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Operation Reveille Webinar Transcript
December 15, 2016, 3–4 p.m. (ET)

Witney James, The District Communications Group

Hello everyone. Welcome and thank you for attending the VA homeless program's webinar on Operation Reveille. My name is Witney James with The District Communications Group and I am just going to run through a few housekeeping items before we get started with our discussion about Operation Reveille. Your phone lines are muted. If they are not muted and you do not have a speaking role, please mute your phone. We want to make sure we can hear everyone and get all of the good information from our speakers. So please, if your phone is not muted at this time, please take a moment to do that now. Thank you so much.

All right. First off, now that we've got phones muted — thank you so much, everyone — we will be taking questions through the Q&A feature found at the left-hand side of your screen. We do have a place in the agenda specifically for questions and answers; it is toward the end of the agenda, so we will address all questions at that point. If we are unable to address your question before the end of the webinar, we will follow up with you separately to ensure that we get you an answer to your question. If you are experiencing any technical difficulties accessing the virtual meeting room, the webinar slides will be available on the va.gov/homeless website today, and we provided a link to that website in the webinar slides — it's actually the last slide of the webinar — and we can also send that information to you separately immediately following the webinar.

Now that we've gotten through the housekeeping items, I will turn it over to Anthony Love, senior advisor and director of community engagement, Veterans Health Administration homeless programs, Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office (VACO)

All right, thank you very much, Witney. I definitely appreciate that. Again, my name is Anthony Love, and I won't take up too much more time with that long title, but I want to thank everyone for joining us and thank you to all of you on the phone for your continued work to end Veteran homelessness. Because of you, over the last six years, we've seen the number of Veterans who are homeless decrease by almost 50 percent, and that is phenomenal. Generally, you do not see that type of progress in any social challenge or social issue, so thank you so much for the work that you've done. With all of that being said, we still have a lot more work to do; so today's webinar is meant to elevate the conversation on how we continue to improve on the efforts to end Veteran homelessness. Today's conversation will involve Operation Reveille, which is meant to provide you with information and tools on implementing this innovation to quicken the pace of getting Veterans housed.

You will hear from other speakers who will talk about how this game-changing initiative has often resulted in communities being able to house Veterans in the same day that they come into contact with them. Our Secretary, Secretary McDonald, has challenged each community to implement this initiative prior to you conducting your Point-in-Time counts. He's challenging you to do this in order to leverage your outreach efforts, and not only count those Veterans who are homeless, but to get them into housing. We hope that you will absorb this information today and begin the process of organizing a Reveille event in your community. With that being said, I will turn it over to our next panelist, Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, the CEO of the Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Thank you, Anthony. I want to introduce two of our champions on Operation Reveille: our regional HUD administrator, Mr. Ed Jennings.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

If you're not speaking, could you please put your phone on mute.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Mr. Jennings, are you available? He's probably delayed on joining us on the call. I'm going to go ahead and introduce our next champion of Operation Reveille. He's the president of ART, Mr. Philip Mangano. Mr. Mangano, are you on the line?

Philip Mangano, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

I am, indeed.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Thank you, sir.

Philip Mangano, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

Well, first of all, I think a special thanks from all of us to Secretary McDonald, Rob McDonald, who has been so supportive of Reveille since he first heard about it during a visit to Tampa. He's become a real champion, and we're very appreciative to Anthony for making certain that that type of potentiality is being realized now cross the country. I do a lot of work in different communities around the country and of course did a lot of work in Washington. One of the things I learned was: if on occasion there is an innovative idea that comes around on homelessness that makes a difference and changes the equation for the entire effort, such as Housing First. Or for a specific population — and of course project Reveille is specifically targeted to homeless Veterans — and I think it's a game-changer and it has the potential for making a significant difference both in terms of leasing out HUD-VASH vouchers to create more political will to sustain that effort but most importantly in the lives of homeless Veterans.

In my work in San Bernardino County, we've actually done project Reveille a couple of different ways. This is a case of so many of these innovative ideas (6:50) — you can innovate the innovation. In San Bernardino, we didn't follow precisely the model that (7:00) Antoinette so wisely created there in Tampa, but we took the basic principles of project Reveille and put them to work. We did that in two ways: One, during last year's PIT count, we did what we called the "PIT cut" to focus specifically on housing homeless Veterans actually during the count. And then secondly, more recently, going into Veterans Day, we did what I would call a "Rolling Reveille." We decided that within 30 days we would house one Veteran a day, every day, weekends included, and end that on Veterans Day. So those two initiatives, the PIT cut and the Rolling Reveille, have resulted in a continuing reduction of homeless Veterans in San Bernardino County. Later, one of the various communities reporting, (7:54) Tom Hernandez, who has been the maestro of all these activities from his department of homelessness resources in San Bernardino, he'll talk more about these two individual initiatives. But certainly one of the things that we've learned from San Bernardino, one of the things I've learned in general about these innovative ideas, is that they arouse a lot of civic and community involvement. And because they secure results that are immediate, they increase political will. So anything that increases civic and political will for homeless people — that's a very hot initiative. So thanks, Antoinette, for creating this. And certainly

we want to encourage communities around the country to innovate the innovation and be part of this larger national effort. Thank you so much, Antoinette and Anthony.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Thank you, Mr. Mangano. So, what is Operation Reveille?

