

# **VA Long Beach HCS – Resume Drop-off for Rapid Candidate Selection**

An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

**White Paper**

**VA**



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Developed by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Program Office identifies and disseminates innovative practices in homeless program operations. The VA Long Beach Health System (VALBHS) has been identified as a site with an innovative practice for their creative use of utilizing direct-hire authorities (DHAs).

## PRACTICE OVERVIEW

### **Use of DHAs can be effective in rapidly identifying candidates to address critical hiring needs.**

While “staffing vacancies and turnover” has been one of the most frequently identified barriers to homeless program operations reported by homeless program leaders, this barrier was particularly impactful at VALBHS. There, the percentage of specific purpose funded positions filled vacillated between 73.85 percent at the close of fiscal year (FY) 2017 to as low as 61.63 percent by quarter two of FY 2019. A significant number of these vacant positions were aligned under the facility’s Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Moreover, when qualified candidates were identified and selected, the process by which they were onboarded could not keep pace with staff turnover. To address this, a workgroup was formed composed of representatives from the facility’s homeless program and Human Resources Management Service (HRMS), along with their regional Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) counterparts. During discussions, VALBHS HRMS suggested an innovative idea, previously used with housekeeping and nursing, to rapidly identify and select new candidates – a resume drop-off event.

Simple in concept, a resume drop-off was a designated week where interested candidates could physically drop off their resumes to be considered for any currently vacant positions. HRMS specialists reviewed and qualified each resume in real time. Interested candidates had the opportunity to meet with Social Work Service supervisors and senior leadership to learn more about the positions and for the supervisors to be introduced to prospective candidates. All qualified resumes were immediately forwarded to the homeless program’s hiring officials, who scheduled interviews later that day, or the following day. This was possible due to VA’s [authority to make non-competitive direct-hires](#) for certain positions. A DHA is an appointing authority that the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) gave to Federal agencies for filling vacancies when a critical hiring need or severe shortage of candidates exists. This allowed for the review of candidates without devoting time to posting on USAJobs.gov and waiting for announcement windows to close. Candidates were rapidly qualified and forwarded to hiring officials for consideration. Notably, Veterans preference did not apply when selecting individuals under DHA as the law allows agencies to hire them without regard to sections 5 U.S.C. 3309-3318, eliminating the requirement for applying Veterans preference. As the hiring officials were seeking candidates to

fill 15 General Schedule (GS)-0185-11 HUD-VASH Case Manager vacancies, only candidates with social work licenses that granted independent practice privileges were initially qualified.

The first resume drop-off week took place in April 2019. To prepare, HRMS developed marketing posters and flyers that outlined the date of the event, the location where candidates dropped off their resumes, and all other required documentation. Candidates were told to be available that afternoon for an interview and, if selected, to also be available the following week for onboarding. The flyers were distributed throughout the hospital as well as to area colleges and universities with social work programs. The resume drop-off event was planned to occur over three days, back-to-back, with each day offering different drop-off times: morning, lunch, and evening. On the day of the event, HRMS staff and the homeless program hiring officials stationed next to each other so that as resumes were dropped off, reviewed, and qualified, they could be immediately handed off to the hiring officials who were mere feet away. HUD-VASH staff were also present to answer questions about the program and the positions such as where the positions would be physically located, what the job duties entailed, and what the minimum requirements were to qualify as candidates. Although it was sometimes difficult to contact individual candidates for resumes that were dropped off during lunch or in the evening, nearly all of the interviews were completed by the next day, if not by the end of the week.

Disappointingly, although the organizers had anticipated significantly more candidates with the appropriate level of licensure, this initial resume drop-off event did not generate many qualified candidates. This was most likely due to the timing of the event where most of the interested social work candidates were on the cusp of graduating or preparing to take the relevant Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) exams, thus not meeting the identified minimum qualification standards. Still, the core concepts of the day proved to be successful – rapid collection, review, and interviewing of candidates. Additionally, they were able to fill half of their 15 HUD-VASH specific purpose funded positions.

Reflecting on the successes of the event and opportunities for improvement, the homeless program leads considered expanding their search criteria to allow for hiring social workers at the GS-0185-09 level. They contacted other homeless programs and HUD-VASH Regional Coordinators to get a sense of how many programs utilized GS-0185-09 social workers. After receiving feedback suggesting that GS-0185-09 social workers were utilized with significant frequency, the organizers decided to host a second resume drop-off event, with an expanded scope, in June 2019. Although the first event had a one-week lead time to allow for awareness to build from the marketing efforts, the second event extended the lead time to three weeks and expanded the messaging reach to the facility's social media pages. The response was overwhelming as they



received resumes from over 100 candidates, resulting in 40 scheduled and completed interviews. There were so many qualified candidates that they were able to fill their remaining vacant HUD-VASH positions as well as some other vacant non-homeless program positions across the facility.

While each selectee still had to complete standard processes, including review by the facility's professional standards board, credentialing, and VetPro, it was estimated that nearly two months were reduced from the overall time it took to process each vacancy. Not only that, but multiple candidates were able to be processed simultaneously. **In addition to making selections for all of their HUD-VASH vacancies, VALBHS increased the percentage of specific purpose funded positions filled from 61.63 percent in FY 2019 quarter two to 79.57 percent by the end of FY 2019 quarter four.** These gains were not without significant effort as the organizers acknowledged that it was grueling to interview all of the qualified candidates in a single week. Facilities interested in replicating this practice should prepare themselves to endure a physically demanding interview process. For those staff chosen to sit on the interview panel, it was critical that their schedules were cleared and open for the entire week to allow for flexibility and responsiveness in scheduling. Additionally, with so much attention paid to logistics and planning, the organizers also emphasized the importance of staying hydrated, scheduling breaks, and having nutritious snacks on hand. As these new hires would likely have start-dates around the same time, facilities should develop plans to provide orientation, local onboarding, office space and equipment, and other new-hire processes in groups or simultaneously. The rapid influx of new staff may be a shock to the existing program's organizational culture, so care should be provided to ensure that new staff integrate well to their new workgroup.

## CONCLUSION

While this innovative practice was, in principle, always permissible due to VA's DHA, the missing piece was the commitment and dedication to same-day review by the HMRS team. They recognized that the important work of ending Veteran homelessness simply would not get done without sufficient and qualified staff on hand to provide the necessary supportive services. In times of critical staffing shortages DHAs can streamline hiring process and get help to Veterans quicker. We would like to thank the dedicated staff at VALBHS for sharing their practice with us.

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