COMMUNITY HOUSING SURGE

A Step-by-Step Guide for Communities and Coaches

Move people from homelessness into housing — with urgency, coordination, and a plan.

WHAT IS A HOUSING SURGE?

A Housing Surge (also called a Housing Sprint or Housing Challenge) is a structured, time-limited initiative designed to rapidly move individuals experiencing homelessness into housing. It brings together partners from across your community — shelters, service providers, housing programs, landlords, and government — to act with a shared sense of urgency toward a clear, measurable goal.

Unlike business-as-usual, a surge is intentional and concentrated. It uses a By-Name List (a real-time list of every person experiencing homelessness), daily coordination, and a dedicated team to remove barriers and keep each person's housing process moving forward.

⚡ URGENCY	🤝 COORDINATION	📊 ACCOUNTABILITY
Act fast. Set a defined timeframe (30–100 days) and hold to it.	Align all partners around a shared goal with clear roles and daily communication.	Track every person by name. Measure progress. Adjust in real-time.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide walks you through a Housing Surge in four phases. Each phase includes:

✅ What to do (actions) ❓ Key questions to answer	🛠️ Tips for coaches and facilitators 📋 Checklists you can use

This guide is population-neutral — it works for any group experiencing homelessness, including veterans, families, youth, or chronically homeless individuals. Simply adapt the language and partners to fit your community's focus.

PHASE 1	Build Your Foundation	Weeks 1–4 (Before the Surge Begins)

Before you launch, lay the groundwork. A surge that starts without the right people, data, and resources in place will stall quickly.

Step 1: Assemble Your Team

Every successful surge needs a small, dedicated core team. Identify who will fill these roles before you begin:

Role	Responsibilities	Capacity Needed
🏠 **Project Lead**	Coordinates everything. Runs daily briefings. Escalates barriers to leadership. Keeps the whole effort on track.	1 person — dedicated 10+ hrs/week
🔑 **Unit Acquisition Lead & Team**	Finds and secures housing units. Builds landlord relationships. Manages incentives and inspections.	1-2 people
📋 **Housing Lead & Team**	Handles program enrollments, unit applications, voucher processes, and lease signings.	1-2 people
❤️ **Case Management Team**	Engages individuals throughout the process. Collects documents. Connects people to services. Provides follow-up support.	Multiple case managers
📊 **Data Lead**	Tracks progress in real-time. Maintains the By-Name List. Flags bottlenecks.	1 person
🤝 **Senior Leadership Rep**	Removes systemic barriers. Approves resources. Attends weekly check-ins.	1-2 executives

Step 2: Identify Your Population

Define who this surge is for — and create or update a By-Name List (BNL) for that group. The BNL is a real-time, person-by-person list of everyone experiencing homelessness in your defined population. It is the backbone of your surge.

Your By-Name List Should Track:

- Each person's name, current location (shelter, street, transitional housing)
- Housing pathway — what type of housing/subsidy are they eligible for?
- Document status — what documents are still needed?
- Barriers and next steps for each person
- Date they entered homelessness (to track days to housing)

Pro tip: Balance your list. Focus on both high-barrier individuals (who need the most support) and lower-barrier individuals (who can be housed faster) to build momentum and identify bottlenecks.

Step 3: Take Stock of Your Resources

Before launching, inventory what you have available:

Housing Resources	Support Resources
Available housing units (vacant, near-ready)	Supportive services (mental health, substance use, employment)
Housing subsidies and vouchers	Staff capacity and hours available
Flexible/emergency funds	Documentation support (DMV, Social Security)
Landlord contacts and relationships	Move-in kits and basic household supplies

Step 4: Build Community Buy-In

A surge only works if the right people are committed. Before you launch:

- Get support from nonprofit executive directors and county/city administrators
- Commit 8–12+ frontline staff and people with lived experience to participate
- Identify 2–3 leaders who can each dedicate 2–4 hours per week to coordination
- Engage landlords early — offer rent guarantees or incentives to participate

Step 5: Set Your Goal and Plan Your Launch Event

Set a specific, measurable goal: "House 40 individuals in 75 days." Then plan a kickoff event (in-person or virtual, half- to full-day) to:

