

**STAFF/VOLUNTEER/VISITOR
POLICIES & PROCEDURES
FOR
HOMESNOW! NOT LATER.**



**HomesNOW
1441 St. Paul St.
Bellingham, WA 98229**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Purpose

These Staff Policies and Procedures are intended to be a written set of guidelines for the smooth, safe and effective functioning of HomesNOW! Not Later as an organization.

The purpose of HomesNOW is to end homelessness one person at a time. HomesNOW as an organization provides safe and stable housing and additional services for homeless individuals. Members of HomesNOW consist of people of various backgrounds, skills and circumstances who are actively helping people seek permanent housing as well as alleviate the suffering of those who have yet to receive housing.

This Policies and Procedures document includes general policies for staff, a code of conduct, and a description of services that HomesNOW provides. **The policies and guidelines in this document are reviewed regularly by HomesNOW and are changed as necessary based on input from staff, volunteers and the general public.**

1.2. About HomesNOW

HomesNOW is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has no paid staff and is made up entirely of volunteers working together to offer affordable housing options and services for homeless individuals in Bellingham and Whatcom County. **HomesNOW supports the Housing First model to house people immediately.** The goal is for each person to have a sense of home, safety, community and overall progress.

In June and July of 2017, HomesNOW worked with **Lummi Stepping Stones** to build two tiny homes. Since that time, the three tiny homes have temporarily housed 8 people transitioning to permanent housing. On average, occupancy has been 2 to 3 months before moving into permanent housing.

In 2017, HomesNOW assisted 25 people into housing by eliminating barriers. **HomesNOW provided:** telephone access, avenues for reconnecting family members, assistance with rental applications for those having difficulty reading and/or writing, winter outreach, transitional housing and assistance for people entering detox programs.

In January 2019, HomesNOW began managing **Winter Haven**, Bellingham's first temporary tent encampment located behind City Hall. In February 2019, during extreme winter weather conditions, HomesNOW coordinated with a diverse group of volunteers and groups to manage an emergency shelter providing basic shelter for up to 40 people.

Winter Haven lasted for 90-days, ending on April 6, 2019. At that time, HomesNOW began managing our second temporary tent encampment, **Safe Haven**, located in the 9-1-1 Call Center parking lot. Since August of 2019, HomesNOW has been operating **Unity Village**. Unity Village is a tiny home community for helping homeless individuals into permanent housing. HomesNOW has achieved over a 30% rehousing rate.

2. GENERAL POLICIES

2.1. Basic Model

HomesNOW encourages the egalitarian model of self-governance and decentralization as a general principle. Using this model makes the job of the staff and volunteers easier and more effective in general as well as promotes homeless individuals achieving permanent housing where they will have to self-govern once they find permanent housing. HomesNOW supports the basic idea of promoting the general welfare of the community, especially those who need it most.

HomesNOW encourages staff and volunteers to use their own initiative and creativity to engage and solve problems. If you see a way that things can be done better, propose a solution, run an experiment. HomesNOW as an organization also encourages volunteers, staff and board members to treat homeless individuals as equal and mutual individuals. In many cases with many organizations, homeless individuals are not treated as equal/mutual people and the result is increased levels of social disfunction, criminal activity, etc.

When people are treated as mutual individuals who can contribute, they generally rise to the occasion.

2.2. Personal Property

Staff and Volunteers are responsible for securing their personal property. If personal property is stolen or damaged, HomesNOW must be notified promptly to access and review security camera footage to account for the incident. If proven, ask for the item to be returned to its rightful owner. If the item is not returned, then it's considered theft. If HomesNOW or personal property is stolen or damaged without provisions for remediation, it's grounds for removal from the organization.

Staff and Volunteers are responsible for their own personal property within the boundary of areas administered by HomesNOW.

Theft of any kind is not tolerated. **Proof of theft is grounds for removal from working with the HomesNOW organization.**

2.3. Parking

Volunteers, Staff and Visitors that require a parking space must notify HomesNOW so that arrangements can be made for parking. No parking in areas where there are no-parking signs.

