



Vermont Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program and Municipal Support Grant Program

Reference Manual for the 2026/27 Winter Season

Version 4.1, October 12, 2026

Get Warm Now VT, a partnership of Vermont Interfaith Action and Green Mountain Justice, administered with the Vermont Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity

GetWarmNowVT.org



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Executive Summary

The State of 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 ECWSP 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(b) confirms that this shelter is low barrier and does not require coordinated entry, case management, or extensive data reporting. Section 2209(a) establishes the Municipal Support Grant Program (MSGP), which Get Warm Now VT also administers in SFY 2027.

This manual describes both programs. It covers the operating season, weather activation, guest eligibility, site requirements, operating standards, staffing, reporting, and reimbursement. It closes with quick reference guides, contacts, and a list of references and web resources for shelter operators and municipalities.

The manual tracks the ECWSP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance and the MSGP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance for SFY 2027, and the ECWSP Activation Protocol. Where this manual and those documents differ, the Standards and Guidance and the subgrant agreement govern.

Some communities and shelter providers work independently of these programs with their own weather triggers, eligibility criteria, and funding sources. The ECWSP and MSGP are opportunities 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.

Key Program Features

ECWSP activation trigger: National Weather Service forecast of wind chill at or below the shelter's approved threshold for 4 or more consecutive hours in its locality. 10°F wind chill is the warmest threshold the ECWSP will reimburse

MSGP activation trigger: National Weather Service Cold Weather Advisory for the municipality's locality, self-monitored by the municipality

Operating season: December 1, 2026 through March 31, 2027

Administrator: Get Warm Now VT (VIA and GMJ), contact@getwarmnowvt.org

Sponsor: Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity



GetWarmNowVT is a project of Vermont Interfaith Action and Green Mountain Justice for the administration, coordination, and operation of Vermont's SFY2027 Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program and Municipal Support Grant Program funded by the State of Vermont.





Reimbursement: Actual, documented, eligible expenses up to the contracted maximum in the subgrant agreement

Website: GetWarmNowVT.org

Section I: Program Overview and Objectives

Purpose

The ECWSP provides reimbursement and technical assistance for the night-by-night sheltering of neighbors experiencing homelessness in Vermont during periods of extreme cold.

Primary Objectives

- Provide life-saving emergency shelter during extreme cold weather events
- Supplement existing shelter capacity where other state-funded shelter options are insufficient
- Maintain consistent, low-barrier operating standards across all participating shelters
- Ensure equitable access to emergency cold-weather shelter for communities with a high number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- Support Vermont's broader strategy to address homelessness under Act 143

Note: *Shelters are free to open and operate whenever they deem necessary. ECWSP reimbursement and technical support are available only for nights that meet the shelter's approved threshold during a Get Warm Now VT activation.*

Statutory Authority

Act 143 of 2026 (H.938), An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum, added 33 V.S.A. chapter 22. Two provisions govern these programs:

- Section 2201(10) defines emergency cold-weather shelter as publicly funded shelter beds made available during periods when the National Weather Service forecasts temperatures at or below 10°F including wind chill
- Section 2209(b) directs that emergency cold-weather shelters be managed through agreements between OEO and community partners to provide overnight, low-barrier shelter when weather conditions warrant. Shelter is time limited, does not require coordinated entry assessment or case management, and has minimal data reporting requirements
- Section 2209(a) directs OEO to provide grants to municipalities in areas with a high volume of unsheltered homelessness, including municipalities underserved by traditional funding sources. Grant use is at the municipality's discretion and includes basic life-sustaining shelter when the National Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory

DCF interim rules for the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum took effect September 1, 2026. Permanent rules are due by October 1, 2027. Program guidance will be updated as rules are adopted.