- Map your current housing process from start to finish — identify every gap and bottleneck
- Share your By-Name List data with the full team
- Assign roles and create a team agreement
- Set weekly meeting schedules and establish norms
- Build team energy — this is a sprint, and momentum matters

Phase 1 Checklist — Before You Launch

- Core team assembled with all key roles filled
- By-Name List created or updated for your defined population
- Resource inventory completed (housing, funding, services)
- Community partners committed (minimum: 2–3 leaders, 8–16 staff)
- Surge goal set (specific number of people, specific timeframe)
- Kickoff event held — system map completed, roles assigned, meetings scheduled
- Data tracking system in place (spreadsheet, HMIS, or equivalent)

PHASE 2	Launch and Activate	Weeks 1–2 of the Surge

The surge has begun. In the first two weeks, your focus is on engaging every person on your By-Name List, kicking off the housing process, and establishing the daily coordination rhythm that will carry the surge forward.

Engage Every Person on Your List

Reach out to each individual to confirm their willingness and readiness to be housed. A simple, direct conversation works best:

> *"We want to help you move into housing in the next [X] days. Are you willing to work with us to make that happen?"*

For each person, begin collecting documents (ID, Social Security card, income verification, etc.) and finalize their housing pathway.

Start the Unit Identification Process

Your Unit Acquisition team should begin immediately:

- Contact landlords and property managers — offer incentives and build relationships
- Identify vacant units that match available subsidies
- Pre-inspect units so they're ready when a person is matched
- Maintain a running list of available units by type, location, and subsidy match
- Explore alternative options: motels, converted buildings, transitional programs

Establish Your Meeting Rhythm — And Hold to It

The single most important thing you can do in a surge is meet consistently and act on what you learn. Here is the recommended structure:

Meeting	Purpose	How Often	Who Attends
Daily Briefing	Review individual cases, solve problems, move people forward	Daily (30 min)	Project Lead + all team leads
Weekly Progress Meeting	Review overall numbers, identify system barriers, adjust strategy	Weekly (1 hr)	Project Lead + all leads + senior rep
Leadership Check-In	High-level oversight, remove obstacles, keep momentum	Weekly (30 min)	Project Lead + senior leadership
Optional Midpoint Review	Celebrate wins, reset goals, pivot if needed	Once at midpoint	Full team

In your daily briefings, go person by person through your By-Name List. For each person: What is the next step? Who is responsible? What is blocking progress? What needs to be escalated?

Phase 2 Checklist — First Two Weeks

- Every person on the BNL has been contacted and their willingness confirmed
- Document collection underway for each person
- Housing pathway confirmed for each person (subsidy type, program enrollment needed)
- Unit identification process underway — initial list of available units compiled
- Daily briefings established and running
- Weekly project management and leadership meetings scheduled
- Data tracking updated: number of people engaged, documents collected, units identified

PHASE 3	Drive Housing Placements	Weeks 3–Final Week of the Surge

This is the heart of the surge. Your focus shifts from planning to placing — matching people to units, completing enrollments, signing leases, and moving people in. The daily briefing becomes your most powerful tool.

The "Wrap-Around" Approach

Rather than requiring individuals to travel to different offices, bring housing services directly to where people are — at shelters, transitional housing sites, or other locations. This dramatically reduces delays caused by missed appointments and logistical barriers.

What Happens at the Site	What It Speeds Up
• Assessments completed on-site • Documents collected immediately • Program enrollment started in person • Housing matches made face-to-face	• Eliminates missed appointments • Reduces back-and-forth communication • Builds trust with individuals being housed • Compresses weeks of process into days

Move Through the Housing Process — Week by Week

Weeks 3–5	**Case Management & Housing Matching** Assign case managers to each person. Submit unit applications. Begin voucher processes. Connect individuals to specialized services (mental health, substance use, employment).
Weeks 6–10	**Lease Signings & Move-Ins** Accompany individuals to lease signings. Facilitate move-ins. Provide move-in kits and furniture resources. A majority of your placements should happen in this window.
Weeks 11+	**Data, Adjustments & Final Push** Use your data to identify any remaining bottlenecks. Accelerate outreach to new landlords if units are scarce. Finalize all pending placements. Every person should have a clear plan.

