



Planning a Supportive Housing Project

Step 5: Choosing Your Role

In every supportive housing project, key roles must be filled in order to create and operate quality, long-term projects. It is important to think carefully about the capacity, expertise and goals of your organization when selecting roles. If your organization is serving as the project lead or “sponsor,” you also will want to ensure that the partner organizations you select can successfully fulfill the functions of their identified roles.

The team members and the roles to be filled in any given supportive housing project will vary depending on the housing model. Regardless of the model, every project will need the following roles:

- **Project Sponsor** — Like any other team, a successful supportive housing project team needs a leader. The project sponsor, sometimes referred to as the project lead, plays a lead role, bringing the right partners to the table and ensuring that the project moves forward.
- **Lead Service Provider or Coordinator** — The lead service provider or coordinator ensures that a comprehensive array of supportive services is designed and delivered to tenants — in effect turning affordable housing into supportive housing. The lead service provider may directly deliver services to tenants or may coordinate the services to be delivered by other organizations.

Projects that create units using a “leasing” strategy, connecting tenants with existing units of housing owned by private market landlords in the community also will need:

- **Housing Manager** — Housing management staff connect tenants to housing in the private rental market, make rental payments for units that the organization may lease directly from a landlord and, in some cases, receive tenant rent payments. Such staff often serve as ongoing landlord liaisons and have distinct roles from service providers.

Projects that create units using a “building” strategy also will need:

- **Property Manager** — The property manager is responsible for day-to-day operations of the project once it is completed, and is key to the financial and physical viability of the project. Property management staff receive and process tenant rental applications, receive rent payments and ensure the ongoing physical upkeep of the housing.
- **Developer** — The developer is responsible for bringing the real estate development activities to completion, taking the supportive housing project from “idea” to “ready for occupancy.”



- **Owner** — The owner has the ultimate long-term legal responsibility and control.

In addition to the primary project roles outlined above, projects also may involve a range of experts such as attorneys, architects and development consultants.

Role of the Lead Service Provider or Coordinator

The provision of supportive services is essential to any supportive housing project. A lead service provider is needed to design and ensure the ongoing and effective function of the services plan, coordinating the partner organizations that will be involved in the delivery of services to tenants.

In a supportive housing project, the lead service provider is responsible for:

- Creating a comprehensive written services plan for the supportive housing project that describes how all members of tenant households will have easy, facilitated access to a flexible and comprehensive array of support services.
- Developing a projected services budget and assisting in securing financing for service delivery.
- Securing ongoing financing for services and reporting to funders.
- Serving as the linchpin for coordinating the delivery of services provided by other organizations, evaluating the outcomes of those services, and ensuring that tenants are receiving the services necessary to achieve and maintain housing stability and personal goals.
- Actively participating on the team planning the supportive housing project and ensuring that representatives of the targeted tenant population are included in this process.
- Participating in the tenant screening and lease signing process.
- Using and/or ensuring that partners use a variety of proactive and creative strategies to engage tenants in voluntary services.
- Coordinating with housing or property management staff, as well as mainstream and community-based organizations, to ensure tenants have access to the support they need.



In thinking about whether your organization should fill the role of lead service provider or coordinator, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Does your organization have experience in delivering or coordinating supportive services to the target population?
Yes No
2. Does your organization have experience delivering or coordinating supportive services in housing settings? If not, have you identified a service partner with this expertise?
Yes No
3. Is the Board of Directors in favor of your involvement in this supportive housing project and role as the lead service provider or coordinator? Are they willing to play an increased role if required for the project to succeed?
Yes No
4. Does your organization have a plan for staffing and funding the work that will be required to successfully fulfill the role and responsibilities of the lead service provider or coordinator?
Yes No

If you answer “No” to any of these items, your organization will need to discuss how to convert them to “Yes” answers, or it should identify another organization that can fulfill the role of lead service provider or coordinator.

