

Across the Lines: The Bay Area

Insights on Shelter Referrals,
Emergency Housing Coordination, and
the Case for Shared Shelter Availability

San Francisco Bay Area | February 2026

Based on input from 50+ Bay Area providers, advocates, hotlines, and referral partners



Bringing shelters and referring agencies together to turn shelter referral friction into shared clarity, better communication, and stronger data for advocacy.

Executive Summary

Across the Bay Area, emergency shelter coordination for survivors remains deeply collaborative but structurally fragmented. Placement decisions often depend on manual outreach, informal knowledge, repeated screening, and provider-to-provider relationships. The problem is not only capacity. It is also visibility: real-time knowledge of what is actually available, appropriate, and safe.

Key System Realities

- GBV emergency shelter access in the Bay Area is **highly decentralized**, with survivors entering through hotlines, chat lines, walk-ins, youth access points, case worker referrals, and sometimes coordinated entry.
- Placement decisions are further complicated by wide variation in program rules, including eligibility, safety zones, residency requirements, household composition, after-hours capacity, and documentation expectations. **Under time pressure, that makes “best fit” matching difficult.**
- The system operates in a capacity-constrained environment where **“no bed available” is the most common reason for denial.** When placement cannot be secured, referrals often spill into hotel or motel overflow, friends-or-family safety plans, or prolonged outreach cycles.

In practice, these workflows still rely heavily on phone calls and informal knowledge. Participants expressed strong interest in a more reliable shared availability system, alongside skepticism that any tool will work unless information is updated consistently.

