

Overview: The Master List

Goal: End Homelessness among Veterans. Federal, state, and local partners are committed to ending homelessness among Veterans in every community as quickly as possible. The goal is to achieve and sustain a well-coordinated and efficient community system that ensures homelessness is ***rare, brief and non-recurring and no Veteran is forced to live on the street.***

In order to meet this goal, communities across the country are recognizing the need to develop, maintain and effectively use a ***Master List¹ of all Veterans experiencing homelessness*** in their area. A Master List is also a critical element for communities pursuing the ***Federal Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Veteran Homelessness.*** A Master List can help:

- Ensure all Veterans experiencing homelessness within a community are identified and their housing needs are known;
- Track the status and progress toward permanent housing of each of these Veterans;
- Coordinate housing and services for each Veteran household between all community providers;
- Measure progress toward goals and how close a community is to reaching an end to homelessness among Veterans;
- Identify key barriers to goal attainment and opportunities to resolve them.

Master List Core Features

While Master Lists take many forms based on local conditions and community needs, communities experiencing the most success work to achieve these six core features in their Master List:

1. Data for the List is generated ***using existing data systems*** – local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) and the VA’s HOMES data system, among others where applicable.
2. The List is comprehensive, meaning it ***captures all Veterans experiencing homelessness*** in the community (specifically, the entire geographic area overseen by the Continuum of Care), including all unsheltered Veterans and those in all emergency shelter (including Health Care for Homeless Veterans contract beds), Safe Havens, and transitional housing (including Grant and Per Diem (GPD) beds). The list includes Veterans who are and are not eligible for VA services.
3. The List is ***dynamic and updated frequently***, preferably daily or weekly, and at least monthly. The List is never “complete”.
4. The List includes ***basic elements*** needed to track shelter, housing and assistance offered to and being used by Veterans, as well as when Veterans exit homelessness and are no longer known to be literally homeless.
5. Information from the List is ***used in case conferencing and other system monitoring to support thoughtful decisions*** about how to best assist each Veteran household in achieving permanent housing as quickly as possible, as well as identifying when assistance is ineffective or where Veterans are lost or disengaged. The list is used to as a tool in coordinated ***entry and prioritization.***
6. The List is used to ***measure progress toward community goals***, such as permanent housing placement rates and average time from identification to permanent housing, as well as to ***identify systemic bottlenecks and barriers*** in the housing placement process to inform process improvements and reduce inefficiencies.

Key Considerations for Communities

Ideally, the creation and use of a Master List is done in the context of true community collaboration involving all stakeholders who provide services to Veterans and their households. Continuum of Care (CoC) staff, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) providers, local VA staff, housing authorities, other homeless assistance providers, Veteran organizations and outreach teams should all be involved in routinely collecting and contributing information to local data systems used to generate the Master List. To meet this goal, all stakeholders should come together to make decisions about the design and use of the Master List. All key stakeholders should be involved to assure a comprehensive and complete list. Begin by bringing as many stakeholders as possible to the table and then bring on others as your work continues. ***This effort is too important to wait until you have everyone participating.***

¹ The term “Master List” is interchangeable with other terminology such as “Active List” or “By-Name List”

Consideration 1: Developing the List

Creating a Master List can seem like a daunting task. Taken step-by-step, however, every community has the capacity and tools available to begin this process.

- **Local Buy-In: It is important to involve as many stakeholders as possible.** Your partners need to understand the purpose of the Master List and its functions as a tool to support housing efforts. Potential stakeholders include, but are not limited to:
 - *Continuum of Care and HMIS Representatives*
 - *VA Homeless Service Liaisons and other homeless assistance staff (e.g., HUD-VASH coordinator, GPD liaisons, etc.)*
 - *Housing Authorities*
 - *Outreach and Coordinated Entry staff*
 - *Veteran-serving organizations*
 - *Emergency shelter staff, especially HCHV staff*
 - *Transitional housing staff, including GPD and other TH programs*
 - *All other appropriate or relevant stakeholders in your community*
- **Timeline:** Identify a timeline for development and implementation. The Master List is dynamic and requires ongoing updates. It will take time and effort to get to a comprehensive list that includes all Veterans who are homeless across the CoC geography and with data from various stakeholders. Do not delay starting your list until you have every stakeholder at the table. Get started and work to build and refine your List and operations over time.
- **Data Sources:** Agree on where and how to get information about Veterans experiencing homelessness to put on your Master List. Use what is available within your community starting with data already being collected and entered into your CoC's HMIS and the VA's HOMES data system. Identify what data is missing (including which providers don't contribute any data) and then supplement your list by gathering data directly from providers. Outreach teams are a critical data source in every community and should be asked to contribute. Your annual Point in Time (PIT) process can also help fill gaps in your list, since most PIT counts include a significant amount of canvassing to find people who are unsheltered who might not be engaged with outreach. Data used for a community's Veterans Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) may also help inform the development of the Master List. HMIS will likely be your primary source of data, but you should also include information from other partners who do not use HMIS (ex: outreach teams, privately funded shelters, the local VA medical center, and some Veteran service organizations).
- **Privacy and Confidentiality Concerns:** Your planning group (in conjunction with the CoC and HMIS lead) should decide how to address privacy, confidentiality, and data security concerns. This can be a difficult conversation, but *can* be resolved (don't be surprised if you have to have Veterans sign multiple release of information forms because of the broad array of stakeholders in your community). Recently, the VA issued [guidance](#) which discusses under what circumstances VA staff can participate in HMIS; this may help resolve some concerns. However, you do not need to wait for your VA to participate in HMIS to get started with your List. There may be ways to share VA HOMES data or use de-identified information from your local VA. Privacy concerns may also dictate which entity is most appropriate to manage the List and its access points. HUD has also published a toolkit titled [Engaging and Identifying All Veterans](#) that offers strategies related to data concerns. Ultimately, Veterans need to consent to data sharing and personally identifiable data must be protected.
- **Data Elements:** As a group, agree on the data elements that should be gathered on your Master List. [The Master List Template and Benchmark Generation Tool](#) contains all the data elements needed to calculate the Federal benchmarks. You might choose to start collecting the basic data elements and then expand the information on the List as you broaden participation and the use of the List. This template and its associated data elements are optional, but provide a sample of a List that would collect all of the data required to both measure against the Federal criteria and benchmarks and inform client-level discussions.
- **Identifying All Veterans:** Work to ensure that your List includes all Veterans experiencing homelessness as soon as possible and is kept up-to-date. USICH, HUD and VA are striving to end homelessness among all Veterans who are literally homeless, regardless of discharge status, and including those residing in VA-funded homeless programs such as GPD and HCHV. Veterans residing in other transitional housing, emergency housing, Safe Haven programs, and in places not meant for human habitation must also be included on the List, as well as Veterans who had been on the street or in a shelter, but who are staying in a publicly-funded institution (e.g., hospital) for 90 days or less and will return to literal homelessness upon discharge. The List should not include Veterans who are at risk of homelessness.