Administration

Program sponsor: Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity

Program administrator: Get Warm Now VT, a partnership of Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) and Green Mountain Justice (GMJ)

General inquiries: contact@getwarmnowvt.org

Activations, reports, and incidents: operations@getwarmnowvt.org

Operating season: December 1, 2026 through March 31, 2027

Get Warm Now VT Responsibilities

- Serve as the primary point of contact for applicants, subgrantees, and partners
- Conduct the application, review, and award process for ECWSP and MSGP subgrants
- Execute subgrant agreements, including each ECWSP shelter's approved activation threshold
- Monitor National Weather Service forecasts for every ECWSP participant's locality
- Issue activation notices and compile Activation Summaries for state partners
- Provide pre-season orientation, training, coaching, and technical assistance throughout the season
- Operate the web-based reporting and reimbursement system
- Review capital improvement and infrastructure requests on a case-by-case basis
- Conduct season-end reconciliation, debrief, and evaluation

Section II: Shelter Opening Criteria

A. 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 application. 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.



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B. 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.

C. The Activation Cycle

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

- 1. Weather monitoring:** Get Warm Now VT monitors NWS forecasts throughout the operating season
- 2. 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. Within 4 hours of the notice, operators confirm that they will open
- 3. Activation period:** Activated shelters open, operate nightly, and close under their approved operations plans. An activation period is one nightly sheltering timeframe within a 24-hour period
- 4. Activation report:** Within 2 hours of closing each night, operators report required data to Get Warm Now VT through the web-based reporting system: total guest count, unduplicated guests, incidents, resource issues, and any support needed. Get Warm Now VT hosts a short ECWSP Activation Debrief call each morning of operations

D. No-Rescind Policy

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

E. Late Activation Notice

If temperatures unexpectedly drop to threshold conditions less than three days before a potential activation period, a subgrantee may request a late activation notice from operations@getwarmnowvt.org. If Get Warm Now VT confirms the forecast change and the subgrantee confirms it can operate, Get Warm Now VT issues an activation notice for that locality.

F. Shelter Operation Outside ECWSP Activation

ECWSP reimbursement and technical support are available only during activation periods as defined above. Shelter operators may open at other times. That is a decision of the individual shelter and its partners. This manual applies to the period of operation funded by the ECWSP, although operators may apply it in other circumstances.



G. Activation Notices to Partners

At each activation, Get Warm Now VT notifies state partners, Vermont 2-1-1, and local emergency management of the shelters activated, their localities, and their hours, so that emergency responders and neighbors can find shelter status and availability.

Section III: Operator Eligibility and Guest Criteria

A. Eligible Shelter Operators

- Nonprofit organizations with experience in social services, emergency response, homeless services, or community outreach
- Faith communities with suitable space and a commitment to serve all individuals regardless of religious affiliation
- Municipal governments and their designated agencies
- Community action agencies and regional service providers
- Educational institutions with appropriate facilities

Two organizations may submit a joint application with one acting as the applicant of record. Organizations that have never operated a shelter are encouraged to apply. Get Warm Now VT provides step-by-step assistance through every stage of development.

B. Operator Requirements

Organizational capacity: Ability to manage emergency shelter operations during activation periods

Staffing: Adequately trained personnel for safe operations, including paid staff and volunteers

Background screening: All paid staff and volunteers working directly with guests must be screened and must not appear on the AHS Child and Adult Abuse Registries

Facility compliance: Sites must meet land use, fire safety, and accessibility requirements as determined by state and local officials. Final zoning and fire safety approval is required to sign a subgrant agreement, not to apply

Community coordination: Willingness to work with Get Warm Now VT, local emergency services, Vermont 2-1-1, and support agencies

Financial management: Capacity to manage program funds and maintain required documentation

Trauma-responsive approach: A non-judgmental, trauma-responsive approach in support of unhoused neighbors seeking shelter

Low-barrier operation: Operation consistent with the low-barrier requirements of Act 143 described below



C. Guest Eligibility

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. Verbal attestation is sufficient.

Act 143 defines homeless at 33 V.S.A. § 2201(13) to include a person who is:

- Lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
- Facing imminent loss of a primary nighttime residence
- Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions
- Residing in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or streets
- Otherwise defined as homeless under federal law

D. 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. Local staff and volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement before interacting with guests.