2.4. Pet Policy

Pets are permitted under the following conditions:

1. Pets must be clean, well fed, and not have fleas or other parasites such as tapeworm.
2. No animal abuse is tolerated. Any act of violence towards an animal from a person or another animal or from an animal to human is **grounds for removal from the organization.**
3. Volunteers, Staff, and Visitors must clean-up after their pet on-site (chewed up or shredded items, spilled food, poo, water, food dishes, etc.)
4. Pet noise must be kept to a minimum at all times.
5. Pet must be spayed or neutered.
6. Only 1 pet is allowed per person.
7. Pet waste must be managed and disposed of quickly and appropriately.
8. Pet must be supervised at all times
9. Pet is required to follow public leash laws at all times.

2.5. Sexual Harassment Policies

The culture of HomesNOW is based on mutual respect and collaboration. Sexual harassment is a serious violation of those principles. HomesNOW! Not Later **does not** tolerate sexual harassment in organization's activities in any way, shape or form. Volunteers, donors, contractors, residents, board members, and everyone interacting with our organization is expected to adhere to these policies.

The Following Behaviors are not Tolerated:

- **Insinuating, proposing or demand sexual favors of any kind.**
- **Invading another person's personal space** (EX: inappropriate touching.)
- **Stalking, intimidating, coercing or threatening another person into engaging in sexual acts.**
- **Send or display sexually explicit objects or messages.**
- **Commenting on someone's looks, dress, sexuality or gender in a derogatory or objectifying manner or a manner that makes them uncomfortable.**
- **Make obscene comments, jokes or gestures that humiliate or offend someone.**
- **Pursue or flirt with another person persistently without the other person's willing participation.**

Also, flirting with someone at an inappropriate time (e.g. in a team meeting) is considered sexual harassment, even when these advances would have been welcome in a different setting. This is because such actions can harm a person's professional reputation and expose them to further harassment.

The most extreme form of sexual harassment is sexual assault. This is a serious crime and our organization will support victims who want to press charges against offenders.

- **No one has the right to sexually harass our members.** Any person working with HomesNOW who is found guilty of serious harassment will be terminated, whether they are Board Members or Volunteers.
- **Sexual harassment is never too minor to be dealt with.** Any kind of harassment can create a hostile working environment. As an organization, HomesNOW will hear every claim and report to proper social and legal channels for repercussions of offenders.
- **Sexual harassment is about how we make others feel.** Many do not consider behaviors like flirting or sexual comments to be sexual harassment, thinking they are too innocent to be labeled harassment. But, if something you do makes your colleagues uncomfortable, or makes them feel unsafe, you must stop.
- **We assume every sexual harassment claim is legitimate unless proven otherwise.** We listen to victims of sexual harassment and always conduct our investigations properly. False reporting does not undermine this principle.

- **We will not allow further victimization of harassed person.** We will fully support any person within the framework of Homes NOW! Not Later in areas such as volunteerism, leadership, residency, or interactive participants who may experience sexual harassment and will not take any adverse action against them. We will remain supportive and in defense of their position.
- **Those who support or overlook sexual harassment are as much at fault as offenders.** Management is obliged to prevent sexual harassment and act when they have suspicions or receive reports. Letting this behavior go on or encouraging it will bring about disciplinary action. Anyone who witnesses an incident of sexual harassment or has other kinds of proof should report to HomesNOW management immediately.
- **No retaliatory actions based on the reporting of sexual harassment.** If you report sexual harassment it's your right to be heard and to have the issue resolved, without fear of losing your housing or losing your position within the organization. No person in a position of authority within the organization can retaliate against reports of sexual harassment.

Reporting Sexual Harassment:

If you are being sexually harassed (or suspect another person is being harassed), please report it to any board member or staff member that you feel comfortable with. In serious cases like sexual assault, please call the police and inform management that you plan to press charges.

We acknowledge it's often hard to come forward about these issues, but we need your help to build a fair and safe organization for everyone.

- **Ask for an urgent meeting with HomesNOW Management.** Once in the meeting, explain the situation in as much detail as possible. If you have any hard evidence (EX: emails), forward it or bring it with you to the meeting.

- **Send your complaint via email.** Please email all incidents to incidents@homesnow.org. Management and your supervisor will discuss the issue and contact you as soon as possible.

If you need to make a sexual assault report to the police, our organization will provide any possible support until the matter is resolved. We will ensure you are not victimized and that you have access to relevant evidence admissible in court, like security video footage or emails (without revealing confidential information to unauthorized parties.)