Let me chime in to see if our HUD regional administrator is available. Mr. Jennings, are you on the call yet? OK.

Operation Reveille has one goal. The goal is to end homelessness among military Veterans. To do this, our focus is to rapidly rehouse homeless Veterans; the second one is to bring together a wide range of partners; and the third pillar is to develop a system of service to ensure that a Vet never sleeps on the streets again. Operation Reveille is truly rapid rehousing. It minimizes the term “document ready.” When possible, Operation Reveille allows Vets to acquire the documents in one day and at one location. Operation Reveille goes beyond a typical resource fair and provides housing in one day in many cases.

How did Operation Reveille get started? Myself, I am a Veteran of the U.S. Air Force, active duty six years. I have been part of the continuum of care for the past 25 years and became impatient with the current rapid rehousing status and the notion that people are still sleeping on our streets when there are available units. During one of our Point-in-Time counts, we had 138 chronically homeless persons; we had 169 beds available that night. So, Operation Reveille and other similar initiatives were started in St. Louis. Operation Reveille was conceptualized in February of 2013; there was a trial run in January 2014; and then Operation Reveille was actually implemented in July of 2014 during our summer Point-in-Time count. During the previous Point-in-Time count, 50 Veterans were identified. During Operation Reveille, 51 Veterans were housed.

Operation Reveille builds upon previous best practices such as Project Homeless Connect, the Stand Downs, and another initiative that we did in St. Louis — The BEACH Project — similar to Operation Reveille, but The BEACH Project focused on the chronic homeless population. Now we’ll have some discussion, just brief discussion, about how other communities have made Operation Reveille their own. I’m not sure Chicago and Crossville and Cookeville are able to join us today. If not, I’ll jump in and give you just a brief synopsis of how they made Operation Reveille their own. Right now, we’ll hear from the chief operating officer of the Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative, Antonio Byrd, regarding the St. Louis Operation Reveille.

Antonio Byrd, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Good afternoon, everyone. I’ll be very brief in discussing our efforts in detail in St. Louis. Prior to officially launching Operation Reveille, as Antoinette mentioned, the city of St. Louis’ Department of Human Services in the local Office of Veterans Affairs conducted the pilot test of the Operation Reveille concept during the winter census. Again, those efforts were focused strictly on reducing the chronic homeless numbers among Veterans. While conducting the street count, a VA representative was attached to each volunteer group; so, once a Veteran was identified on the streets, the VA rep would dispatch transportation or actually transport the person themselves to their local VA office and then do the immediate screening for VA and HUD-VASH eligibility programs. It wasn’t set up like the Operation Reveille as you know it today. It wasn’t necessarily an event facility setup — everything happened through the VA office.

Since we had previously conducted an inventory of available, permissible housing units in the community, the first group of Veterans identified was immediately connected to those units and our programs. Additional eligible and non-eligible Veterans were placed into hotels for 14 to 16 days, utilizing ESG dollars from the city and some community donations to support that stay as other units were being inspected and partially furnished. If someone was not deemed a Veteran, a referral to the emergency shelter would be made. We were successful in getting all chronically homeless Veterans housed within that two- to two-and-a-half-week time frame. Which brings me to the launch of Operation Reveille.

Expanding from the census winter (14:18) count, during the summer census on July 30, we partnered with various organizations to launch Operation Reveille. We knew we had, roughly, 48 to 50 Veterans left sleeping on our streets, so we planned to house at least 50 Veterans on the day of the event. We were able to get 53 units that we had to get inspected and furnished before the event. This all happened within a three- to five-week time frame leading up to the count. So we really didn't have time. I know there's a big concern about holding units. There's really no time to really hold units because you'll be utilizing that time pretty much getting the units prepared and inspected. The event was held at a military museum there in St. Louis, and we were able to get that facility free of charge since we worked for the city of St. Louis. Again, we had VA representatives attached to volunteer groups doing the Point-in-Time count, and they utilized the same transportation dispatch and eligibility screening process for those Veterans on that day as well. And if an individual was not deemed a Veteran, then again we made referrals to shelter.

No matter what the Veterans' discharge status was, they were housed within a day. It was a small and intimate event and only included partners that could address the Veterans' immediate needs. Outside of selecting a unit at the end of the event, the Veterans were supplied with furniture donated from a hotel liquidation, 250 pounds of food, SSI/SSVI income verification printouts and temporary Social Security cards, criminal and civil legal services on-site, connected with the location training program, hygiene kits, housing supplies, move-in kits, and transportation to their new home. Although we were able to obtain 53 units for the day of the event, we got the job done by placing 51 Veterans on the day of the count and officially ended Veteran homelessness in the city of St. Louis. Thank you.