Consideration 2: Managing the List

- **A Keeper or Manager of the List:** Identify one person who is primarily responsible for managing the List. While all relevant partners should contribute to and participate in the use of the List, one person (or entity) must be responsible for managing the List and ensuring sharing and privacy protocols are being followed. It may be appropriate for HMIS staff to assume this role.
- **Regular Updates and Standardized Workflows:** Your community should decide how often the List is updated to reflect the most current status of Veterans on your list. This includes specifying a workflow for each data source for the List: who provides the data, what data they should provide, when data should be provided, and by what means should data be provided. Ideally, a dynamic, useful Master List is updated weekly, but at minimum information should be updated monthly.
- **Flexibility:** A Master List will always be a work in progress. Just as the names on the list will constantly change, the data elements and protocols for the List may need to be adjusted as you use it and as your local needs evolve.
- **Technology:** Ideally, most information collected for a Master List should also be in your CoC's HMIS, though the cost and time involved may require this to be a longer-term goal. A Master List does not need to be complicated. While working toward making HMIS capable of generating your Master List, a simple excel file or shared file may be all that is needed for an effective tool as long it is managed well. Adding in simple color coding or other grouping of Veteran status can help you prioritize Veterans during case conferencing or pinpoint bottlenecks and challenges within the system itself.
- **Managing who is on the List:** Your community should agree on a procedure for how to track the changing status of Veterans on the List. Understanding who, on any given day, is "active" (i.e., literally homeless) is key to efficient tracking and system management. One way to manage this is to create multiple tabs (or use filtering or some other method) on an excel spreadsheet (for an example, see the *Master List Template and Benchmark Generation Tool* that track each Veteran's status – Veterans can either be 'active' (in shelter or transitional housing or on the street) or 'inactive' (unknown or missing after a certain period of time, permanently housed, or otherwise exited homelessness). Federal guidance recommends changing a Veteran's status to "inactive" (or "missing") only for Veterans who cannot be located by Outreach staff after repeated attempts for 90 days or more. An important question to answer is how do you remain "on the lookout" for people who are temporarily not active or disengaged.

Consideration 3: Using the List

Apart from the basic purpose of a Master List (to identify all Veterans who are homeless at any point-in-time and over-time), the Master List is a key means for coordinating assistance among providers, prioritizing assistance for Veterans with more severe service needs, and for system evaluation and improvement planning.

- **Case Conferencing:** Case conferencing is a critical element to your community's efforts to end homelessness among Veterans. Please see the accompanying *Overview of Case Conferencing* tool for more detailed information and guidance.
- **Prioritization:** The List can help facilitate coordinated entry processes and real-time decisions around who to prioritize for more intensive and costly assistance, such as HUD-VASH.
- **System Evaluation and Improvement:** The List can be both a snapshot of Veterans who are homeless at a point in time and a way to gauge progress over time; where possible it can and should be used to identify systemic barriers to housing placements and inefficient or ineffective housing interventions. The List can also help identify patterns in Veterans entering homelessness, whether for the first time or after previous homeless episodes, including those who return to homelessness after an initial exit to permanent housing.

To end homelessness among Veterans you must know who the Veterans are that are in need of assistance. The Master List is a window into your progress toward this goal and a tool to help measure it. *To request Technical Assistance related to the Master List, please contact your SSVF Regional Coordinator or Technical Assistance providers under the Vets@Home initiative.*