# Entry Form
# 2017 Annual Awards for Program Excellence
## Entry Deadline: Thursday, June 15, 2017, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

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**Entry Title:** Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

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**Category:** _____

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**Entry Summary:** A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

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Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF?        Yes        No

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Maine Assessing and Planning for Supporting Housing Stability with HCV Participants

MAPS

In 2012 MaineHousing decided to bring in house the administration of the Housing Choice Voucher program.  MaineHousing administers 3,800 vouchers predominantly in municipalities not served by a local housing authority.  Prior to taking on direct administration of the HCV program, MaineHousing contracted it to several regional housing and/or social service providers within the state.

The decision to provide housing services directly to tenants was difficult.  MaineHousing's business is largely the financing and development of housing.  The other housing programs – homeless assistance, weatherization, home repair and fuel assistance – are contracted to third party providers to deliver the services.  Bringing the HCV program was a dramatic cultural shift – one that the organization had been moving to, but not deliberatively.

It became quickly apparent that our HCV staff were overwhelmed with numbers of clients, the significance of their needs, and the challenges of connecting with tenants who may live more than 400 miles from our central offices.  MaineHousing's HCV program is designed to prioritize those families most in need.  As a result of our homeless preference, over 60% of vouchers issued are to families who are homeless.  Coupled with preferences for families with disabilities, the elderly and families with children, voucher holders in Maine are in significant need not limited to income.  Of MaineHousing's voucher holders, 76% earned less than $15,000 and nearly 50% have a disability.

Our HCV staff were often in a situation of having to determine the importance of tenants' needs, who to contact for help in meeting these needs, and as importantly, how to engage the tenant in an effective, nonjudgmental way – over the telephone.  The goal of assisting tenants to achieve and maintain housing stability has two important outcomes.  The obvious is the wellbeing of the tenant.  The other benefit is somewhat selfish – stably housed tenants mean less paperwork and greater program compliance.

The challenge to integrating a case management model into the administration of the HCV program were several:

- Time management concerns due to the size of average staff caseloads – typically approximately 350 households.
- Attitudinal:  staff were trained in managing the paperwork and didn't see themselves as "caseworkers."
- Resources:  staff were unaware of where to refer tenants, what it is they need.
- Lack of developed practice models for those working on housing stability.

**The Training Model: MAPS**

To assist in implementing a case management approach to housing stability, MaineHousing contracted with the University of Maine, Muskie School of Public Service to conduct a review of literature and model programs; lead a series of Maine based focus groups with landlords, staff and tenants; and convene a statewide steering committee to oversee and direct the creation of MAPS. We invited local public housing authorities to participate in the program design and resulting training. Three PHAs are members of the steering committee and contributed to the training program's design.

MAPS provides a 3 phased framework and includes strategies and tools to support staff in assessing tenant needs and planning for and supporting housing stability. The goals of the program are to:

- Strengthen tenant/staff engagement
- Work proactively to assess and respond to tenant needs throughout the process
- Strengthen collaboration with stakeholders who are essential partners in housing stability.

The 3 phases of MAPS are:

1. Assess Housing Stability using a combination of tools and observation
2. Plan for Housing Stability that prioritizes need, builds tenant motivation and develops a stability plan for moderate and high need tenants
3. Support Housing Stability to proactively resolve barriers and document progress.

The development of MAPS is divided into four components:

1. Research of Evidence Based Practice (Best Practice) and Curriculum Design
2. Model Curriculum Development
3. Training of Staff and Ongoing Coaching and Skill Development
4. Sustainability including a Train the Trainer component

A short overview of the MAPS model is included in our submission.

**Training Elements**

MAPS is a practice model, therefore an important element of MAPS is the identification of effective practices upon which the curriculum, training and coaching will be developed.

The model is consistent with MaineHousing's performance management focus on coaching for success. Coaching and practice are significant part of the MAPS training.

The development of MAPS was collaborative involving participants within MaineHousing as well as external. As a result, the training is easily transferrable to other organizations such as other public housing authorities and shelter providers.

Finally, MAPS is designed to be sustainable. Our capacity to continue delivering the training was built into its design. HCV staff have been trained to be trainers of the model.

**Implementation**

MaineHousing HCV staff have been trained as trainers and have begun implementation of the training within the department.  In May, HCV trainers provided an introduction to the training model and a role play demonstrating its application to all our staff during MaineHousing's All Staff Day.