69%

Same-day need

54%

Denials because no beds are available

85%

Direct calling to determine availability

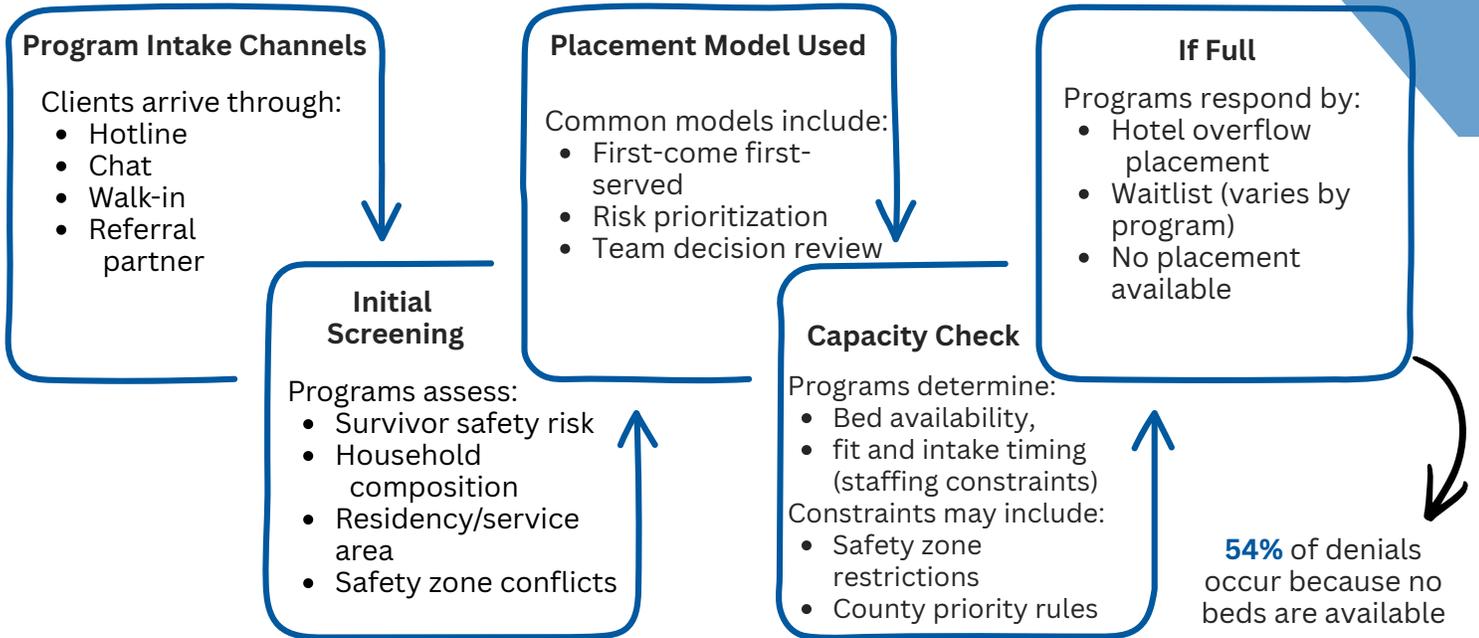
77%

Hotel overflow or alternative fallback use

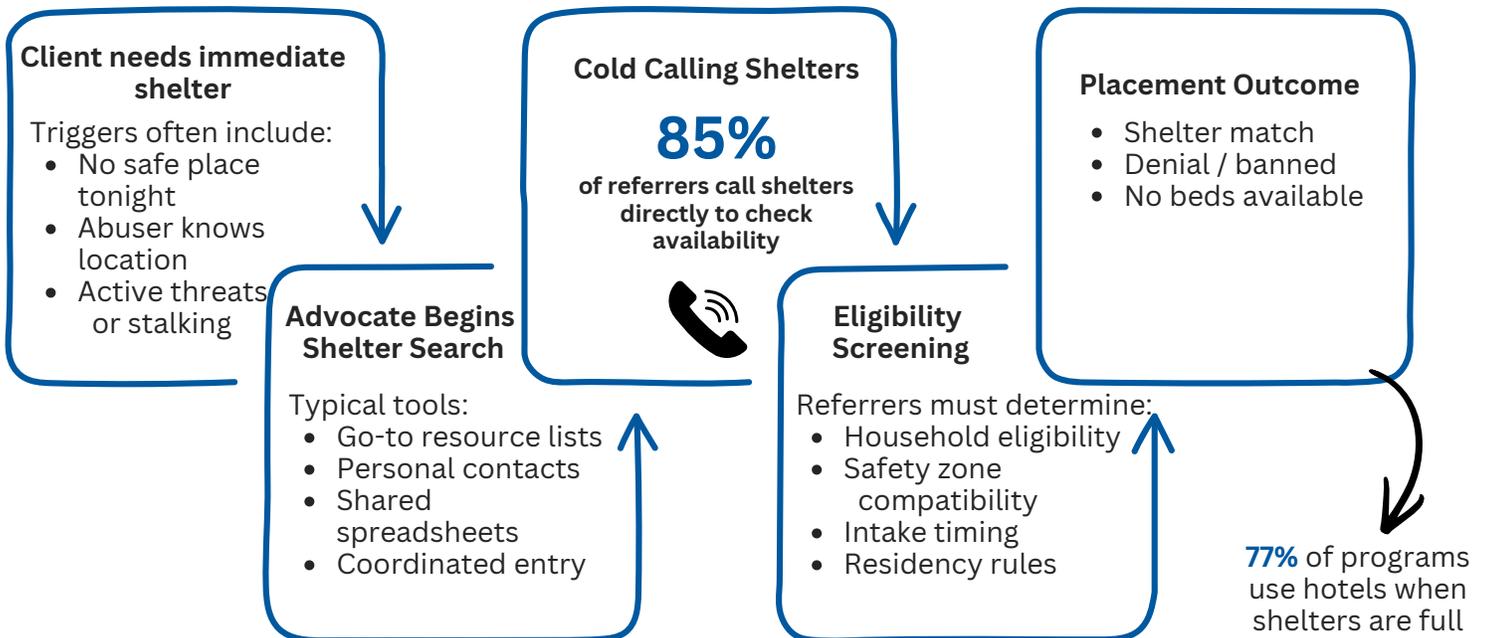
Current Shelter Placement Processes

Both sides of the system are working under pressure, but without shared visibility the process remains labor-intensive and inconsistent.

Shelter Program Workflow



Referring Agency Workflow



Where the System Breaks Down

Fit Is Difficult to Assess Quickly

- eligibility rules
- safety zone restrictions
- residency requirements
- household composition
- after-hours intake
- documentation expectations

Real-Time Availability Is Hard to Verify

There is no reliable shared way to see which shelters have openings in real time. This leads to:

- repeated cold-calling
- duplicate screening
- longer placement searches
- more stress for advocates and survivors

Same-Day Denial Creates the Greatest Risk

Participants identified same-day denial without a clear backup plan as the most vulnerable point in the system.

When shelter cannot be secured, survivors may rely on:

- temporary hotel placement
- friends or family safety plans
- car sleeping
- extended outreach cycles



69% of shelter searches are for same-day placement

Bay Area Takeaway

Emergency shelter coordination across the Bay Area is deeply collaborative, but still depends too heavily on manual coordination and incomplete visibility into available beds.

In practice, urgent need often collides with limited capacity, fragmented information, and time-consuming search processes.

“Right now, access to shelter often depends on who you know—relationships matter, but they shouldn’t be the only way to secure a placement.”