E. Shelter Approach and Community Safety

Vermont communities know their neighbors best. Get Warm Now VT encourages each shelter operator to prioritize individual and community safety while maintaining maximum accessibility for those in need. This approach is consistent with Red Cross emergency shelter best practices, ADA Standards for Accessible Design, Emergency Solutions Grant shelter standards, and federal non-discrimination requirements. It builds trust through empathy rather than punitive approaches. Operators minimize unnecessary obstacles while maintaining safety for guests and communities.

All ECWSP shelters maintain plans and procedures consistent with local Vermont emergency management plans. Local emergency management contacts are listed in the Vermont Emergency Management Partners Directory (see References).



Section IV: Basic Shelter Standards

A. Site Selection and Approval

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. Get Warm Now VT works with state partners to help applicants navigate zoning and code variances.

Key Considerations

- 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 and mitigation

Space and Building Requirements

- Sleeping areas: a minimum of 35 square feet per person is the common emergency shelter planning standard
- Accessibility: compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements as determined by state and local officials
- Capacity limits: maximum occupancy as determined by state and local officials
- Building integrity: structurally sound facilities that protect guests from the elements

Fire Safety Requirements

- Compliance with the Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code and local regulations
- Approval by the Division of Fire Safety and local officials
- At a minimum, working smoke detectors and clearly marked emergency exits

B. Basic Amenities and Services

Sleeping accommodations: Beds, cots, or sleeping mats with clean bedding

Restroom facilities: Adequate toilet and handwashing facilities

Heating: Heating systems that maintain safe indoor temperatures

Storage: Basic secure storage for personal belongings

Food and beverages: Hot beverages and food service when possible

C. Health and Sanitation Standards

- Regular cleaning and sanitization of restroom facilities
- Proper waste disposal



- Access to clean drinking water
- Basic first aid supplies and emergency contact procedures

D. Pets and Companion Animals

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.

Section V: Eligible Expenses and Reimbursement Guidelines

The ECWSP is a reimbursement program. Subgrantee operators are reimbursed for eligible, documented expenses up to their contracted maximum. Eligible cost categories are personnel, facility, supplies, infrastructure, permits, and insurance. The ECWSP Budget Template at GetWarmNowVT.org organizes these categories.

A. Eligible Program Expenses

Personnel: Shelter managers, coordinators, and shift staff; stipends for on-call and overnight staff; security personnel if necessary and approved in advance; cleaning and transportation staff

Facility: Utilities, facility rental or use fees, cleaning, repairs, and routine maintenance

Supplies: Minimal food and beverages, bedding and linens, basic hygiene supplies, first aid supplies

Infrastructure: Pre-approved safety and accessibility improvements, heating repairs, security features, and bathroom upgrades needed to operate the shelter

Permits: Permit and inspection fees required for shelter operation

Insurance: Insurance coverage during operations

Transportation: Guest transportation to and from the shelter, including coordination with local transit, volunteer drivers, and vouchers

Administrative: Administrative costs as set in the subgrant agreement

Note: *Infrastructure and capital improvement requests must be included in the application for review and approval. All such improvements require formal pre-approval before any reimbursement can be provided.*

B. Non-Eligible Expenses

- Entertainment or recreational activities
- Permanent facility improvements not directly related to shelter operations
- New facility construction
- Personal items for individual guests
- Alcohol or tobacco products



C. Reimbursement Process

- Use the standardized reimbursement template provided at GetWarmNowVT.org
- Include 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, 2027 (May 16, 2027)

D. Documentation Requirements

The ECWSP Activation Protocol organizes reimbursement documentation in five parts:

Guest documentation: Guest sign-in sheets (English and Spanish), nightly guest counts, unduplicated guest counts

Staff documentation: Staff timesheets, volunteer logs, staffing schedules

Expense documentation: All expense receipts, food and supply invoices, facility rental costs, other eligible operational expenses

Facility documentation: Facility opening and closing inspection forms, any damage or repair documentation

Incident documentation: Critical Incident Reports and related follow-up

Payment terms, documentation requirements, and reporting deadlines are set in the subgrant agreement. Detailed procedures and forms are posted at GetWarmNowVT.org.