# Maine Assessing & Planning for Supporting Housing Stability with HCV Participants (MAPS)
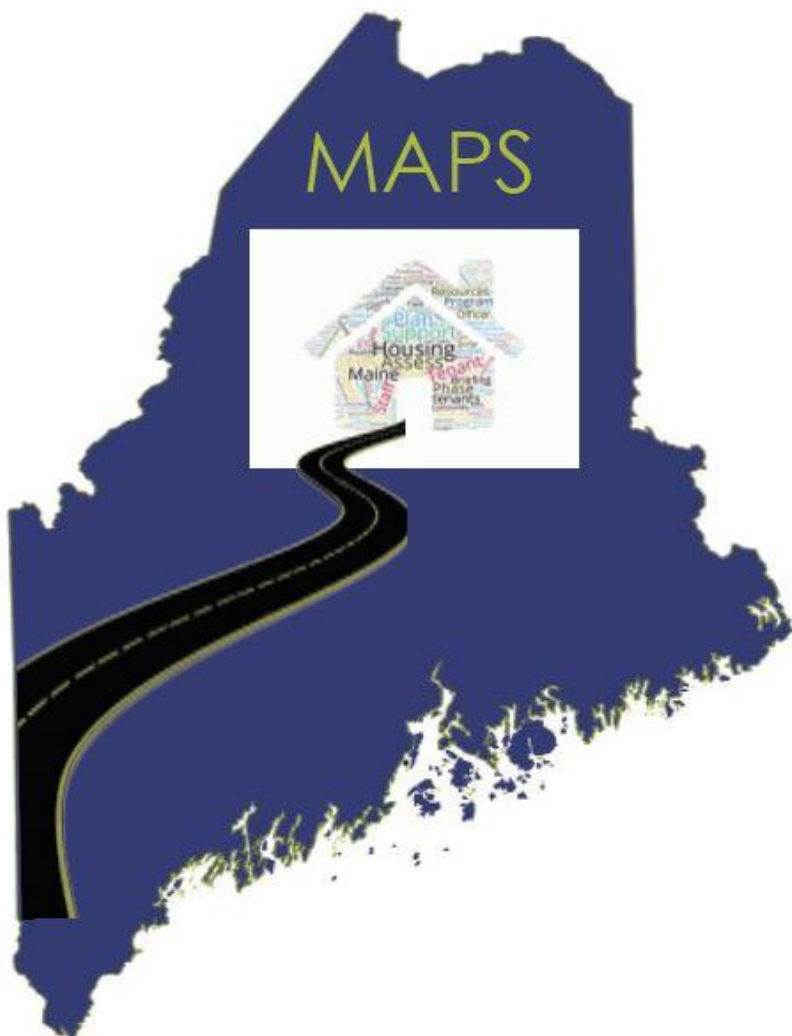


***Developed in partnership with the University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service***

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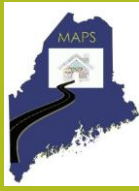
# *Acknowledgements*

## Authors

*Erica King, University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service*

*Maureen Baker, University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service*

## Key Contributors to Research

Paula Gerstenblatt, PhD

Rena Davis, JD

Jessica Pao, LMSW-CC

## Special Thanks

To Lauren Bustard and Denise Lord for leading this work in collaboration with MAPS Steering Committee and for their work to align the policy, practice and resources that contributed to the development of this training.

## MAPS Steering Committee

| | |
|---|---|
| Amanda Bartlett, Augusta Housing Authority | Amy Liechty, Bath Housing |
| Debora Keller, Bath Housing | Leah Bruns, MaineHousing |
| Denise Lord, MaineHousing | Amy Parks, Bath Housing |
| Jan Bosse, Portland Housing Authority | Lauren Bustard, MaineHousing |
| Louise Patenaude, MaineHousing | Allison Gallagher, MaineHousing |
| Melissa CloutierMaineHousing | Anne LaChance, MaineHousing |
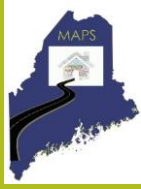
# *Introduction*

## Chapter Outline

1. Welcome and Context
2. What Contributes to Housing Stability?
3. Purpose and Origins of the Model
4. Overview of the Model
5. Two Essential Practices:  Empathy and Collaboration
6. The Role of Maine Housing Team Huddles
7. Summary and Reflections

