

The Supportive Housing Network of New York

# Best Practices for Rent Collection in Supportive Housing

the Network  
Supportive Housing Network of NY



# Introduction



Effective rent collection is essential for supportive housing providers' primary mission— ensuring households with a history of homelessness have stable housing. This guide outlines best practices to help nonprofit supportive housing providers manage rent collection efficiently and empathetically.

# POLICIES AND COMMUNICATION

## ■ ESTABLISH CLEAR PAYMENT POLICIES

- Clearly outline rent amounts, due dates, and acceptable payment methods in lease agreements.
- Develop a comprehensive rent payment document, made readily available to tenants. Including information about late fees and grace periods, and the ramifications of nonpayment.



## ■ TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION

- During apartment viewing and lease signing, thoroughly explain rent obligations and available support.
- Regularly remind tenants of rent due dates and available resources to assist with payment.



Clear and effective communication is essential for establishing a productive relationship and building trust with tenants. This starts with clearly defining policies and outlining the responsibilities of both the property manager and the tenant.

# PAYMENT OPTIONS

## ENCOURAGE MULTIPLE PAYMENT OPTIONS

- Offer automatic payment options at lease signing
- Implement secure online payment systems
- Allow payments via electronic transfer, direct deposit, checks, money orders, and cash.



## OFFER INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE TIMELY PAYMENT

- ★ Hold an annual raffle for tenants who have successfully paid their rent throughout the year, offering gift cards or products as prizes.
- ★ Offer tenants a half-month rent discount once a year if they have paid their rent on time for the other 11 months.
- ★ Provide tenants with a half-month rent discount during their birthday month as a special incentive.

# BUDGET AND PAYMENT PLANS

All payment plans for tenants experiencing financial difficulties should begin with budgeting and reviewing the tenant's financial situation with a case manager.

Tenants should not have to negotiate payment plans directly with property management. Case managers can help determine feasible budgets, after which property management can offer appropriate payment plan options. For instance, tenants could make payment pledges to address rent arrears or other debts, with restrictions such as one pledge per year or a maximum duration of six months.



All payment options and policies should be clearly communicated and equally available to all tenants. All payment plans should be documented in case notes and property management systems. All payment plans should be reviewed prior to escalation.

# BUILD TRUST

## TENANT ENGAGEMENT

- Assign dedicated rent liaison officers as a consistent point of contact for tenants throughout the payment process.
- Include discussions about rent collection and financial challenges during case management meetings.
- Send a friendly reminder via call or text about rent due dates and available support resources at least once a month.

## HARM REDUCTION APPROACH

- Work with peer specialists to accompany tenants to complete One Shot Deal applications or other necessary resources.
- Collaborate with tenants on a case-by-case basis to find mutually agreeable solutions to rent issues.
- Approach budgeting and rent collection with an emphasis on tenant's needs.

**A strong personal relationship with a tenant—built on earned mutual trust and familiarity—is one of the most effective ways to support households in maintaining rent payments and ensuring they receive necessary assistance before issues become too challenging to manage.**

# GUIDANCE AND ASSISTANCE

## ■ INFORMATION & FACILITATION

- Show tenants how to properly complete a check or money order and provide examples of completed documents for reference.
- If using online payment platforms, assist tenants in signing up, creating email addresses, and connecting their financial institution.
- Develop one page template with resources for rent payment, utility payments, rent payment portals, and other helpful links.
- Provide tenants with information on available financial counseling services and how these resources can assist with budgeting, debt management, and overall financial stability.
- Coordinate with local financial counseling agencies to offer workshops or one-on-one sessions, and assist tenants in scheduling appointments if needed.
- Provide a checklist of steps for accessing utilities, including helpful phone numbers, websites, and a list of necessary personal documents.

Many credit unions across New York offer free financial counseling services, which can be a valuable resource for budgeting, managing debt, and improving financial health.