Section VI: Record Keeping and Data Reporting Requirements

Reporting requirements are deliberately minimal, consistent with Act 143. 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.

A. Required Reports

Activation report: After each night of operation, submitted within 2 hours of closing

Critical Incident Report: 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

Monthly reimbursement request: With supporting documentation, by the deadline in the subgrant agreement

End-of-season reconciliation: Within 45 days of April 1, 2027

B. Guest Registration and Tracking

- Nightly guest log with name and date of birth, the minimum intake data under the low-barrier standard
- Verbal attestation of homelessness status recorded at intake



- Emergency contact and immediate needs when the guest chooses to provide them
- Departure confirmation

Get Warm Now VT provides templates for all required documentation. Sign-in sheets and intake forms are available in English and Spanish.

C. AHS Health-Related Social Needs Screening Tool

AHS Field Services provides the AHS Health-Related Social Needs (HRSN) Screening Tool for use in ECWSP and MSGP shelters. The tool asks short questions about living situation, housing conditions, food, transportation, utilities, health insurance, and primary care, and pairs each answer with a Vermont referral such as Vermont 2-1-1, 3SquaresVT, the local Community Action Agency, or Medicaid transportation. Operators may offer it to guests who want help connecting to services. It is not an intake requirement. A guest may decline, and declining never affects shelter access. The tool is available from Get Warm Now VT and AHS Field Services.

D. Privacy and Confidentiality

- Each shelter maintains a confidentiality policy protecting guest identity, except when guests have signed information releases or as required by law
- Staff and volunteers sign confidentiality agreements before working in the shelter
- All information is stored securely with access limited to authorized personnel
- Get Warm Now VT administrative staff and state partners retain full access to shelter spaces and records for monitoring, support, and oversight

E. Financial Documentation and Audit

Subgrantees may be subject to state audit to ensure compliance with grant requirements, assess financial records, and review internal controls. Records subject to audit include:

- All expenditure documentation and receipts
- Staff payroll and benefit records
- Vendor contracts and payment records
- Bank statements and reconciliation reports
- Monthly reimbursement requests and summaries

Records are retained for a minimum of seven years. Subgrantees cooperate with state monitoring visits.

Section VII: Additional Operational Standards

A. Operations Plan

Operators maintain an operations plan and are equipped to function safely, efficiently, and respectfully during activation periods. Each operator's plan includes at minimum:

- A clear list of rules and expectations for guests
- Intake and documentation procedures



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- 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
- Procedures for guests accompanied by pets or companion animals

B. Guest Conduct and Staff Response

Shelter staff work to establish a safe and supportive environment during night-to-night emergency operations. Given the temporary nature of ECWSP activations, the focus is on immediate safety and basic needs rather than complex case management. Discharge of a guest is a last resort, considered only after all efforts to resolve non-compliance have been exhausted.

C. Transportation

Operators are encouraged to coordinate transportation for neighbors experiencing homelessness in and beyond their locality. Where a shelter is not reasonably accessible to unsheltered residents, transportation is part of the operations plan. Resources include local transit authorities, volunteer driver programs, taxi or rideshare vouchers, and community organizations that provide transportation.

D. Operating Hours and Morning Exit

Evening admission: Generally 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM

Overnight accommodation: 10:00 PM to 7:00 AM

Morning departure: 7:00 AM to 9:00 AM

Flexible scheduling: Accommodations for work schedules, medical appointments, and individual circumstances

Before requiring departure, staff assess current weather conditions, provide a secure system for guests to retrieve stored items, and share area-specific information about daytime warming, ongoing support, and housing resources.

