

Important New Funding Resource for SSI/SSDI Assistance

As part of economic recovery legislation, Congress and the Administration have created a potential source of new funding for case management services to help clients obtain SSI/SSDI benefits. The recently enacted American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided \$1.5 billion for a new Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). **Eligible activities under this program include providing case management services to help homeless persons obtain SSI and SSDI benefits** in order to help those persons obtain housing. HPRP is a one-time infusion of funds to states and local communities to help them prevent and address homelessness. All HPRP funds **must** be spent within a two-year period.

HPRP provides an important opportunity for your organization or community to fund case workers to implement the lessons learned from SOAR, however, nonprofits must act soon in order to have an opportunity to obtain these funds. Under HPRP, all \$1.5 billion will be distributed to states and entitlement communities. Only states and local governments are eligible grantees, but these agencies may provide subgrants to private nonprofits.

To obtain HPRP funding, states and local governments must submit to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) a Substantial Amendment to the jurisdiction's Consolidated Plan 2008 Action Plan (also known as a "Con. Plan", this is a document that normally outlines a jurisdiction's housing and community development needs and planned steps to address those needs). **The Substantial Amendment is due to HUD by May 18, 2009.** Prior to HUD submission, jurisdictions must provide a public comment period of at least 12 calendar days. **Most jurisdictions have begun the public comment period this week (4/20/09) or will begin in the next two weeks.**

These public comment periods provide an opportunity to press for the Substantial Amendment to include SSI/SSDI application assistance as an eligible activity. While most jurisdictions will do a Request for Proposals (RFP) separate from the Substantial Amendment to the Con. Plan, it is important to ensure the activities you want to carry out are included in the Substantial Amendment as eligible activities.

Although HPRP funds will only be distributed for two years and are not expected to be renewed, they provide a critical opportunity to get SOAR programs started or brought to full scale. In turn, having these programs in place can allow SOAR programs to document results, which may in turn make it easier for organizations to find other funding for the positions in the future.

What you should do:

1. Review HUD's webpage about the HPRP program: <http://www.hudhre.info/index.cfm?do=viewHPRP>. The webpage includes the Notice for HPRP funds, Frequently Asked Questions, and a variety of useful links.

Additionally, the page also has an interactive feature that allows you to submit questions directly to HUD and get a personalized response.

2. Get in touch with your state or local government officials to find out the timing and status of plan development in your jurisdiction, as well as the timing and status of the RFP. In general, grantees will be the state or local government agency responsible for administering Community Development Block Grant funds. HUD has published information on how much money each state or local government is eligible to receive under HPRP, along with a listing the CDBG contact for that jurisdiction:
<http://www.hudhre.info/documents/HPRPGranteesCDBGContacts.pdf>.

Note that if your city or county government is not listed as an eligible grantee, you may only obtain HPRP funding from your state government.

3. Advocate for local officials to include funding for case management services for public benefits assistance. It may be helpful to mention that your jurisdiction has access to SOAR training and technical assistance and these funds will help them to maximize that resource. Because the purpose of this funding is to rapidly re-house homeless persons, you also should explain how obtaining SSI benefits will help your clients to obtain housing. You may also wish to make the case that SOAR can result in cost savings for other systems such as hospitals. For more information on examples of costs savings, see
<http://www.prainc.com/SOAR/training/pdfs/SustainabilityTranscript.pdf>.

To enhance your advocacy and service efforts, collaborate with other homeless advocates and service providers to help your community develop a plan for these funds. HPRP funds may be used for a variety of activities, including short- and medium-term (up to 18 months) rental assistance and homelessness prevention activities. While the housing assistance under HPRP is time-limited, it may provide stable housing while clients wait for public housing or other housing assistance.

4. Once your community's RFP has been issued, apply for funds.

To help you navigate the HPRP process, the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty (NLCHP) has developed a wiki that includes an overview of the program as well as links to useful documents:

<http://wiki.nlchp.org/display/Manual/Homelessness+Prevention+and+Rapid+Re-Housing+Program+%28HPRP%29>.

Additionally, NLCHP and the National Alliance to End Homelessness have been conducting a series of webinars about the HPRP funds. You can find links to the presentations here:

<http://wiki.nlchp.org/display/Manual/HPRP+Links%2C+Documents+and+Presentations>.

For more information, contact Laurel Weir at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty at lweir@nlchp.org.