



Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program

DRAFT Program Description, Standards, and Guidance

SFY 2027 (2026–27 Winter Season)

About the program

Vermont's Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program (ECWSP) supports community-based emergency shelter during periods of extreme cold. It serves people experiencing homelessness who have no other safe housing option. The goal is to prevent cold-related illness and death by ensuring access to safe, temporary shelter during Vermont's severe winter weather.

The program enters its second season in 2026–27. It is administered by Get Warm Now VT, a partnership of Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) and Green Mountain Justice (GMJ). The program is sponsored and funded by the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity (AHS/DCF/OEO).

Act 143 of 2026 created the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum at 33 V.S.A. chapter 22. It gives extreme cold weather sheltering a statutory foundation for the first time. Section 2201(10) defines emergency cold-weather shelter. Section 2209 confirms that this shelter is low barrier, and that it does not require coordinated entry, case management, or extensive data reporting.

Some communities and shelter providers work independently of the ECWSP with their own weather triggers, eligibility criteria, and funding sources. The ECWSP is an opportunity for local communities to receive funding and support in exchange for providing safe, warm, welcoming night-by-night shelter for some of our most vulnerable Vermonters.

What this guidance covers

This document is an overview of the 2026–27 ECWSP, updated for the statutory requirements in Act 143. It covers the operating season, weather activation, guest eligibility, site requirements, operating standards, staffing, reporting, and reimbursement.

Application information, including how to apply, will be posted at GetWarmNowVT.org [under development].

Operating season

The ECWSP operating season runs from December 1, 2026 through March 31, 2027. Get Warm Now VT monitors weather conditions and activates subgrantee shelters throughout this period.

When shelters activate

The activation threshold

Communities may open and operate shelters based on their own criteria at any time. Participation in the ECWSP and reimbursement under it are limited to nights that meet the applicant's approved threshold, in localities where other state-funded shelter options are insufficient.

10°F wind chill is statutorily the warmest threshold the ECWSP will reimburse. Applicants set their own threshold at or below that point as part of the ECWSP proposal and application process. An applicant may propose any colder value that fits local conditions, population needs, facility capacity, and budget. Applicants are encouraged to choose the threshold that best serves their community rather than defaulting to the warmest or coldest option.

Get Warm Now VT activates a participating shelter when the National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts a wind chill at or below that shelter's approved threshold, sustained for 4 or more consecutive hours in its locality.

Thresholds are recorded in the subgrant agreement. A subgrantee may request a change during the season. Changes take effect only after written approval from Get Warm Now VT.

Weather monitoring

Get Warm Now VT monitors NWS forecasts in the locality of every ECWSP participant. Vermont's temperature variation across regions is substantial. Locality monitoring activates shelters where conditions warrant without over-activating milder regions. Applicants provide a ZIP code so their locality can be monitored.

The activation cycle

During the season, ECWSP operational periods cycle through four phases:

- Weather monitoring. Get Warm Now VT monitors NWS forecasts throughout the operating season
- Activation notice. When NWS Impact-Based Decision Support Services (IDSS) forecasts indicate that conditions will meet the threshold in a participant's locality, Get Warm Now VT issues an activation notice for that locality. Notices are issued approximately three days (72 to 84 hours) ahead of the reimbursable activation period so communities have maximum time to prepare. Within 4 hours of the notice, operators confirm that they will open
- Activation period. Activated shelters open, operate nightly, and close under their approved operations plans
- Activation report. Within 1 hour of closing, operators report required data to Get Warm Now VT, including total guest count, unduplicated guests, incidents, resource issues, and any support needed. Reports are submitted through the web-based reporting system or at the ECWSP Activation Debrief, a short call held each morning of operations

Operators can prepare with the assurance that, once issued, an activation notice is not rescinded. If the NWS IDSS forecast changes after the notice and conditions rise above the threshold, the activation stands and the operator is reimbursed for the activation period.

Who qualifies for shelter

Guests are eligible for ECWSP shelter if they meet the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definition of homelessness as adopted by Vermont's Agency of Human Services, and they have no other safe shelter option.

A low-barrier approach

ECWSP shelters are low barrier by statute. No identification is required. No coordinated entry assessment or case management is required. A guest may not be denied shelter for declining to provide information. The minimum data collected at intake is guest name and date of birth. Life safety comes first and data collection second.

Each shelter uses an intake procedure that establishes guest eligibility, collects the required information, and ensures guests understand the shelter's rules and expectations for a safe, welcoming congregate setting.

Each shelter maintains a confidentiality policy protecting the personal information of guests within the ECWSP system. Local staff and volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement before interacting with guests.

Shelter sites and facilities

Sites and facilities used for the ECWSP are identified in advance and approved for the intended use and capacity by state and local officials. Proposed sites are shared with the Vermont Division of Fire Safety (DFS) as early as possible in the planning cycle. DFS applies capacity categories of 6 to 8, 9 to 16, and 17 or more occupants when reviewing shelter sites. Adequate staffing can offset some code requirements.

