

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/expanding-housing-access-for-formerly-incarcerated-people-1>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Everyone deserves a place to call home.

However, for many people leaving our nations prisons and jails, the main barrier to successful reentry is access to [safe and affordable housing](#). Formerly incarcerated people often do not have the financial means to rent in the private market, or they wish to live with family in public housing. Yet, [many public housing providers continue to temporarily or permanently ban tenants](#) with conviction histories going beyond the requirements provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Without a stable place to live, it can be challenging to find and hold steady employment, complete substance use treatment, or connect with family and other social support systems. It is therefore critical that public housing authorities partner with local law enforcement, reentry organizations, and other community partners to assess their admissions policies for people with conviction histories and to facilitate safe reentry for people leaving incarceration.

As part of the Opening Doors to Public Housing Initiative, Vera is announcing a [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP) to provide technical assistance to public housing authorities (PHAs) who seek to plan and implement reentry programs and/or change their admissions policies regarding people with conviction histories. Vera, with funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), will select up to four housing authorities to receive 15 months of technical assistance beginning this summer. We encourage housing authorities of all sizes to apply. Multiple housing authorities in the same geographic area may choose to apply together in a single application if they believe that coordinating their reform efforts will increase the local impact of their work. Proposals are due on Wednesday, May 2, 2018.

Last summer with funding from The Tow Foundation and Trinity Wall Street we selected six PHA sites from across the nation who were seeking assistance in a broad range of areas. For example, we are assisting the Tacoma Housing Authority with its [College Housing Assistance Program \(CHAP\)](#) to provide formerly incarcerated college students who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless with rental assistance. We are also working with the state of Colorado's Department of Local Affairs, Division of Housing on various reform efforts, from revising their admissions policies, convening local PHAs in Colorado on policy changes they can make, and coming up with ideas for housing programs. In the past, we [partnered](#) with the Housing Authority of New Orleans to develop new policies and screening guidelines regarding housing and hiring people with conviction histories. We also completed [an evaluation](#) of the New York City Housing Authority's Family Reentry Pilot Program, which reunites formerly incarcerated people with their families who lived in public housing.

With this RFP, Vera seeks new partners in this work. We hope to continue expanding public housing access to people with conviction histories while keeping our communities safe. This can only be accomplished by developing and maintaining strong partnerships between housing authorities, criminal justice stakeholders, and other members of the community. All of society benefits when formerly incarcerated people are able to reintegrate safely and successfully back into the community, and this process begins with a place to call home.

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