Management must not, under any circumstances, blame the victim, conceal a report, or discourage associates from reporting sexual harassment. If management behaves that way, please send an email to incidents@homesnow.org explaining the situation. We welcome any feedback or complaints about our procedures and how our members handled each case.

2.6. Fire Safety

Cooking is only permitted in designated cooking or kitchen spaces. Grills, toasters, and microwaves must not be left unattended when in use. The only type of heating devices authorized inside tiny homes are portable oil-filled heaters or infrared radiant heaters that will be supplied with the unit.

Fireworks and candles are not allowed to be lit on site. **Smoking is not allowed inside tiny homes** or structures; smoking is only allowed in the designated smoking area. Fire extinguishers are placed throughout the site in accordance with state law. In the event of a fire, volunteers, staff or residents must call 911 immediately and evacuate to a safe location.

2.7. Emergencies

In the event of an emergency (police, fire, ambulance required), residents should immediately call 911. Residents must notify HomesNOW as soon as realistically and safely possible.

After any incident requiring police, fire, or EMT dispatch, the HomesNOW Board will meet to evaluate the cause of the incident and determine if further action is necessary to ensure the safety of the volunteers, staff and residents. This may include updating policies, issuing warnings, and/or removal of an individual, if necessary.

2.8. Violence/Abuse/Discrimination

Violence, physical abuse, verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, and intentional damage to others' property are not tolerated, and ***are grounds for immediate removal from the organization.***

Prejudiced, racist, sexist, degrading, or discriminatory remarks are not tolerated. Harassment of any kind is not tolerated. Bullying is not tolerated. Staff, Volunteers or Visitors spreading rumors about others is not tolerated.

Depending on the severity of the incident and at HomesNOW's discretion, we may ask the staff member, volunteer or visitor to leave immediately or implement appropriate consequences. **Any concerns of misconduct or any illegal activity must be reported to HomesNOW immediately.**

2.9. Weapons

Knives longer than 3.5-inches and all firearms are strictly prohibited from HomesNOW sites; possession of these items is ***grounds for immediate removal from working with HomesNOW.***

Items deemed as weapons (other than those that are prohibited) will be stored in a safe location. Use of any item as a weapon to injure, threaten, or harass others is not tolerated and **will result *immediate removal*** and intervention by law enforcement for removal.

2.10. Visiting Hours

Visiting Hours for volunteers and visitors on the site are from 8:00am to 8:00pm, every day. **During visiting hours, any volunteers, staff or visitors are expected to minimize noise so that it does not disturb residents.**

Staff, Volunteers and Visitors are expected to behave respectfully and cooperatively and **consider the impact of their behavior on the rest of the community.**

2.11. Guest and Visitor Policies

Visitors/guests must be **checked in and checked out.** Guests and visitors are responsible for their own behavior. **Visitors/guests are not permitted to stay overnight.** Visitors must consent to a background check upon the request of HomesNOW. **Refusal will result in the guest being asked to leave.**

2.12. Cleanliness & Sanitation

Volunteers, Staff and Visitors must maintain cleanliness and clean up their own waste and mess. Volunteers, visitors and staff are expected to minimize offensive odors and scents that may disturb others. Any time a HomesNOW member reasonably requests another member to address sensitive odors, the neighboring member is expected to respectfully do so. Members of HomesNOW are asked to bring any recurring complaints to discussion at meetings to find peaceful conflict resolution. Members are also encouraged to approach each other directly about any mess or problems related to cleanliness or sanitation.

2.13. Substance Use

HomesNOW is a drug and alcohol-free community. Staff, Visitors and Volunteers are not allowed to possess or consume alcohol on-site. Illegal drugs are not permitted on or off-site. Furthermore, volunteers, staff and visitors are not allowed to be present on site while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. However, prescription medications including cannabis with the presence of medical marijuana card are permitted. All smoking must be done in the smoking tent or designated smoking areas.

No smoking is allowed in tiny homes, tents, or other structures. Smoking is allowed in designated smoking areas only. **If evidence of smoke contamination of the structure is found, that volunteer, visitor or staff member must restore the structure to its uncontaminated condition, either through cleaning or replacement of contaminated parts.**

2.14. Financial Policies

These financial policies are put in place in order to prevent any misappropriation of funds, resources, equipment, inventory, donations, etc.