## Learning Objectives

**Participants will:**

♦ Identify factors contributing to housing stability

♦ Describe the purpose of MAPS

♦ Identify collaborative partners in housing stability and explore similarities and differences across the various roles

♦ Describe the importance of empathy with the experience of a person who is seeking assistance with housing stability

♦ Summarize the purpose of team huddles as a support to resolve policy and practice barriers to housing stabilities

♦ Generate a list of topics to inform upcoming team huddles

# Welcome & Context

Across North America, housing programs are grappling with how best to support housing stability within low-income housing voucher programs.  There is a significant amount of research regarding the homeless population; however, there is a shortage of research on the specific population of people who cycle between housing voucher programs and homelessness. Housing stability is of the utmost importance as people in housing voucher programs have been shown to have higher rates of mental and physical health concerns and in fact have substantially poorer health than the general public (Digenis-Bury et al., 2008, Simning et al., 2012).

### What is Housing Stability?

Housing stability is "the extent to which an individual's customary access to housing of reasonable quality is secure (Frederick, Chwalek, Hughes, Karabanow, & Kidd, 2014)".  We are all somewhere on a continuum of housing stability, ranging from no access to housing to access to quality housing. Some believe that housing stability is best defined in relation to the presence or absence of threats to housing security. Housing stability:

♦ Can be hard to assess at the front door and over time
♦ Intersects with many more dimensions than HCV eligibility
♦ Is vulnerable to changes in income, relationship, access, health and legal status.
♦ Those changes can sometimes be sudden and unanticipated



| Housing Instability | Housing Stability |
|---|---|

**No access to housing of reasonable quality**          **Access in the absence of threats**
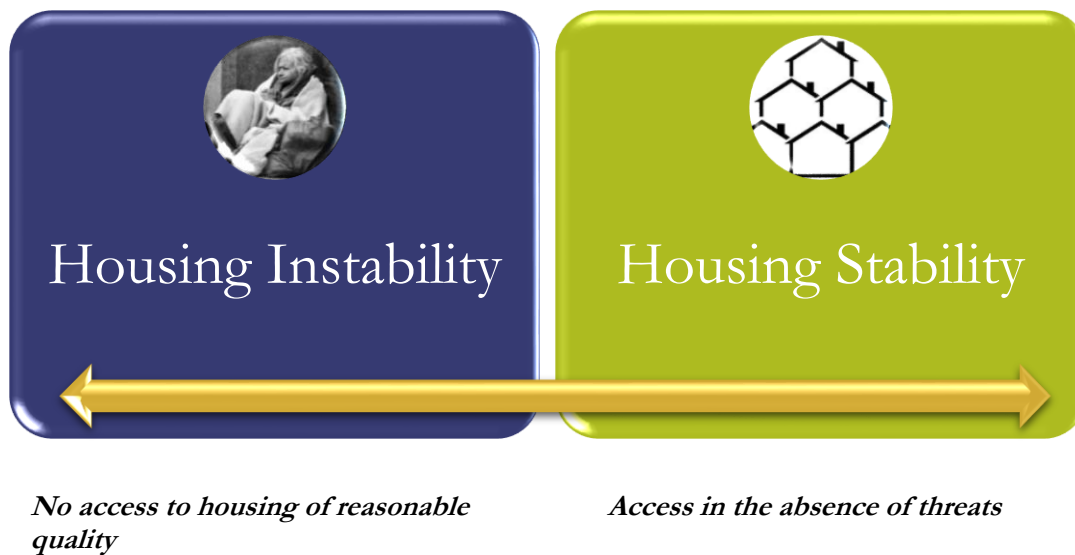
**The Role of HCV Programs**

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) programs are an essential resource in assisting very low-income families with affording safe, suitable housing of their choice through the provision of housing vouchers.  In many cases, tenants are able to find and keep appropriate housing, but **what happens if the tenant has higher needs that need to be addressed either prior to or following lease up?**

Across North America, research is reflecting innovative and proactive service models that increase housing stability by supporting individuals and families in overcoming barriers to permanent housing.  Key components of many models include assessing needs up front, individualized planning, referring to appropriate services, linking with community resources, and providing ongoing support after one is housed.  These activities have demonstrated improvements to housing stability, as well as a range of public health and justice outcomes including a reduction of substance use problems, mental health symptoms and barriers to employment.

**Exercise 1: Components of Housing Stability**

Large Group: Introduce yourself to your colleagues and share a response to each of the following questions with others in the room.