Next, we'll hear from Felicia Crosby-Rucker. She's the department director for the Hillsborough County Homeless Services Department. She'll speak about the efforts in Tampa Hillsborough County.

Felicia Crosby-Rucker, Hillsborough County Homeless Services

Thanks, Antonio. Good afternoon. In Tampa Hillsborough County, we realized that homelessness is a community problem that demands a community response, and that our government here cannot solve it alone. Here we approach Veteran homelessness through a multisector, collaborative effort where government, nonprofit partners, our faith-based community, citizens, students, and the private sector come together to help reduce and end Veteran homelessness. Tampa Hillsborough County, Florida, has replicated the St. Louis model that Antonio talked about actually for the past three years — in 2014, 2015, and 2016. In fact, due to our community's interest in wanting to help out Veterans, our one-day event has now expanded to a 90-day campaign to end Veteran homelessness. Our community here holds this Operation Reveille event on Veterans Day; however, this year our campaign began on November 1, and will continue through January 31, 2017, as part of the response to the Secretary's call to house Veterans to end Veteran homelessness.

We used the St. Louis model as a base and made adjustments based on our resources each year. Our Operation Reveille event is more like Stand Downs on steroids. We have a variety of vendors and resources available to assist Veterans from the VA Mobile vehicle to Feeding Tampa Bay, providing a bag of fresh perishable items for the Veterans to take to their homes with them. One year, the county contracted with a single agency to provide emergency brief housing units, which included 53 apartments that were identified and scattered throughout Hillsborough County, including the city of Tampa, as affordable housing options for Veterans to select on Veterans Day. The master lease was held by one agency, and the Veteran would sign a sublease type of agreement with that agency upon selection of that unit. The units were secured about a week from the event and required inspections and setup. Building on our multisector collaborative efforts, we had several partners step in to help strengthen our campaign over the years to include Ashley HomeStore, who provided furniture to our units which included queen size beds, a dresser, a sofa, coffee table, a dining room table, and four chairs. Our professional sports teams also got engaged with helping us end Veteran homelessness. We had the Tampa Bay Lightning, which is our professional hockey team, as well as the Tampa Bay Rays, our major league baseball team. Other partners I'd like to highlight include Chase Bank, USAA Foundation, Florida West Coast Credit Union, Support the Troops, Feeding Tampa Bay, as well as the Melville Charitable Trust, just to name a few.

Through a combination of financial support and donations, we were able to secure move-in kit items that included but were not limited to bedding, bathroom items, towels, kitchen items, plates, utensils, toiletries, as well as nonperishable items for the unit. After the unit passed inspection, which we partnered with our housing authority and also we partnered with our county code enforcement to do some inspections, we had volunteers from various groups including MacDill Air Force Base, Southern Technical College, The University of Tampa baseball team, several county and city departments, faith-based groups, as well as others supported and joined in our efforts to help set up the furniture that was delivered by Ashley as well as unpacking the move-in kit items so that the units would be turnkey-ready for the Veterans when they came home at the end of the Operation Reveille event. Also, too, we had our local elected officials from the mayor as well as our county commissioner and our chief administrator on-site too, setting up furniture and unpacking dishes as well. And we also used this as a media opportunity to bring out the media to show that the community is engaged. And also, too, encouraging the volunteers that were there to actually use our social media hashtag and take pictures and post to their social media pages.

All clients that moved into the units were assigned case management and further screened for eligibility for various permanent or permanent supportive housing programs to include Emergency Solutions Grant, the Rapid Re-Housing Program, Home TBRA, SSVF, VASH, the CoC rapid rehousing program, as well as the CoC permanent supportive housing program. As clients were determined eligible for one of the respective programs, the clients basically transitioned in place and, in some cases, signed leases of their own. While we have come a long way in improving our system of service for Veterans, we continue to work hard at it daily to ensure that we meet our goal to end Veteran homelessness. We proudly support this model here; our community is excited about this model. And we encourage you to take a close look at it, and see how you can adapt it to your community based on your resources that are available. This was definitely a useful tool — it is a useful tool in our toolbox — to help end Veteran homelessness. We've held this event here in Tampa Hillsborough County, Florida, for the last three years. And each year, we've improved our approach based on what we've learned from the past. I have to tell you; this is a great way to effect change and create and strengthen your system much further by bringing all of the community partners together to solve a community problem. So now, I'll yield to Chicago.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

This is Antoinette Hayes-Triplett. I'll give you just a brief description of how Chicago did their Operation Reveille, and if there's anyone on the phone from Chicago that would like to chime in, please do so.

Chicago did Operation Reveille in 2015, November 2015, and they call it Project Home for the Holidays. The catch (22:52) that was different from Chicago's version of Operation Reveille is that they brought the landlords on-site to take applications. As a result of their efforts, over 200 units were identified during their event for Veterans. Over 50 Veterans were housed during their Operation Reveille event. I'll turn it over to ... is there anyone from Chicago that wants to chime in? I'll turn it over to San Bernardino-Riverside, California.

