Problem-Solving Guide for People Seeking Shelter

Below is a problem-solving guide for staff in Boston to use to give participants the space to brainstorm alternatives to entering shelter. The questions on the first page are not required, but are a toolbox of prompts that can be effective in finding alternative solutions to a housing crisis. Staff are encouraged to use the order and questions that make sense, given the nature of the relationship with the participant. Staff members are encouraged to utilize active listening and motivational interviewing skills to engage in conversations and support participants to identify their own unique potential solutions to resolve their housing crisis.

Introduce the purpose of a problem-solving conversation to the participant. Suggested key points include:

- *Continued homelessness can take a toll on people's health and well-being. Since there are not enough housing resources in Boston to give everyone housing who needs it, we also want to problem solve and explore other options you may have to leave this housing crisis and move to a more stable safe alternative even if for tonight.*
- *If you get into shelter, there is no guarantee you will be able to access long-term housing assistance. For example, right now in Boston, it is estimated there is only enough subsidized housing for 1 out of 4 people who need it.*
- *Do you have any questions before we start?*

Assess for Immediate Safety

Discuss with the participant if they are actively fleeing violence or harm or are experiencing a serious health or mental health crisis. If so, stop the conversation and connect the participant with crisis intervention services such as Safelink for domestic violence, or urgent medical or psychiatric care if applicable.

- *Is there anyone making you feel unsafe or that you are fleeing from?*
- *Do you have any pressing medical, health or other safety concerns that we should address before discussing your housing situation?*
- *Are you currently having thoughts of hurting yourself or others?*

Explore the Situation & Appropriateness of the Shelter Environment

Gain an understanding of the participant's living situation. Share realities of the shelter environment so the participant has information to make informed choices about where to stay.

- *What brings you here today? Why are you seeking shelter now? Where did you stay last night?*
- *Do you currently have a housing voucher, even if it expired recently, or your own apartment or home?*
- *Where have you been staying? What was your most recent indoor living situation? How long had you stayed?*
- *How did you hear about us? Is this your first time in shelter?*
- *Where would you stay if shelter was unavailable? If you came to shelter, do you know how you would get around and take care of your personal needs (hygiene, transportation, storage of things, etc)?*
- *In the past 1-6 months, have you stayed at an institution like detox, treatment, hospitals, jail? Are you an active or past client of the Dept. of Mental Health?*

Brainstorm Possible Solutions

Engage in active listening and think about/reflect back strengths they may share. Brainstorm possibilities and use motivational interviewing skills. Explore potential options with the participant.

- *Who are the people that may want to know you are seeking shelter tonight, or may want to know you need help?*
- *What are some of the places you have considered staying other than shelter, even for the night?*
- *Tell me about past places you've stayed that have been positive.*
- *Tell me about any strengths you have to navigate difficult situations.*

- *What support would you need to stay somewhere else or make a housing option work?*

Next Steps: Data Collection, Services and Assistance to Resolve the Housing Crisis

If a successful housing alternative is identified through the Diversion conversation, reflect back potential option(s) to participant and agree on next steps (i.e. confirm with family/friend their return with verbal consent, arrange for transportation, resources, etc. Inform the participant that to provide services like mediation (i.e. talking with a family member) and/or financial assistance, you will ask to collect the key data points shown below to both create a client record and inform service delivery.

If a housing alternative is not identified and the participant is in need of shelter services, collect the below data and move forward with any triage or shelter intake work you would do to connect the participant to immediate shelter options.