Separation of Duties:

Separation of duties involves splitting responsibility for bookkeeping, deposits, reporting and auditing. The further duties are separated, the less chance any single board or staff member has of committing fraudulent activities. **Sharing responsibilities between two or more people** or requiring information to be reviewed by co-workers can serve the same purpose. Avoiding a conflict of interest is essential.

Accounting System Access Controls:

Controlling access to different parts of an accounting system via passwords, lockouts and electronic access logs can keep unauthorized users out of the system while providing a way to audit the usage of the system to identify the source of errors or discrepancies. Robust access tracking can also serve to deter attempts at fraudulent access in the first place.

Physical Audits of Assets:

Physical audits include hand-counting cash and any physical assets tracked in the accounting system, such as inventory, materials and tools. Physical counting can reveal well-hidden discrepancies in account balances by bypassing electronic records altogether.

Standardized Financial Documentation:

Standardizing documents used for financial transactions, such as invoices, internal materials requests, inventory receipts and travel expense reports, can help to maintain consistency in record keeping over time. Using standard document formats can make it easier to review past records when searching for the source of a discrepancy in the system. A lack of standardization can cause items to be overlooked or misinterpreted in such a review.

Daily or Weekly Trial Balances:

Using a double-entry accounting system adds reliability by ensuring that the books are always balanced. Even so, it is still possible for errors to bring a double-entry system out of balance at any given time. Calculating daily or weekly trial balances can provide regular insight into the state of the system, allowing Homes NOW! Not Later... to discover and investigate discrepancies as early as possible.

Periodic Reconciliations in Accounting Systems:

Occasional accounting reconciliations can ensure that balances in Homes NOW! Not Later...accounting system match up with balances in accounts held by other entities, including banks, suppliers and donors. For example, a bank reconciliation involves comparing cash balances and records of deposits and receipts between accounting system and bank statements. Differences between these types of complementary accounts can reveal errors or discrepancies in Homes NOW! Not Later...accounts, or the errors may originate with the other entities.

Approval Authority Requirements:

Requiring specific managers to authorize certain types of transactions can add a layer of responsibility to accounting records by proving that transactions have been seen, analyzed and approved by assigned authorities. Requiring approval for large payments and expenses can prevent unscrupulous associates from making large fraudulent transactions with organization funds, for example.

Financial Affirmative Action & Procedures:**Keep business and personal finances separate:**

Never co mingle organizational and personal finances. If you do make a loan to HomesNOW or make a purchase on behalf of HomesNOW, document it appropriately with a promissory note or receipts specifying repayment terms.

Conduct background checks:

This is especially important for members whose job duties involve finances, such as bookkeeping, accounting, payroll or handling cash.

Create monthly cash flow projections:

If actual cash flow falls short of projections, investigate to find out why.

Review monthly bank statements in detail:

Have bank statements sent directly to personal email or home address.

Review all credit and debit card statements for accuracy:

Using payment cards for business expenses can simplify accounting and tax preparation. However, the more company credit cards, the greater the chance of fraud. Document all business expenses with detailed receipts.

Inventory control systems:

Inventory is often damaged, stolen or lost. Inspect and count incoming inventory to make sure orders were filled accurately. Designate who can sign for incoming inventory or release outgoing inventory. Conduct regular inventory of products or materials.

Don't put one person in charge of petty cash:

Require a second associate to authorize all petty cash transactions. Record all transactions, and balance the petty cash once a week.

Review all outgoing payments:

Compare payments to invoices. Watch for duplicate invoices, new vendors or multiple invoices from the same vendor in a short time. Members who embezzle often use these tactics to pay themselves. Require vendors to submit detailed invoices. Avoid vague language on invoices.

2.15. Discretion

The HomesNOW policy on discretion is that everybody's situation and circumstances is different depending on their situation. Rules and policies are enforced and created with discretion for maintaining stable and mutually beneficial results for the overall community.

3. Services**3.1. Food**

The community kitchen of Unity Village is open 24 hours per day, 7 days per week for the residents. Residents prepare their own food and are responsible for properly storing and disposing of their food and maintaining a clean kitchen and dining area. Residents who wish to prepare meals for themselves and other residents are welcome to do so. Volunteers are also free to prepare a community meal as needed.