Philip Mangano, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

I'm hoping that Tom Hernandez is on this call.

Tom Hernandez, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

Hey, I'm here. I'm sorry, I couldn't undo the mute button.

Philip Mangano, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

No worries. I had mentioned earlier, Tom, that we did two iterations of project Reveille — one was our PIT Plus effort that led into the PIT count earlier this year and then the Rolling Reveille that we did related to Veterans Day. So if you could talk about those two that would be, I think, invaluable to folks on the call.

Tom Hernandez, American Roundtable to Abolish Homelessness

Sure, I will. And in 2015, Philip had connected us with Antoinette, who talked a little bit to San Bernardino County about Operation Reveille. In 2015, our board of supervisors had an initiative to address Veteran homelessness. Using the gaps analysis tool that was provided by the VA, we had identified through our Point-in-Time count number for 2015 how many estimated homeless Veterans we had at the time. I think our number was 401, and so the board set that as a goal to reduce that. And so, we have had a committee, a homeless Veterans committee, planning group, as well as an advisory board that is chaired by our county executive officer Greg Devereaux to really, really focus on addressing Veteran homelessness issues. And so, what we were thinking is we wanted to do something like Operation Reveille, and I know we talked with Antoinette and it was around Veterans Day, but we found we needed to really get more involvement, more collaboration, to really set up a good system. So we scheduled it in conjunction with our Point-in-Time count in January.

We established four bases of operation — actually we had five, but one was sort of like a quasi-base — bases in operation. We gathered all of our service providers — our SSVF providers, our CoC providers, our housing authority, our VA — and we coordinated. I don't know if you know this, but San Bernardino County is the largest county in the contiguous 48 United States. We're pretty big, so we needed bases of operations in certain sections of the county. And it was really similar to what everyone else had stated that they were doing: getting on the providers, identifying whatever units we can, having them pre-inspected and ready for anyone to get in, if they wanted that unit, of course. But it was a huge effort; it was a political effort. We have a huge political will in our county. Our continuum of care is run by our Interagency Council on Homelessness that sort of mimics the national level, but we have two boards of supervisors; we have city representatives; we have basic directors from various departments; our VA; everyone is involved. And so, I think that unity and that support really helped us on the day of the event.

Transportation was a huge issue because San Bernardino County, like I said, is so large, so it was any person we identified on the day of the Point-in-Time count. We connected them to bases of operations and we sent out to those areas transportation units that actually, if they were willing to come, they would come back to the base of operation; we would screen them; we would then go and give them the two-hour/four-hour information for the VASH voucher and hopefully issue it that day. Some of them actually did receive it that day. We wanted to house some on that particular time we had. I think we managed to get one into housing. Our Point-in-Time count was on a Thursday, so the first person we were able to move into direct housing when they actually got their keys, lease, and everything signed was that Monday. So we did have, I believe, quite a few that were actually issued VASH vouchers. Some received SSVF services; some were serviced through the CoC. So there was a wide variety.

And so, that was very successful. We're actually trying an additional PIT Plus, as we like to call it, with a little more focus on the chronic homeless this year. But of course, you know the Veterans now that we're seeing, because we reduced our numbers so significantly, are really geared toward those chronic, intense services that we do need. We did do, like Philip mentioned, the Rolling Reveille. We decided to house one Veteran every day for 30 days. [Name] was really instrumental in participating in this. She is the executive director of one of our SSVF provider programs. We went from 10/11 — we started on October 11 — to 11/10, which is the day before Veterans Day. We managed to house 34 Veterans in those 30 days, so it was a really intense effort coordinating. And really, if we didn't have the support of all of the providers as well as the political will and ability of our decision-makers to help get things done, we might not have made that goal.

In our particular county, our advisory group, which is, like I said, led by our CEO, they created a — Philip's guidance was of course instrumental — they created a housing search and stability program which was focused specifically on taking case management out of the landlord navigation and search function and sort of putting that into a real estate service specifically targeted for our homeless community. And so that has actually been successful because since they've been started — and Philip, I want to say it's only been maybe a month — they have identified over 100 units at least within San Bernardino County and, you have to remember, we are pretty much saturated and California housing is at a premium. So trying to get that is a unique challenge. And so I think all of the puzzle pieces have to come together in order for us to be successful. We do plan on making this a routine effort because eventually we hope to get down so we have a manageable amount so whenever homeless Veterans do come in, we're able to rapidly transition them into housing. These type of events, we do appreciate them. And we hope to make them ongoing; and we are going to make them ongoing.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Thank you so much, Mr. Hernandez and Mr. Mangano. Is anyone from Crossville or Cookeville, Tennessee, on the line who wants to give an update on their Operation Reveille? Then I'll go ahead and chime in, unless someone from those areas is on the line; I'll give them a chance to chime in.