Your name and title

Name an essential component of housing stability

If you had one superpower in your work with tenants, what would it be?

### *Key Components of Housing Stability*

As you noted in the previous exercise, there are many factors that contribute to housing stability. They are multidimensional and span across a variety of life domains**.**



## **Purpose and Origins of MAPS**

### *How Did We Get Here?*

In order to address this challenge, leadership within Maine Housing recognized a need to strengthen training and resources to support HCV staff who are working with tenants whose needs vary in complexity and intensity.  Maine Housing partnered with the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine to conduct a review of literature and model programs; lead a series of Maine based focus groups with landlords, staff and tenants; and convene a statewide steering committee to oversee and direct the creation of MAPS.
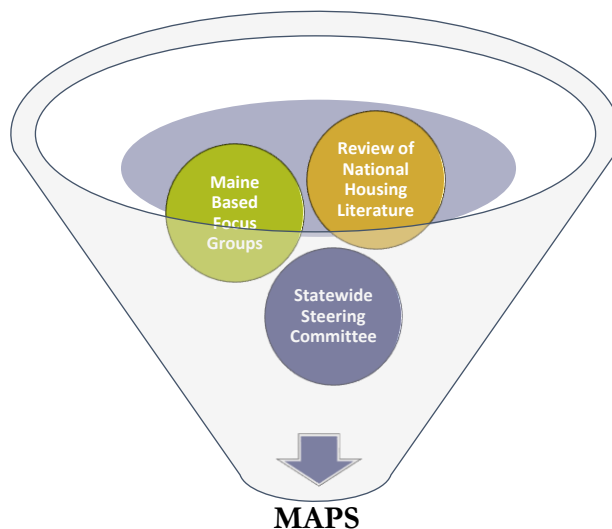
### Local Challenges, Local Opportunities

Across Maine, housing staff are faced with challenges related to insufficient housing stock, finding and supporting willing landlords, insufficient resources, and lack of services/supports for our most vulnerable tenants. Within the HCV program, program staff need a common approach to assessing and addressing tenant needs at the front end of the system and a method to plan for eviction prevention when challenges arise.

Despite the challenges those working on housing stability in Maine face, there have been several recent developments and opportunities related to policy and practice that are worth highlighting. Given the compelling national literature on the effectiveness of approaches that integrate case management and collaborative models, and demonstrated effectiveness of local models, like Home to Stay, we have an opportunity to strengthen our work with tenants in the HCV program.

Recently and in response to identified needs, the Navigator program has been expanded to serve more voucher participants. The Home to Stay Program has adopted new innovations to help triage participants and identify needs, such as the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT). National best practices around housing stability which speak to the importance of case management and collaborative models have been incorporated into this model.

At MaineHousing, several policy and practice changes have been underway to support improvements. New team leaders, the addition of team huddles, increased collaboration with local housing authorities and the focus groups mentioned above are all strategies that have been implemented to help understand and address the needs of tenants, staff, landlords, and other stakeholders.

**Opportunities**

- **National best practices**
- **Expansion of access to the navigators**
- **Policy and practice changes statewide and locally**

**Challenges**

- **Insufficient housing stock**
- **Lack of resources**
- **Challenges with landlords and inspections process**
- **Desire for more training**

**Local Research: Key Themes of Maine Focus Groups with Housing Staff, Landlords and Tenants**

To better ensure that this model reflects the needs of tenants and staff working in housing in Maine, we conducted qualitative research with housing staff working across Maine's HCV programs and their key partners, landlords and tenants across the state. The themes were remarkably similar across groups, with some variations by group. Below are some of the key themes with each group as it pertains to their efforts to promote housing stability:

**Themes with Maine Staff**

- Staff experience frustration: all around. They want to expand on efforts that are working well (Home to Stay and Navigators) as a resource for other participants.
- Staff believe that their caseloads are large and that they need extra support and time to spend with high needs participants
- Staff see that participants face a range of issues impacting housing stability: mental health, physical health, money management, education, jobs, emotional support, culture of poverty, transportation, out of state landlords, etc.
- Staff recognize that voucher recipients face misperceptions: public stigma, small percentage of participants are high risk yet so much energy needs to be placed on them (publicly, systemically).
- Staff want more training and education for everyone (staff, landlords, tenants, community organizations).

- Staff believe there should be more incentives for both landlord and tenant participation and involvement (i.e. Landlord & Tenant Schools).