Tracking What Matters

Update your By-Name List after every daily briefing. At minimum, track:

People	Housing	System
• Total on BNL • Newly housed this week • Actively in process • Stuck / barriers identified • Avg. days to housing	• Units available • Units pre-inspected • Lease signings this week • Move-ins this week • Landlords engaged	• Funding utilized vs. available • Documentation delays • Agency bottlenecks • Returns to homelessness • % of goal achieved

Phase 3 Checklist — During the Surge

- Daily briefings happening — every person on BNL reviewed regularly
- Wrap-around services deployed at shelter/housing sites where possible
- Case managers assigned to every individual
- Unit applications submitted for everyone with confirmed housing pathway
- Lease signings and move-ins tracked and celebrated each week
- Data updated after each briefing — bottlenecks flagged and escalated
- Leadership check-ins addressing any systemic barriers (agency delays, funding gaps)

PHASE 4	Close Out and Sustain	Final 1–2 Weeks + Beyond

A surge ends — but the work doesn't. Use the final phase to complete remaining placements, evaluate your impact, celebrate your team, and build toward what comes next.

Complete All Placements

- Ensure every person on your BNL is either housed or has a clear, dated plan for housing (lease signed, move-in date set)
- Confirm case management is in place for everyone who moved in — ongoing support is critical for housing stability
- For anyone not yet housed, document the specific barrier and assign a team member responsible for resolution

Evaluate Your Impact

Hold a final review and complete another system map (compare to your kickoff map — what changed?). Measure:

Outcome Measures

- Total number of people housed
- Average days from BNL entry to housing
- Housing retention rate (still housed at 30/60/90 days)
- Number of landlords engaged

Process Measures

- What worked? What slowed you down?
- Which partnerships were most valuable?
- What barriers kept coming up?
- What would you do differently next time?

Celebrate — Then Plan What's Next

Recognize your team publicly. Acknowledge the people who were housed. Then use your momentum:

- Keep the core team meeting monthly to maintain forward progress
- Use your data and lessons to advocate for policy or funding changes
- Plan your next surge — for the same population or another group
- Document everything: what you built, who you partnered with, what it cost, what it achieved

The goal is not just to house people during the surge — it's to build a community system that can house people faster, permanently.

Phase 4 Checklist — Wrap-Up

- All individuals on BNL are housed or have a clear, dated housing plan
- Ongoing case management confirmed for everyone who moved in
- Final evaluation completed — outcomes documented and shared
- Closing system map completed and compared to kickoff map
- Community celebration held — team and community recognized
- Lessons learned documented
- Plan for continued monthly meetings or next surge in place

QUICK REFERENCE: SURGE AT A GLANCE

Phase	Timeframe	Primary Focus	Key Output
Phase 1: Build Your Foundation	Weeks 1–4 (before launch)	Team, data, resources, buy-in	Ready-to-go team + updated BNL + kickoff event complete
Phase 2: Launch & Activate	Weeks 1–2 of surge	Engage individuals, begin unit search, start daily meetings	Every person contacted + daily briefing rhythm established
Phase 3: Drive Placements	Week 3–final week	Match, apply, sign leases, move in	Majority of placements achieved
Phase 4: Close Out & Sustain	Final 1–2 weeks + ongoing	Complete placements, evaluate, celebrate, plan ahead	All individuals housed or with clear plan + lessons documented

KEYS TO SUCCESS

🏆 Collaborative Leadership

Success requires active coordination from government, nonprofits, landlords, and people with lived experience — not just one organization.

⚡ Speed and Flexibility

Move fast — and adapt. When something is not working, the daily briefing is where you identify it and the weekly meeting is where you fix it.

📊 Data Transparency

Real-time data is non-negotiable. Every data point is a person. Keep the BNL updated and share progress openly with the whole team.

Remember: the goal is not just to run a successful surge.
It is to build a community that can house people faster — permanently.