I actually found out about their Operation Reveille through just a Google search. And those two communities are located in neighboring counties, and they partnered together to do Operation Reveille. Based on the information that I found, they received donated items from the community and residents throughout those two small counties; and on that day, they housed five homeless Veterans out of Crossville and Cookeville, Tennessee. Did anyone join us from those communities? And I'm going to go back and see if our regional administrator has joined us.

So we're going to move on to basically a checklist of Operation Reveille: some of the things that we saw that were beneficial to us and things you might need to have in place. But, as you heard from the other communities, it can change a little bit. The focus is definitely on removing the barriers to housing Veterans as quickly as possible. I'll turn it over to Felicia Crosby-Rucker. Again, she'll go over some highlights of the checklist for Operation Reveille.

Felicia Crosby-Rucker, Hillsborough County Homeless Services

Thank you. So we'll go over a few things that we found, points that are interesting for us, and I'll give you some examples of what we did in our community and definitely give suggestions that you can take and consider, but definitely encourage people to inventory your community resources. Make sure you have your local government at the table, because they have a lot of resources, whether they are city or county.

- Our first group is our Veterans. You want to be sure that you are pulling Veterans from your "Take Down" list or you're identifying Veteran populations from your "Take Down" list and plan your targets. So if you plan to target only family (32:58) or chronic homelessness, or you're opening it up to all Veterans, make sure you're working closely with your VA office and that you're using your "Take Down" list.
- An executive planning group for an Operation Reveille event. Typically, you want to make sure — here our CoC is the lead entity for Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative and also to our local government partners, representatives from the city and county. And you want, for an Operation Reveille event, you want leaders that are at the table and actually make decisions and offer up resources that the local governments have available to assist this effort. Also, too, you want to have the SSVF providers and also VA at the table.
- The CoC leadership, definitely here our CoC leadership is the lead for the Operation Reveille events. Also they are also supportive with the HRMS system; we use Unity here in Tampa.
- On local government representatives: Definitely, there's a lot of political will here in Hillsborough County and Tampa. The mayor of Tampa as well as our Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners as well as our county administrator and his leadership, they're all supportive and vested into Operation Reveille and definitely want to end Veteran homelessness here. But we have the political will. All local governments have put in resources, and we definitely want to maximize our efforts in ending Veteran homelessness.
- Lead organizers, so us here, it's the CoC, Hillsborough County, the city of Tampa, and VA. It could vary based on your area or your jurisdiction.
- Local champions here are our mayor and our county commission leader. At the time, our president of our county commission, Sandra Murman, she was a big proponent, or supporter, of the effort. Also, too, we have a board member, a county board member, who's a Veteran, as well as our county administrator. Also, it is helpful to use business leaders or anyone in the community that is visible out there that can be a champion to help promote your efforts in regards to Operation Reveille.
- The type of event we had, we held it every year for the last three years actually in a Tampa Port Authority building, which is downtown and easily accessible. And it was a stand-alone event. But you can also combine it with a Stand Down. You can combine it with the Point-in-Time count or the Project Homeless Connect. This year we actually combined it as part of Stand Down. Stand Down was held two weeks before, and then our Operation Reveille event was held two weeks later, and we actually partnered with them so we made sure we didn't duplicate (35:50) the resources. Stand Down would basically provide a variety of resources for Vets and services. But

then the actual Operation Reveille event this year was focused specifically on the housing part, so the vendors and resource providers that were at the Operation Reveille event this year were only resources that were supportive or that led to supporting a client or Veteran getting into permanent or permanent supportive housing.

- The event program and press conference — definitely the CoC is the lead and is not part of the local government. You definitely need to use your local government resources. Here we used our communications department to assist us with developing a program. We used the city of Tampa as well as Hillsborough County media resources to get media out to the event. Also, from past years we pulled success stories and had them available for the media to be able to go back and interview clients from the past to see basically where are they now that they've been housed in 2014 and 2015.
- Also, you want to inventory your voucher resources. I mentioned earlier the different types of voucher programs that were available that we used here: the ESG, Home TBRA, SSVF, VASH, and the CoC housing, I mean CoC funds. You need to meet with the providers to have those resources in order to help strengthen your system of service, and also you need to include your housing authority and the VA office as part of the whole discussion.
- Landlords: We did a lot of outreach efforts with our landlords; we actually went out and did presentations to the Hillsborough, I'm sorry, the Tampa Bay Area Apartment Association. We did presentations to them, provided them with information to put on their website to do outreach. We also have a letter that was signed by the mayor of Tampa as well as the president — the chairman, I'm sorry — of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners that went out in a mass email from the housing authority to all of their list of vendors that they had available. So that helped us bring in a pool of apartments as well.
- Event location: Definitely need to identify locations that are centrally located, that are easily accessible. For us, because of the type of vehicles that some of the providers were coming in — the VA Mobile vehicle, also we had the state of Florida FLOW Mobile, which provides drivers licenses on-site — we actually used a Port Authority building the last three years, and we got that free of charge. It was an in-kind donation from the Tampa Port Authority. So make sure you are looking for something that is accessible to the public, accommodates big trucks and a lot of parking, and is centrally located. Definitely reach out to your local governments to see if they have buildings that are available in the community as well. You could possibly get those for free.
- The time frame of the event: For the last three years, our event typically starts at 9 a.m., with a short program, and by 9:30 the Veterans are starting the process to be assessed and engage with the case managers and flow through the resources that are available. Typically, our first Vets are leaving to get new keys and is getting on the bus that is provided by Hillsborough County government Sunshine Line program. They're getting on the bus probably about noon. They get on the bus, and they're actually being escorted by leadership at the Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative, as well as sometimes some of the local government leaders that are part of the excitement, and sometimes media, if the Veteran is OK with that, we have the media follow sometimes, and the buddies, most importantly, the buddies. The buddies are important. The buddies actually help the Vets throughout the day. We partner each Veteran that comes to the event with a buddy. That's someone they can talk to, engage with, be their support, eat breakfast with them. Typically, since the first Vet isn't leaving until 12 o'clock, the buddy will eat lunch with them as well but also, too, the buddy can go to the apartment with them to help them get acclimated to the apartment, get their turnkey unit. You think about it: You're getting keys to a unit. You walk in, there's brand-new furniture; the bed's made up; there's pillows on the bed, towels. You open up the refrigerator; there's food in the refrigerator