HomesNOW also coordinates with the Bellingham Food Bank to provide food for residents. The Sikh community may provide a community meal once per week and food at our monthly homeless summits where clothing, supplies and showers are provided. If other volunteers or businesses would like to provide food donations, all public health regulations on food handling and storage will be followed. Any volunteer that prepares food will be required to have a WA State Food Workers card.

3.2. Supplies

Supplies such as hygiene products, blankets, furniture, and other donated items are available and distributed by HomesNOW, the Site Manager, or the Donations Lead. The Donations Lead will notify HomesNOW of any inventory needs.

3.3. Transportation

Bus passes are available and distributed as needed. Other modes of public transportation may be available to residents and those in need based on specific personal need and circumstances.

3.4. Support Services

Unity Village will serve as a central location for service providers to meet with residents to determine their individual needs. HomesNOW will coordinate with other service providers and providers of shelters for homeless persons within the County and will inquire about the availability of existing resources with these providers. It is recommended that any chronic health and/or mental health conditions be assessed as a prerequisite for residency. Case worker(s) will identify which support services are needed (if any) based on a preliminary evaluation.

Examples of support services may include:

- Eligibility for residency
- Job training accessibility
- Mental health assessment
- Counseling for drug/alcohol recovery
- DSHS follow-ups and reviews

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) may provide additional services to the residents of Unity Village. DSHS may host mobile community services at Unity Village once per month. DSHS may assist residents with determining eligibility for cash and food assistance programs, child care benefits, Medicare, and Medicaid. Applications for aid are available at the on-site office.

3.5. Security Services

Unity Village and other HomesNOW sites are monitored by 24/7 video surveillance. 1080P 60HZ HD security cameras are placed around the perimeter of the property to monitor all activity occurring on and surrounding the perimeter of the site.

- Camera use on the site is necessary to protect rights of all residents, volunteers, staff and visitors as well as neighbors in the area from any potential problems or unlawful activity.
- Site location is monitored remotely by HomesNOW through an application on the phone and/or PC to ensure stability at the site.
- Security cameras are **not** installed inside tiny homes or bathrooms; this measure is to preserve the privacy and rights of the site residents.

3.6. Waste Management

Residents, Volunteers, Staff and Visitors are expected to adhere to all state laws and county health regulations. Every member of HomesNOW must practice responsible self-care and proper waste disposal to avoid cross contamination, illness, and/or disease.

A dumpster, recycling bin, food waste bin, and trash cans are provided on the site for use by residents. Residents are responsible for disposal of their trash and/or recycling and maintaining a clean and orderly environment on the premises and surrounding areas. Every resident is responsible for trash detail, recycling, and waste management.

Portable toilets are located throughout the site and are equipped with hand sanitizer. A handwashing station is located near the cluster of portable toilets. A sink with running water is available in the kitchen for hand washing.

A graywater tank is located outside of the kitchen tent. All graywater from the sink is collected in 5-gallon buckets and dumped into the graywater tank.

3.7. Repairs and Maintenance

Repairs and maintenance are handled directly by HomesNOW. Residents must notify either the HomesNOW of any needed repairs or maintenance promptly. If an emergency repair is required, residents must contact HomesNOW as soon as possible.

3.8. Winter Outreach Support

During emergency weather events and generally during the cold months of winter, HomesNOW will support and be part of community efforts to transport homeless individuals to emergency shelters or the hospital as needed and will provide donations of gear, tents, sleeping bags for those out in the cold. Having a tiny home community acts as a hub for the general public to know where to bring donations to.

3.9. Tiny Home Communities

Currently, HomesNOW operates one tiny home community (Unity Village). Unity Village has 22 tiny homes and can house up to 28 people. The Homes are insulated and have electricity. The type of housing is classified as transitional housing. Residents are required to follow a basic set of rules and responsibilities in order to be admitted. It provides a stable place for people to get back on their feet.

4. ACCEPTANCE OF THE RULES

By signing this handbook you are agreeing to abide by these rules and standards. If you can't follow these rules, and basic consequences are not achievable, you agree to leave the organization.

NAME:

DATE (MM/DD/YYYY):

SIGNATURE