**Themes with Maine Landlords**

- Landlords have understanding and compassion for what tenants are going through.
- They see that tenants face a range of issues impacting housing stability, especially physical and psychiatric needs.
- Landlords experience frustration with lack of support available to help tenants and lack clarity around services tenants may have access to.
- Landlords have had financial losses resulting from participating in voucher program (maintenance fees/inspection fees/costs assoc. with meeting code requirements).
- Landlords are often expected to take on additional responsibilities (i.e. asked to provide case management functions for tenant).

- Landlords have encountered inconsistency with inspection process.

**Themes with Maine Tenants**

- Tenants face stigma from everyone in the system – from staff, landlords and other tenants.
- Tenants feel gratitude for the support but needing help diminishes their self-worth.
- Tenants often fear rocking the boat and are sometimes reluctant to reach out when they need support or have questions.
- Tenants commonly identified lack of transportation and an unstable job market as barriers to self-sufficiency.
- Tenants are confused about resources and options available to them.
- Tenants know that they have tenants' rights but need more training on how to understand and exercise them.

# Overview of the Model:  Assess – Plan – Support
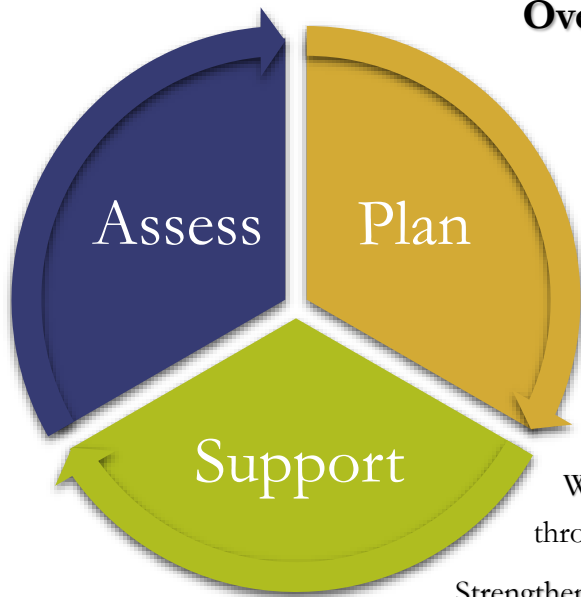
MAPS provides a 3 phased framework and includes strategies and tools to support staff in assessing tenant needs and planning for and supporting housing stability.  The goals of the model are to:

Strengthen tenant/staff engagement

Work proactively to assess and respond to tenant needs throughout the process

Strengthen collaboration with stakeholders (tenants, landlords, navigator, case managers, providers, natural supports) who are essential partners in housing stability

Prevent evictions and to assist tenants in staying housed

## Phase 1: Assess Housing Stability

**Tasks**

- Engage tenant
- Conduct Prescreening Questionnaire to triage and anticipate high needs
- Conduct Briefing and observation to make determination on level of need based on all available data
- Complete Tenant Assessment Tool to identify needs

**Tools**

- Domains of Housing Stability
- Prescreening Questionnaire
- Tenant Assessment Tool
- Tenant Assessment Summary

# Phase 2: Plan for Housing Stability Plan

*Tasks*

- ♦ Prioritize needs
- ♦ Build tenant motivation to address needs
- ♦ Develop Housing Stability Plans for moderate and high need tenants
- ♦ Share plan with tenant, and collateral contacts

*Tools*

- ♦ Housing Stability Plan
- ♦ Importance and Confidence Ruler

# Phase 3: Support Housing Stability

*Tasks*

- ♦ Monitor plan
- ♦ Proactively resolve barriers
- ♦ Document progress and challenges in Elite HCV notes

*Tools*

- ♦ DAP note format



**Throughout the training we will explore and practice using each of these tools and working through the 3 phase model.**

# Our Implementation Focus

Staff in the HCV program work with tenants with varying levels of needs.  Some will come to you with more access to resources and supports than others.   While some tenants will come with an assessment and plan that you can support and implement, others will benefit from increased efforts to identify needs at the point of briefing that lead to a plan to support ongoing housing stability.

Our implementation focus is to be more proactive to tenants at the front end of system so that we can identify and be more responsive to tenants who require more support to find and maintain housing. In order to do this, we must also strengthen our collaboration at both the policy and practice level with stakeholders (formal and natural supports) who are essential partners in this work.