Section VIII: Staff Training and Safety Requirements

A. Training and Technical Assistance

Get Warm Now VT and state partners provide training opportunities and coaching throughout the season, including:

- Pre-season operator orientation covering trauma-responsive care, de-escalation, hypothermia, naloxone, guest care, the AHS HRSN Screening Tool, the activation protocol, and financial reporting
- Examples of emergency shelter policies, plans, procedures, and forms
- Documentation templates for all required reporting



- Ongoing technical assistance throughout the activation period
- Emergency consultation during operations

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.

B. Staffing Requirements

- Qualified paid or volunteer staff are a critical component of an extreme cold weather shelter
- Minimum one adult on site during operational hours unless there are specific fire safety staffing requirements
- 24/7 availability of the shelter manager or designee
- Paid and volunteer staff must be screened for suitability
- Operators or their partners screen staff and volunteers using the AHS Child and Adult Abuse Registries

C. Staffing Resources

- 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. Guidance on stipend structures is available from Get Warm Now VT

Section IX: Community Coordination and Partnerships

ECWSP shelter operators are encouraged to maintain community partnerships to the extent feasible.

A. Emergency Services Coordination

Law enforcement: A written protocol governing entry to the shelter space, regular communication, and defined roles and responsibilities

Fire and EMS: Emergency response procedures, safety inspections, medical emergency protocols, and evacuation planning

Local emergency management: Coordination with the town or regional emergency management director on activations and warming center listings

Vermont 2-1-1: Shelter status and availability shared during activations so responders and neighbors can find open shelters

B. Service Provider Network

Healthcare access: Coordination with local healthcare providers, mobile health services where available, and mental health crisis intervention



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Social services: Connection to mainstream benefits, housing assistance, and legal aid and advocacy services, using the AHS HRSN Screening Tool referrals where a guest wants them

Animal care: Vermont State Veterinarian and VDART for guests with pets or companion animals

Section X: Emergency Procedures and Safety Protocols

The following are examples of procedures operators include in their operations plans.

A. Medical Emergencies

- Immediate emergency services contact (911)
- Basic first aid, CPR, and naloxone administration
- Guest medical information access procedures
- Family notification when appropriate

B. Health and Wellness

- Wellness checks for vulnerable guests
- Isolation procedures for communicable diseases
- Medication management assistance
- Mental health crisis intervention and 988 referral

C. Safety and Security

- Secure entry and exit procedures
- Personal property protection
- Emergency communication systems
- Protocol for law enforcement and outside medical personnel entering the shelter space

D. Emergency Evacuation

- Clear evacuation routes and procedures
- Assembly areas and accountability systems
- Coordination with emergency responders
- Alternative shelter arrangements

E. Critical Incident Reporting

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. Mortality is reported even when the cause appears natural.



Section XI: Municipal Support Grant Program

The Municipal Support Grant Program (MSGP) helps Vermont municipalities support their unhoused neighbors during periods of extreme cold. It is established under Act 143 of 2026 at 33 V.S.A. § 2209(a). The statute directs OEO to provide grants to municipalities in areas of the state with a high volume of unsheltered homelessness, including communities underserved by traditional funding sources. Get Warm Now VT administers the MSGP with OEO.

The MSGP and the ECWSP are separate programs with separate eligibility, activation triggers, and applications. The ECWSP funds community shelter operators and activates at a wind chill of 10°F or below. The MSGP funds municipalities and activates on a Cold Weather Advisory. A community may be served by both. Where both operate in the same locality, coordination is required.

A. Who Qualifies

Municipalities that demonstrate a commitment and ability to shelter community members during a National Weather Service Cold Weather Advisory during the 2026/27 winter season are eligible to apply. A municipality can meet this commitment in any of three ways:

Direct provision through an approved shelter: The municipality documents that it can shelter community members now in an existing facility approved to operate under cold weather advisory conditions

Direct provision through a proposed shelter: The municipality submits a plan to shelter community members in a proposed municipal facility potentially capable of operating under cold weather advisory conditions

Collaborative agreement: The municipality submits a shelter agreement with a neighboring shelter provider to transport unsheltered community members to and from an approved shelter site and back