Bay Area participant

What Has Been Tried & What It Tells Us

Regional coordination efforts

Efforts to improve coordination of shelter referrals are not new in the Bay Area. Regional initiatives have previously tried to centralize information and make access to services easier for providers and survivors.

One example was the Domestic Violence Information and Referral Collaborative (DVIRC), a regional inventory designed to help providers identify shelter



options across programs. Participants described it as

useful and widely used in its early stages. Over time, however, the effort became difficult to sustain as technical support diminished, program data became less consistent, and there was no dedicated funding to support ongoing maintenance.

What SF has already identified

San Francisco has already identified many of the same cross-system challenges through earlier assessment and planning work. In 2021, the City's Safe Housing Community Needs Assessment was launched to inform the development of a coordinated entry approach that would improve survivors' access to housing, increase safety, choice, and privacy, and improve coordination between victim service providers and the Homelessness Response System.

Key themes from that process included:

- improving coordination between victim service providers and the homelessness response system
- creating clearer referral pathways for survivors
- ensuring information about housing options is consistently available across providers
- strengthening cross-system collaboration and problem-solving

Technology alone is not enough.

Durable coordination efforts require funded maintenance, clear oversight, and operational support.

The need is not for another short-term directory. It is for sustainable, community-supported coordination infrastructure that improves visibility, referral pathways, and cross-system collaboration without compromising survivor safety or provider judgment.

Why The Grove Is Different

Collaborative Entry, Not Centralized Bed Control

The Grove offers a **collaborative entry** approach, strengthening, not replacing, existing systems by adding shared visibility and coordination capacity across providers.

By connecting information across programs and systems, The Grove helps communities move toward a more coordinated model, where providers can spend less time searching for options, and more time supporting survivors.

It's not about changing how providers do their work. It's about making that work more visible, more connected, and more effective across the system.

Traditional centralized bed control

- One central list
- One placement authority
- Best fit for systems that can centrally assign inventory

Collaborative entry with The Grove

- Shared non-PII visibility
- Shelters retain acceptance authority
- Referrals are based on fit, confidentiality, and availability

Why this matters for GBV systems

- Confidentiality comes first.
- Provider judgment stays intact.
- The model supports survivor-centered placement instead of flattening it.

What Providers Say Would Help

Shared Visibility

Programs strongly support tools that provide real-time shelter availability.

92%

prefer real-time availability systems over static resource lists.

Clear Program Profiles

Providers want consistent information about:

- Eligibility criteria
- Length of stay
- Intake rules
- Household types served
- Pet policies
- Transportation access

Simple Updates

Preferred update methods include:

- One-click web status updates
- Mobile “tap to update” tools
- Automated reminder prompts

“We spend a significant amount of time making calls just to find availability. There’s a clear need to move beyond phone-based coordination.”

Bay Area participant

What The Grove Could Make Visible

Unique System Insights

Across the Bay Area, communities are working to better understand not just whether shelter resources exist, but whether survivors can actually access safe, appropriate placements when they need them.

The Grove adds a privacy-protective, community-level coordination and data layer that helps jurisdictions, funders, and providers see how placement is functioning across systems in real time. By combining live availability, program-level fit information, referral activity, and aggregate system insight, it makes it possible to understand where placements are happening, where they are breaking down, and where unmet need is building.

Rather than focusing only on how many beds exist, this approach helps answer a more meaningful question:

What safe, appropriate placements are actually available and accessible for survivors right now?

What Makes The Grove Different



Shelter-managed operations like referral holds and optional client queues.



Live bed and room availability, including family rooms.



Filter for pets, language access, accessibility, and low-barrier programs.



Refer clients without revealing their identity.



Community-level insights like queue pressure, denial reasons, bed-type gaps, and time-to-placement. View a sample report [here](#).



Update availability via text, making it easy for staff to keep vacancy information accurate in real time.

Most systems can count beds. Very few can show what is actually placeable for a survivor household in real time.

What Success Could Look Like

Today

- Fragmented manual coordination
- Repeated calls and duplicate screening
- No shared visibility into fit or availability
- Limited aggregate system data

Future state

- Shared visibility layer
- Provider-controlled referrals
- Placeability and queue insight
- Stronger public and internal reporting

What Success Could Look Like: Better Data for Programs and the Bay Area

The Grove creates a privacy-protective data layer that supports both day-to-day operational visibility for individual housing programs and stronger collective insight into the health of GBV housing access across the Bay Area.