Key considerations in site selection include:

- Physical suitability for intense congregate use, including ease of circulation, sufficient storage, ease of visual monitoring, and adequate bathroom and other facilities
- Accessibility to unsheltered people by foot, public transportation, or other transportation during operating hours
- Neighborhood impact

Operators maintain an operations plan and are equipped to function safely, efficiently, and respectfully during activation periods. Operations plans address guests accompanied by pets or companion animals. Get Warm Now VT helps operators coordinate with the Vermont State Veterinarian and the Vermont Disaster Animal Response Teams (VDART) to support unsheltered neighbors with animals.

Operating standards and safety

Each operator's plan includes at minimum:

- A clear list of rules and expectations for guests
- Intake and documentation procedures
- Defined shelter staff roles and responsibilities
- Emergency contact information and communication protocols
- De-escalation and conflict resolution guidance
- A protocol governing entry to the shelter space by law enforcement officials and outside medical personnel

Get Warm Now VT administrative staff and state partners retain full access to all shelter spaces and shelter records for monitoring, support, and oversight.

All shelter staff and volunteers are supported and trained to respond to the needs of shelter guests, with the aim of a safe, secure, and supportive environment. Training in trauma-responsive practices is provided. Discharge of a guest is a last resort, considered only after all efforts to resolve non-compliance have been exhausted.

Operators complete and submit a Critical Incident Report to Get Warm Now VT within 24 hours of any incident involving a medical emergency, serious injury, threat to safety, property damage, law enforcement involvement, or suspected abuse or neglect.

Staffing

Qualified paid or volunteer staff are a critical component of an extreme cold weather shelter.

- Paid and volunteer staff must be screened for suitability
- Operators or their partners must screen staff and volunteers using the AHS Child and Adult Abuse Registries
- Area service agencies, places of worship, congregations, and mutual aid groups may serve as sources for volunteers or paid staff
- The Vermont Medical Reserve Corps may be a source of qualified volunteers and can support first aid, CPR, and Narcan training
- Stipends for on-call and overnight staff have proven effective, and guidance on stipend structures is available from Get Warm Now VT
- Get Warm Now VT and state partners provide training opportunities and coaching throughout the season

Reporting

Reporting requirements are deliberately minimal, consistent with Act 143.

- Activation report after each night of operation, submitted within 1 hour of closing
- Critical Incident Report within 24 hours of a reportable incident
- Monthly reimbursement request with supporting documentation
- End-of-season reconciliation within 45 days of April 1

Reporting moves to a web-based system for SFY 2027, replacing email and spreadsheet tracking. Participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is not required. Get Warm Now VT provides templates for unduplicated guest counts instead.

Reimbursement

The ECWSP is a reimbursement program. Subgrantee operators are reimbursed for eligible, documented expenses up to their contracted maximum. Eligible cost categories include personnel, facility, supplies, infrastructure, permits, and insurance.

Reimbursement requirements for SFY 2027:

- Use the standardized reimbursement template provided at GetWarmNowVT.org, with all legible expense receipts, documentation of guest counts, staff and volunteer time, and facility inspection forms
- Submit reimbursement requests monthly, by the deadline set in the subgrant agreement
- Complete end-of-season reconciliation within 45 days of April 1

Resource guide

Get Warm Now VT offers a resource guide here [[linked page](#)], which lists helpful references and best practice information.

Municipal Support Grant Program

In SFY 2027, Get Warm Now VT also administers the Municipal Support Grant Program (MSGP) with OEO. The MSGP, established under Act 143, provides grants to municipalities that support their unhoused neighbors during periods of extreme cold. This includes communities underserved by traditional funding sources.

The MSGP is a separate program with its own eligibility criteria, activation trigger, and application. A municipality that already has an extreme cold weather shelter in its locality is eligible to apply for the MSGP. Full award criteria and application details can be found here [[linked page](#)]. Interested municipalities may email contact@getwarmnowvt.org.

Next

- FAQs; general announcement of programs and outreach/recruitment (application process completed and NOFO announced pending rules); digital infrastructure development continues; orientations and training plan developed (events planned); etc.
- DCF interim rules take effect September 1, 2026, and this guidance will be finalized to match
- Application materials and instructions posted at GetWarmNowVT.org
- Awards announced October 15, 2026
- Pre-season orientation for operators and partners before November 1, 2026
- Mobilization readiness November 15, 2026
- Operating season on or before December 1, 2026, depending on Vermont temperatures

For more information, email contact@getwarmnowvt.org.

Document history

Document title	Date	Summary of revisions
Extreme Weather Shelter Procedure	August 1, 2025	Original
ECWSP Program Description and Procedure	July 26, 2026	Revised for SFY 2027: 10°F wind chill threshold, Get Warm Now VT administration, reporting standards, MSGP added
ECWSP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance	July 28, 2026	DRAFT restructured for Act 143, locality-based monitoring, four-phase activation cycle, no-rescind policy, web-based reporting, MSGP grant cap removed
ECWSP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance	July 29, 2026	Eligibility tied to sufficiency of other state-funded shelter, resource guide section added, activation report contents and morning debrief specified, staffing projection restated as statewide activations, next steps updated
ECWSP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance	July 31, 2026	Revised after OEO review: applicant-selected activation threshold at or colder than 10°F, season end corrected to March 31, early operating start when conditions warrant, prior-season summary, threshold rationale, and statewide activation projection removed