and in the cabinets; there's dishes. The space is turnkey, and that's a lot to take in. So we definitely have a support person there for them.

- Also, the staging of the unit is important too. You definitely need to identify a lead person to be over the unit. What we did is we were very meticulous about making sure that everything was in place. We had a lot of volunteers, from the University of Tampa baseball team, faith-based groups, county and city departments were competing against each other. Because we had, basically, items that we contributed through donation, but then also some of the departments or groups decided to get a little competitive and actually picked up additional items to decorate soft touches to the unit.
- Also, volunteers for the day of the event we recruited through the CoC, sending out messages through email and social media and through the Hillsborough County government.
- Food for the day of the event we actually maximized by using local providers like Tijuana Flyers, Hooters, McDonald's, and also we had food trucks that were sponsored by one of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers players.
- One of the other things I want to make sure you keep in mind is make sure you have alternative temporary housing options. If you have more clients than you have units that show up that day, you need to make sure you have shelter beds available to be able to transport those clients to those shelter beds. And then immediately, on the next business day, the lead person on case management will follow up with those clients and start assessing them to get them rapidly rehoused as well. One more other thing, the last thing, is sharing the event. Oh, follow-up, I'm sorry.
- Follow-up: Making sure every Veteran who goes into housing on Operation Reveille event days, they have a case manager assigned to them and they have the contact information for the case manager. And within 24 hours of them entering into housing, a case manager will follow up with them.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Great. Thank you, Felicia. Next slide, please. Anthony is going to just go over a couple of principles to keep in mind if you're planning on doing an Operation Reveille or a Housing First event. Anthony?

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

Absolutely. So, thank you, there, Antoinette, and thank you to everyone who talked about Reveille and their communities. The principles that you see on the slide will be second nature to many of you, but they're just so important that they are at least worth repeating somewhat so you keep this in mind by both the leaders of the event as well as by staff and personnel.

- Just because you have the event, you know, even when you don't have the event we know you will continue to place people in housing as quickly as possible. You're not necessarily waiting until the day of the event to place folks; you will continue to do that. If your community has a by-name list, they should already have been assessed and may have obtained a housing resource; so that's business as usual. As soon as a landlord comes forward or a unit is identified, those Veterans should be housed. I think Antonio mentioned earlier, landlords don't hold on to units, and there's no expectation that they hold on to them. And as soon as it becomes available, if that Veteran picks that unit and wants to move in, we should get them in there. No one should have their housing delayed just so they can participate in the event. So just please keep that in mind.

- Of course, we don't want to expose the Veteran to any undue stress. If they are housed before the event, it is not a requirement for them to attend the event. If they want to come, if they ask to come, or whatever, that's fine, but it is not a requirement for them to participate. Also, keep in mind, if you're going to have this large event, it can be extremely stressful to be in kind of a big hall with lots of people, to be subject to questions, to be put in front of reporters, so just keep that in mind. Again, for a lot of you, this is second nature; just repeating it because it is so important to keep in mind. Also, just knowing that it's up to that Veteran — if he or she wants to participate is completely voluntary, and then only in those aspects of the event that are truly likely to be helpful to them.
- Ensure that there's a true choice. So if a Veteran doesn't like the unit and they want to decline that unit, they have every right to do so — if that unit doesn't satisfy them or doesn't meet their needs. Folks who have been homeless and who have a chance at housing, they're going to be very sensitive to the needs of the people in control of the housing resource. So folks who are participating in this event have the right to make the choices that fit their needs, and we want to make sure that they continue to be empowered and still have the dignity to make the choices that they feel work for them.
- Also, ensure the staff, your staff, doesn't feel pressured to rush an assessment or offer a placement that don't fit the goal of the Veteran. I know that it's going to be a big event, and we want to make things happen; but just keep that in the back of your mind, or in the forefront of your mind, that the assessments should be a proper assessment to ensure the Veteran's needs are being met.
- And then on a more global matter, do consider not placing an artificial one-day goal on your community surge event. If you have the housing, if you have the assessment, if you have all those things in place and the Veteran picks it, and it all happens in one day, bam! That's good enough for me. But if it is possible to bring the community together to recommit to end Veteran homelessness and inspire them to contribute resources without the publicity and pressure of a one-day goal, do that as well. And as you've heard, a couple of folks, they're doing Reveille for several days, several weeks, several months, or whatever. So it's a matter of just a mad rush. There's an urgency involved in getting Veterans housed, and so you can have it over several days. Many communities have 100-day events, but even a two-week surge event gives more time for reflection and considered choice on the part of the participants. Next slide.