- High volume of unsheltered homelessness is an evaluation criterion, not a screening criterion
- A municipality whose locality already has an extreme cold weather shelter is eligible to apply. Coordination between the two operations is required
- There are no fixed regions. Communities of any size from across the state may apply
- Applicants provide a ZIP code so their locality can be monitored
- A multi-town alliance may apply together

B. What the Grants Support

A funded program must include a commitment to shelter community members during a Cold Weather Advisory during the winter of 2026/27. Beyond that, communities have flexibility to design a response that fits local needs. Eligible activities may include:

- Overnight emergency shelter operations and staffing
- Repairs and readiness work at a dedicated shelter facility
- Daytime warming and provisions at the same site as the overnight shelter



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- Transportation supporting cold weather sheltering, including transport under a collaborative agreement
- Life-saving supplies such as coats, sleeping bags, and tents

Shelter means overnight shelter. A municipality's commitment to operate overnight shelter is what makes a proposal eligible. Once that commitment is in place, the other activities above may be funded whether or not a Cold Weather Advisory is issued, through the end of the state fiscal year on June 30, 2027.

Funds support existing facilities and existing operations. Day services and supplies are funded as part of a municipality's sheltering commitment, not as standalone programs. The program does not fund new facility construction.

C. Grant Amounts

There is no hard ceiling on a request. Proposals are considered on project criteria, community need, reasonableness, and available funds. OEO and Get Warm Now VT work with applicants whose requests appear out of scale with the proposed response.

D. When Municipal Shelter Operates

The statute ties this support to an NWS Cold Weather Advisory. In Vermont a Cold Weather Advisory corresponds to roughly -20°F apparent (wind chill) temperature.

Operating during a qualifying advisory is mandatory for grantees. There is no opt-out. Municipalities self-monitor NWS advisories for their locality. Most already carry this obligation under their Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP). The monitoring obligation is written into the subgrant agreement. The Department of Public Safety provides embedded support as a backstop. Get Warm Now VT monitors forecasts for ECWSP participants only.

E. A Low-Barrier Approach

Shelter provided under the program is low barrier and time limited. Consistent with the statute, it does not require a coordinated entry assessment or case management, and it carries minimal data reporting requirements. The minimum data collected at intake is guest name and date of birth. Life safety comes first and tracking second. A guest may not be denied shelter for declining to provide information. Get Warm Now VT provides templates for all reporting requirements.

F. Shelter Standards and Safety

MSGP documentation and shelter operating standards mirror the ECWSP standards in Sections IV through X of this manual as closely as practical. Municipalities receive the ECWSP standards and templates.

- Each shelter operates under a written plan covering guest rules, intake, staff roles, emergency contacts, de-escalation, and entry by law enforcement and outside medical personnel
- The municipal plan must not contradict the local LEMP



- Training is recommended, not required. Municipalities must be able to show that staffing provides safe care and operations. Staff qualifications are assessed case by case
- Get Warm Now VT provides training opportunities, templates, and coaching
- Where a shelter is not reasonably accessible to unsheltered residents, the municipality must provide transportation

G. Reporting

- Activation report after every advisory night on which the shelter operates
- End-of-season reports submitted through the web-based reporting system, which replaces email and spreadsheet tracking
- Reports retain enough detail to produce nightly census counts
- Critical incident reporting and financial documentation as set in the subgrant agreement

H. Grant Administration

- A senior municipal representative signs the subgrant agreement, meaning the mayor, select board chair, or city manager
- That signatory verifies that the proposal comports with municipal regulations and guidelines
- Payment terms, documentation requirements, and reporting deadlines are set in the subgrant agreement

For more information, email contact@getwarmnowvt.org.

Section XII: Program Evaluation and Feedback

Get Warm Now VT conducts an end-of-season review following the 2026/27 winter season:

- Program evaluation using activation reports, Activation Summaries, reimbursement records, and partner feedback
- Subgrantee and partner interviews and recommendations
- Documentation of operational challenges and successes
- Recommendations for future program iterations and for DCF permanent rulemaking

OEO reports annually on each level of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum, including emergency cold-weather shelter and municipal supports, under 33 V.S.A. § 2217.