Role of the Housing Manager

In projects in which the associated housing units are secured using a leasing-based strategy, the organization responsible for housing management builds and maintains a strong relationship with the property owner. Although the title of this role varies among organizations, it is critically important that this role functions separately from that of the supportive services provider. Having a distinct housing management role ensures that services staff who have a therapeutic relationship with tenants will never be in the position of receiving or requesting rental payments.

In a supportive housing project, the housing manager is responsible for:

- Identifying a property owner who is willing to contract directly with your organization for some or all of the units in a given building (“master-leased” or “sponsor-based”) OR Identifying and building relationships with landlords in the community who are open to renting units to tenants who have their own rental subsidy (“tenant-based”).



- Educating tenants about their housing unit, neighborhood, and rights and responsibilities as lease holders.
- Providing tenants with the opportunity to view multiple housing units and supporting them in securing a unit that meets their needs.
- Working closely with the lead service provider and communicating frequently, but maintaining a separate and distinct role.
- Actively participating on the team that is planning the supportive housing project, ensuring that representatives of the targeted tenant population are included in this process.
- Serving as the primary contact for property owners and responding promptly to any issues.

In thinking about whether it makes sense for your organization to fill the role of housing manager, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Does your organization have experience in building and maintaining relationships with private market owners and/or landlords?
Yes No
2. Does your organization have experience coordinating with service providers in order to help tenants sustain housing and prevent eviction? If not, have you identified a partner with this experience or a plan to train staff in best practices?
Yes No
3. Is the Board of Directors in favor of your involvement in this supportive housing project and role as the housing manager? Are they willing to play an increased role if required for the project to succeed?
Yes No
4. Does your organization have a plan for staffing and funding the work that will be required to successfully fulfill the role and responsibilities of the housing manager?
Yes No

If you answer “No” to any of these items, your organization will need to discuss how to convert them to “Yes” answers, or it should identify another organization that can fulfill the role of housing manager.



Role of the Property Manager

In projects in which the associated housing units are created using a building strategy, the property manager is an integral part of the supportive housing project team. In some cases, projects that are securing units via a master lease agreement may also have ongoing property management responsibilities and a designated organization fulfilling that role. Property managers in supportive housing projects are responsible both for the day-to-day operation of the project as well, as its long-term physical and financial health. In a supportive housing project, the property manager is responsible for:

- Managing the property in compliance with all local, state and federal laws that govern fair housing and the landlord-tenant relationship.
- Actively participating on the team that is planning the supportive housing project, ensuring that representatives of the targeted tenant population are included in this process.
- Providing input on the projected operating budget and project design considerations, including equipment and materials based on costs of maintenance and operations.
- Managing the leasing of units, marketing, outreach and tenant selection.
- Collecting rent and enforcing the terms of the lease while working with the lead service provider to prevent evictions.
- Regularly and proactively maintaining the physical property.
- Working closely with the lead service provider and communicating frequently, but maintaining a separate and distinct role.
- Actively soliciting and responding to tenant feedback in order to ensure the living environment promotes the ability of tenants to achieve their goals.

In thinking about whether it makes sense for your organization to fill the role of property manager, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Does your organization have experience in managing property? Is any of this management experience for supportive housing properties? If not, is there a plan to partner with or learn from an experienced supportive housing property manager?

Yes No



2. Does your organization have experience coordinating with service providers in order to help tenants sustain housing and prevent eviction? If not, have you identified a partner with this experience or a plan to train staff in best practices?

Yes No

3. Is the Board of Directors in favor of your involvement in this supportive housing project and role as the property manager? Are they willing to play an increased role if required for the project to succeed?

Yes No

4. Does your organization have a plan for staffing and funding the work that will be required to successfully fulfill the role and responsibilities of the property manager?

Yes No

If you answer “No” to any of these items, your organization will need to discuss how to convert them to “Yes” answers, or it should identify another organization that can fulfill the role of property manager.