So the goal is to make sure we work toward effectively ending Veteran homelessness. I know that each of you are still working hard on doing that. The checklist for the event will be made available to you. We need to do more than just consider the initiative; we need to start planning and implementing this initiative right away. Let's take these efforts to the next level.

Reveille speaks to the urgency of getting Veterans off the street and into housing. It is another tool in your toolbox to address Veteran homelessness. Secretary, again, has challenged us over the next 90 days, but most important before your PIT count, to get a Reveille event planned over the week before, two weeks before, or the day of; and your goal would be to house at least 25 Veterans by the end of January. And so, let's say every single continuum of care participates in a Reveille, and they house 25 Veterans before January 31, then that would be roughly 10,000 Veterans who are no longer homeless by January 31. That would be outstanding! So, please, go back to your communities really, again, do more than just consider it — do it. Next slide.

I think we should have some time for questions. I know I've seen you over here typing quite quickly, I don't know if we have time for a few questions.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

We do. I'll start with a question that I've gotten a couple of times; there's a very easy answer to it: Are these slides going to be available for download online? And the answer is yes. They are currently up on the VA homeless website. The web address is www.va.gov/homeless/events. So you should be able to find the slides there for downloading now. So, that's one.

Another question that I have, that I received earlier in the webinar: Where do these Veterans go that you can house so many? And this is probably a question for Antoinette or any of our experts who have planned and hosted an Operation Reveille.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

What was the question? Where do they go?

Witney James, The District Communications Group

Where do the Veterans go that enables you to house so many of them?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

I'm not sure what that question means, but I'll try to address it this way, I guess (49:41). We have pre-identified units and have them, as Felicia talked about earlier, we have them already furnished and with food and all types of supplies — toothpaste, toothbrushes — all of those inside the unit. So, a Veteran, we have a map of where the units are throughout the county, and Vets can select from that list if they want to go into one of those units. So the Vets are housed in one of those units. The first year, we did 53, and the last two years we've done 25 because we've really concentrated on our Take Down list and the chronically homeless population. This year, our focus was the Vets that were chronically homeless, that had a high [inaudible] score, and that had been homeless the longest. So, some of our results: We had placed three Vets that were homeless six years or longer coming off the street that day.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

And they may ... I know if folks were asking if they go to VA or if they go to some other place, but I'm guessing that if you're having an actual event, they would come to the event, but they can go to the VA if that's where they're most comfortable.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Yes, and as far as where do they go, we use multiple funding sources. We talked about we use ESG funds; we've been using county funds or unrestricted general revenue funds, maybe for the first three months until they get document ready. We try not to wait until they get document ready, as a lot of people talk about. So, with ESG funds, we definitely can tell if this person has been homeless and move them in right away. Then, behind the scenes, we try to seamlessly move them into another program, maybe SSVF, or HUD-VASH, or CoC permanent housing, but upfront we use an array of resources to get them in the first couple of months until they get the documents they may need to support that they are chronically homeless or eligible for other permanent programs.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

OK. Any other questions?

Witney James

Yes. We have quite a few popping up here. How many employees and/or volunteers were on hand to accomplish the event in St. Louis?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

In St. Louis, it was an initial operation, so it was really like 100–150. To pull that off, it was really kind of like a pie-in-the-sky idea, so we did have about 100 volunteers. And the volunteers ranged from those that were helping to set up the units all the way to helping the Vets out on that day — being a buddy. If we're going to have 50 people, we need at least 50 buddies, and so then that also includes the vendors that are on-site too. We have people who want to serve food, so we have different committees, and I'll try to get that as part of the slides — what committees that we have established. In Hillsborough County, people in Hillsborough County are very generous, and as I said in a previous call, our Veterans are dying on the streets, and our community is dying to do something about it. And definitely in Hillsborough County. I arrived in Hillsborough County in August, and Operation Reveille was pulled off in November. So just a few months of planning here in Hillsborough County, we had over 350 people sign up to assist with that.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK, and just to piggyback off of that, a related question: Is there any training for the staff that implement Operation Reveille?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Yes. We do training, definitely for the volunteers, but we can definitely do some training to communities, as we've talked about that (54:11). I've previously given out my personal cellphone for communities that want to call. Time is not an issue, time zone. I've had people call me at 8 or 9 o'clock at night, you know, East Coast time, and they're from West Coast, so that's not a problem. I'll give it out at the end of the call as well.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK, another question: How have communities managed to house those Veterans without any income? And how much rent was being paid for and for how long to get Veterans on their feet?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