Quick Reference Guides

ECWSP Activation Checklist

- ☐ Watch for a Get Warm Now VT activation notice for your locality (issued 72 to 84 hours ahead)
- ☐ Confirm within 4 hours of the notice that you will open



- ☐ Schedule staff and volunteers; the notice will not be rescinded
- ☐ Prepare the facility, supplies, and food
- ☐ Open and operate under your approved operations plan
- ☐ Complete the nightly guest log and intake
- ☐ Submit the activation report within 2 hours of closing
- ☐ Join the ECWSP Activation Debrief call each morning of operations
- ☐ Submit a Critical Incident Report within 24 hours of any reportable incident

Daily Operations Checklist

- ☐ Conduct wellness checks
- ☐ Complete the guest log
- ☐ Assess weather for evening operations
- ☐ Coordinate with emergency services as needed
- ☐ Document any incidents or concerns
- ☐ Complete facility opening and closing inspection forms

MSGP Activation Checklist

- ☐ Monitor NWS advisories for your locality at weather.gov
- ☐ Open when the National Weather Service declares a Cold Weather Advisory for your locality
- ☐ Provide transportation where the shelter is not reasonably accessible
- ☐ Report activations, guest counts, and incidents through the web-based system

Emergency Contact Quick List

911: Police, Fire, EMS

988: Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, call or text

2-1-1: Vermont 2-1-1, or text VTHELP to 898-211

Get Warm Now VT Operations: operations@getwarmnowvt.org

Get Warm Now VT General: contact@getwarmnowvt.org

Templates for all required documentation are available from Get Warm Now VT and at GetWarmNowVT.org.

Contact Information

Get Warm Now VT: Program Administrator. Website: GetWarmNowVT.org. General inquiries: contact@getwarmnowvt.org. Activations, reports, and incidents: operations@getwarmnowvt.org



GetWarmNowVT is a project of Vermont Interfaith Action and Green Mountain Justice for the administration, coordination, and operation of Vermont's SFY2027 Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program and Municipal Support Grant Program funded by the State of Vermont.





Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA): 152 Pearl Street, Burlington, VT 05401. www.viavt.org

Green Mountain Justice (GMJ): PO Box 242, Vergennes, VT 05491.
www.greenmountainjustice.org

Vermont Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity:
280 State Drive, Waterbury, VT 05671-1020. dcf.vermont.gov/oeo

References

Vermont Statute and Rules

Act 143 of 2026 (H.938), An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum, 33 V.S.A. chapter 22
<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2026/Docs/ACTS/ACT143/ACT143%20As%20Enacted.pdf>

Vermont Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity
<https://dcf.vermont.gov/oeo>

Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code and Division of Fire Safety
<https://firesafety.vermont.gov>

Get Warm Now VT Program Documents

ECWSP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance SFY 2027 (Get Warm Now VT), posted at GetWarmNowVT.org
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/resources.html>

MSGP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance SFY 2027 (Get Warm Now VT), posted at GetWarmNowVT.org
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/resources.html>

ECWSP Activation Protocol SFY 2027 (Get Warm Now VT), available from operations@getwarmnowvt.org
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/resources.html>

AHS Health-Related Social Needs (HRSN) Screening Tool (AHS Field Services), available from Get Warm Now VT
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/resources.html>

Get Warm Now VT website
<https://getwarmnowvt.org>

Providers and grant opportunities, program comparison, and FAQs
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/providers.html>

Resources page: applications, budget templates, information session slides and recording
<https://getwarmnowvt.org/resources.html>

ECWSP Application SFY 2027
https://getwarmnowvt.org/assets/documents/ECWSP_Application_SFY2027_v2.pdf

MSGP Application SFY 2027
https://getwarmnowvt.org/assets/documents/MSGP_Application_SFY2027_v2.pdf