Role of the Developer

In projects in which the associated housing units are created using a building strategy, the developer is responsible for the real estate development portion of the project — from the initial planning stages through the construction period. In a supportive housing project, the developer is responsible for:

- Delivering a complete, functional project built to specifications and complying with all codes and regulations.
- Providing and managing the services necessary to acquire and construct or rehabilitate the project.
- Actively participating on the team that is planning the supportive housing project, ensuring that representatives of the targeted tenant population are included in this process.
- Overseeing the selection and monitoring the performance of development team experts such as architects, lawyers and general contractors.
- Managing the project, overseeing all predevelopment phase tasks and monitoring construction.



In thinking about whether it makes sense for your organization to serve as the developer, it may be helpful to consider the following questions.

1. Does your organization have experience in developing supportive housing similar in type and scale to the proposed project?

Yes No

2. Does your organization have experience collaborating with tenants, service providers, property managers and other project partners during the development process? Do you have strategies for making shared decisions, communicating about project progress and handling challenges?

Yes No

3. Is the Board of Directors in favor of your involvement in this supportive housing project and role as project developer? Are they willing to play an increased role if required for the project to succeed?

Yes No

4. Does your organization have solid financial footing, including audited financial statements, professional monthly financial statements, a sufficient fund balance and the ability to risk upfront cash?

Yes No

5. Does your organization have the staffing capacity and expertise to provide consistent project management and oversight throughout the development process?

Yes No

If you answer “No” to any of these items, your organization will need to discuss how to convert them to “Yes” answers, or it should identify another organization that can fulfill the role of developer

Role of the Owner

In projects in which the associated housing units are created using a building strategy, the owner is legally and financially responsible for the property, representing the long-term interests of the project and its residents. The owner drives the planning and development process. Even if another entity is serving as the developer for the project, or a development consultant is acting as project manager, the owner must be fully engaged in the development process to ensure that its long-term interests are being addressed. In many cases, the owner of the project also serves as the project sponsor or leader. In a supportive housing project, the owner is responsible for:



- Managing relationships with key stakeholders, including government and the community.
- Overseeing all legal matters and approving all contractual agreements.
- Overseeing the implementation of management and service plans.
- Selecting (if also serving as the project sponsor) or collaborating in the selection of the developer, property manager, service provider and other partners/collaborators.
- Monitoring tenant satisfaction and adjudicating grievances.
- Monitoring performance of property manager and service provider and mediating disagreements between them.
- Monitoring project finances and overseeing compliance.
- Managing long-term facility planning, including repairs and replacement, insurance and liability, and changing tenant/service mix.

In thinking about whether it makes sense for your organization to serve as the owner, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Is your organization committed to planning, implementing and ensuring the successful ongoing operation of the supportive housing project?
Yes No
2. Are this project and your proposed role as owner consistent with your strategic plan and any new major commitments expected during the next two years?
Yes No
3. Is the Board of Directors in favor of your involvement in this supportive housing project and role as owner? Are they willing to play an increased role if required for the project to succeed?
Yes No
4. Does your organization have a plan for staffing and funding the work that will be required to successfully fulfill the role and responsibilities of the owner?
Yes No



5. Does your organization have experience collaborating with tenants, service providers, property managers and other project partners? Do you have strategies for making shared decisions, communicating about project progress and handling challenges?

Yes No

6. Does your organization have solid financial footing, including audited financial statements, professional monthly financial statements, a sufficient fund balance and the ability to risk upfront cash?

Yes No

7. Is your organization comfortable with the “double bottom line” of services and property management, meaning that maintaining the physical and financial viability of the project over time is just as important as providing quality support services? Property management issues are not secondary to service concerns, nor vice versa: the two go hand-in-hand.

Yes No

If you answer “No” to any of these items, your organization will need to discuss how to convert them to “Yes” answers, or it should identify another organization that can fulfill the role of owner.