New York Public Library free financial and medicare counseling services:

<https://www.nypl.org/business/resources/financial-credit-medicare-counseling>



# MONITORING AND EVALUATION

## TRACKING PAYMENTS

- Case management and property management should implement a standard workflow for consistently monitoring tenant payment status, and for responding when payment is missed.
- Use automated systems to send reminders a week before rent is due and immediately after a missed payment.

## ACTIVE IMPROVEMENT

- Actively seek feedback from tenants, staff, and case managers about which systems work best, desired future assistance, and any issues with current policies.
- Create an anonymous and separate avenue for complaints, distinct from the rent collection process, to ensure tenants feel safe expressing their concerns.





## REPRESENTATIVE PAYEE

If a tenant struggles to manage their finances, the **Social Security Administration (SSA) may appoint a representative payee (a person or organization)** to manage their Social Security or Supplemental Security Income payments. This can help tenants get 'back on track' with rent payments.

Keep in mind that managing finances on someone's behalf can be a time-intensive process that may strain tenant relationships, so it should be considered a last resort.

To enroll in the representative payee program, contact your local SSA field office. <https://www.ssa.gov/ny/services-fo.htm>

The applicant must complete an SSA-11 form, provide proof of identity, a compelling reason for the program, and usually undergo an in-person interview:

<https://www.ssa.gov/payee/faqrep.htm?tl=8>

## BEST PRACTICES

The SSA recommends a friend or relative as the representative payee, but may accept another individual or organization in some cases. This representative should not be the tenant's property manager.

For NYC tenants, if no suitable option is available, NYC Human Resources Administration Adult Protective Services can serve as the payee.

For detailed information on HRA's policy see, here:

<https://www.nyc.gov/html/mancb3/downloads/budget/2019/Human%20Services/HRA/HRA%20Policy%20Statement.pdf>

For first-time participants, the program should be set up temporarily for a few months, with the goal of returning financial management to the tenant once they are ready.

## PAYMENT PROCESSING

- Designate a specific staff member (such as the previously mentioned Rent Liaison Officer) to manage rent payment reception.
- Process rent payments promptly to assist tenants in tracking their personal finances and building financial skills.
- Ensure rent ledgers are up to date and accurate when communicating with tenants and staff.

## CASE MANAGEMENT / PROPERTY MANAGEMENT COORDINATION

- Case management and property management should meet regularly to case conference; notes of conferences should be shared with senior leadership
- Develop internal protocols to rent collection approach; ensure understanding and buy-in from all relevant staff.

Organizations can track outstanding payments through monthly arrear reports, which can be produced on a tenant-by-tenant basis and include information about unpaid rent.

These reports might feature details such as the building name, unit number, tenant name, subsidy type, net arrear balance, current month's charges (including payment plan obligations and rent), amount paid, and any plans in place to resolve the arrears.

# RESOURCES FOR NEW YORK STATE RESIDENTS

New York Departments of Social Services:  
Provide services to prevent eviction and homelessness, including rental assistance:  
<https://otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/dss.asp>

Catholic Charities Community Services: Offers various assistance programs, including emergency financial assistance for rent:  
<https://cccsny.org/>

Office of Mental Health CORE Services:  
Provides therapy, mental health, and socialization services, peer support, and family training:  
<https://rightsandrecovery.org/peer-navigator/>

Support Service for Veteran Families (SSVF):  
SSVF provides case management and supportive services to prevent the imminent loss of a Veteran's home:  
<https://www.va.gov/homeless/ssvf/index.html>

NY Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP):  
Provides assistance to New Yorkers struggling to pay energy bills:  
<https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/>

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Coalition for the Homeless: Provides various services including crisis intervention and eviction prevention:  
<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/our-programs/>

Part of the Solution, Brooklyn: Provides free food pantry/ community meals, guidance, mailing, medical checkups, and legal services:  
<https://potsbronx.org/english/programs/>

HRA Homebase: provides New Yorkers experiencing housing instability in the community with various homeless prevention services.  
<https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/homebase.page>

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