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ECWSP Budget Template

https://getwarmnowvt.org/assets/documents/ECWSP_Budget_Template_v1.xlsx

MSGP Budget Template

https://getwarmnowvt.org/assets/documents/MSGP_Budget_Template_v1.xlsx

2026/27 Information Session recording

<https://youtu.be/SWE7xaadzYc>

Federal Regulations and Standards

24 CFR § 576.403, Emergency Solutions Grant Shelter and Housing Standards

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-24/subtitle-A/part-576/subpart-E/section-576.403>

Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design

<https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/design-standards/2010-stds/>

HUD Definition of Homelessness, Four Categories

<https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/four-categories/>

Weather and Activation

National Weather Service Burlington, VT

<https://www.weather.gov/btv/>

National Weather Service Albany, NY (southern Vermont)

<https://www.weather.gov/aly/>

National Weather Service Wind Chill Safety and Chart

<https://www.weather.gov/safety/cold-wind-chill-chart>

VT-Alert emergency notifications

<https://vem.vermont.gov/vtalert>

Emergency Management and Safety

Vermont Emergency Management Partners Directory

<https://vem.vermont.gov/programs/emd/partners>

Vermont Emergency Management Plans and Procedures

<https://vem.vermont.gov/plans-and-procedures>

Vermont Emergency Management Animal Planning and VDART

<https://vem.vermont.gov/plan/animals>

Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Animal Health and State Veterinarian

<https://agriculture.vermont.gov/animal-health>

Vermont Medical Reserve Corps

<https://www.healthvermont.gov/emergency/volunteer/medical-reserve-corps>

Emergency Shelter Best Practices

FEMA and American Red Cross Shelter Field Guide (FEMA P-785)

https://www.nationalmasscarestrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Shelter-Field-Guide-508_f3.pdf



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American Red Cross Sheltering Handbook

<https://crcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/American-Red-Cross-Sheltering-Handbook.pdf>

FEMA Planning Considerations: Evacuation and Shelter-in-Place (2019)

<https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-07/planning-considerations-evacuation-and-shelter-in-place.pdf>

National Alliance to End Homelessness, Emergency Shelters and Interim Housing

<https://endhomelessness.org/resource-best-practice/emergency-shelters-and-interim-housing/>

Community and Crisis Resources

Vermont 2-1-1

<https://www.vermont211.org>

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

<https://988lifeline.org>

Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Grants and Hands-On Support for Emergency Shelters

<https://www.vlct.org/news/grants-and-hands-support-emergency-shelters>

Vermont Climate Assessment 2021 (University of Vermont)

<https://site.uvm.edu/vtclimateassessment/files/2021/11/VCA-11-9-2021.pdf>

Document Information

Version: 4.1

Effective date: 2026/27 winter season

Last updated: October 12, 2026

Next review: April 2027, after DCF permanent rules are drafted

Document History

Version	Date	Summary of revisions
3.39	September 28, 2025	Final SFY 2026 reference manual, VIA administration, fixed - 10°F trigger
4.0	October 12, 2026	Revised for SFY 2027 and Act 143: Get Warm Now VT administration; applicant-selected threshold at or below 10°F; locality monitoring by ZIP code; four-phase activation cycle with 72 to 84 hour notice, 4-hour confirmation, no-rescind policy, and late notice procedure; low-barrier intake; HMIS not required; web-based reporting; 2-hour activation report and 24-hour Critical Incident Report; 45-day reconciliation; season end March 31; pets and law enforcement entry protocols; DFS capacity categories; MSGP section added; references and URLs updated for both programs



Version	Date	Summary of revisions
4.1	October 12, 2026	Aligned to the ECWSP and MSGP Program Description, Standards, and Guidance and the ECWSP Activation Protocol; Section XI rebuilt from the MSGP Guidance; AHS HRSN Screening Tool added; reimbursement documentation aligned to the Activation Protocol; administrative costs deferred to the subgrant agreement

This reference manual is subject to review and revision based on program experience, DCF rulemaking, and evolving best practices in emergency shelter operations.