So, of course, it ranges. We've had Vets that just needed first/last month's security deposit, which can be very difficult to come up with when you're experiencing homelessness. So we've placed Vets into housing that said, 'This is all I need. I don't need any follow-up support,' and we've told them 'we'll follow up with you for a few months, and then after that we'll make sure you're OK, and then after that you don't have to hear from us again.' Then we've had Vets, of course, who need a lifetime of services. So they will become eligible for needing HUD-VASH vouchers or CoC permanent supportive housing vouchers. We have some initial funding from the county for "gap funding." We've housed a Vet, I believe, up to five months until their benefits, or whatever, kicked in. So after they're housed — the housing is the easiest part for the most part — getting them connected to those resources, that could take months. Instead of it taking months and they're on the streets, we'd rather have it take months and they're in housing. So ESG funds can be used, those rapid rehousing funds from ESG can be used up to two years to house a person who is experiencing homelessness (55:51). That's what we used the first time the HARP Act came out; we had ESG funds. I think we had about a half a million dollars that we put toward doing that in St. Louis to make sure those Vets had, at minimum, 12 months of housing through our ESG funds if other funding wasn't located as fast as possible.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK. Another question — I think we'll be able to get maybe two additional questions before we hit 4 o'clock, but we'll try as much as we can. Are there any good practices around pre-inspection efforts and means to help Veterans with unpaid bills that may present challenges during the event?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

For housing inspecting, we lean on our local partners. So the county has an inspection team; the city has an inspection team as well as the housing authority. So all of those entities volunteer to make sure that our units got inspected during each Operation Reveille. We've had some donations to help pay down some of those arrears that a Vet might have. In some cases, we took on the first couple of months to get the utilities turned on, and then when they move in, after a month, we'll turn it back over usually to the Vets.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK, and then I'm going to jump around here. Can you talk more about your outreach to landlords? Did you provide them with any incentives? What strategies were most effective in identifying units and/or landlords ahead of the event?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

So, the first year, the landlords, of course, liked guaranteed rent so we did have a lot of CoC vouchers, and the relationships that our partners had already developed with the landlords was really helpful. And then the second and third year, we had the landlords coming to us and giving us a call saying, 'Are you doing Operation Reveille again this year?' So it's really helpful to maintain a good relationship. We are in the process of starting a fund for damages beyond what is normally paid with the deposit. So we are doing that so we can help those with SSVF, some who do not have that guaranteed long-term rental assistance, so we can assure the landlords that we'll help maintain the place. Also, reaching out to landlords, calling landlords, presenting to landlord associations (58:41), our renters associations, and realtors associations — that helps.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK, and then just a really quick follow-up to the previous answer you provided about EFC funding. Was that right?

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

ESG.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

ESG funding. OK. Somebody wanted clarification on that. Can you spell that out just for those in the room who may not know what the acronym is?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

I'm sorry about that. Emergency Solutions Grant, which is a HUD grant, and it's an entitlement grant for your community. It's similar to your block grant, so it comes along in that package in the CDBG fund.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

Yeah. It is not a lot of money. And it works just like SSVF in terms of the rapid rehousing, and you can leverage that. It's not Veteran-specific but can be used for Veterans.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

All right, so it looks like we're at 3:59, well at 4 o'clock Eastern now, so thank you everyone for joining us. We hope that you got a lot of information. Oh, yes?

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

I just wanted to leave with my phone number.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

OK.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

So, my cellphone number is 618-401-7666. Anyone can give me a call at any time if they have any questions. Or, you can email me at triplett.a@thhi.org. Also, check out our Twitter site as well and our Facebook.

Anthony Love, VHA Homeless Programs, VACO

For those communities who are going to plan and implement a Reveille, we would greatly appreciate if you would let us know if your community is going to do that and the date you're going to do that. You can send that information to Antoinette, or you can email me at anthony.love@va.gov. Definitely appreciate you sharing that information with us, and we'll make a calendar. Our Secretary really is pushing this and would like to see it happening nationwide. Thank you so much for your participation.

Witney James, The District Communications Group

And that wraps us up. If anyone who submitted a question via the Q&A box in the virtual meeting room did not get an answer to their question, if you wouldn't mind just sending me a quick message and we can try to work to get you an answer offline, please. Thank you guys so much. Have a wonderful day.

Antoinette Hayes-Triplett, Tampa Hillsborough Homeless Initiative

Thanks, everybody!