What Could Be Measured

- Total beds, rooms, family rooms, and household capacity
- Available male, female, bunk-specific, and family placements
- Occupancy and vacancy trends over time
- Capacity by provider, geography, and program type

What This Data Adds

- Household fit, not just bed count
- Eligibility and population-specific inventory
- Population-specific and eligibility-based availability
- Access factors like ADA, language, pets, and services
- Visibility into vacancies that are not truly placeable

What Most Systems Still Cannot See

- System-wide availability and intake activity
- Fulfilled, denied, and unresolved requests
- Referral queues and shelter-managed waitlists
- Time-to-placement and unmet demand

Why This Matters for Funders and Public Agencies

Why providers care

- Less interruption and guesswork
- Better referral fit
- Shared visibility without loss of control

Why funders care

- Aggregate unmet-demand data
- Capacity-gap analysis
- A practical coordination layer with regional impact

The Next Step

Bay Area providers have been clear: survivors often need shelter the same day, the current workflow is still manual and phone-based, and programs want a shared real-time availability system that is accessible, secure, and consistently maintained. The next step is to turn that shared interest into visible support, early participation, and a practical path forward.

Action 1: Show interest and help build regional support

If your agency wants to see The Grove come to the Bay Area and is interested in participating, complete the interest form. This will help demonstrate regional demand, support outreach to public and philanthropic funders, and identify agencies that want to stay involved as next steps take shape.

[Complete Interest Form](#)

Action 2: Take the first practical step

Shelters can sign up now for a free Grove account to explore the platform and share feedback.

This is a chance to see how shared visibility, program profiles, and fit-based search work today – and to tell us what works, what doesn't, and what would make The Grove useful for your program.

[Explore Grove Today](#)

Action 3: Share this report with the people who should be part of this conversation

If there are colleagues, funders, public-sector partners, or provider networks that should be involved, please share this report with them. Sharing it is one way to help broaden the base of support for a Bay Area pilot.

[Share Report](#)

Thank You

Thank you to all of the agencies and partners who participated in Across the Lines and contributed to this conversation about strengthening GBV shelter referrals, visibility, and coordination across the Bay Area. The convening reflected input from 51 participants across 33 organizations, with strong representation from GBV shelter programs, advocacy organizations, and coordinated entry partners.

Participating agencies included Shalom Bayit; Ending Domestic Violence in Jewish Homes; San Francisco SafeHouse; La Casa de las Madres; Narika; Beverly Upton (DVC); MISSEY; CORA – Community Overcoming Relationship Abuse; A Safe Place; DeafHope; Freedom Forward; Larkin Street Youth Services; W.O.M.A.N., Inc.; SAVE (Safe Alternatives to Violent Environments); Contra Costa Family Justice Alliance; Family Violence Law Center; Mujeres Unidas y Activas (MUA); Black Women Revolt; University of California, San Francisco; Community Forward SF; San Francisco District Attorney’s Office; San Francisco Police Department (SFPD); SF WAR; Restorative Pathways; The Women’s Building; Monarch Justice Center; Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence; and Dr. Gena Castro Rodriguez (USF).

Special thanks to W.O.M.A.N., Inc. for presenting on the Domestic Violence Information and Referral Collaborative (DVIRC), and to Jill Zawisza and Mary Martinez for sharing that history and context.

Thank you to the ReloShare team who facilitated the convening: Megan Rabbitt, Mackenzie Masion, Adrienne Malkemus, Paige Allmendinger, and Francesca Zárate. We are especially grateful to Megan Rabbitt, Mackenzie Masion, and Paige Allmendinger for leading the writing and development of this report.



Let's build safer communities **together.**

Thank You

We are grateful to everyone who contributed their time, expertise, and candor to this conversation. Your participation helped surface a clear message: Bay Area providers want stronger visibility, more reliable coordination, and tools that reflect how survivor-serving systems actually work.

Methods & Data Sources

This report draws on multiple sources to understand referral practices, barriers, and opportunities for stronger coordination across the Bay Area:

- Registration Data (Eventbrite Export): A deduplicated dataset of 51 unique participants (based on email).
- Across the Lines: GBV Shelter Referrals Workbook: Structured workbooks completed during the convening captured detailed input from both shelter providers and referring agencies.
- Safe Housing Community Needs Assessment (2021): Findings from the San Francisco Safe Housing Community Needs Assessment were used to provide broader system context and validate recurring themes related to coordination, access, and survivor-centered service design.
- Facilitator Notes & Synthesis: Notes from facilitated discussions, process mapping activities, and group reflections were analyzed to capture key insights, including historical context such as DVIRC, provider experiences, and emerging opportunities for system improvement.

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