Project Descriptor Data Elements: Building Projects the Correct Way for LSA, HIC, and PIT

Transcript

Hello and welcome to this short training on Project Descriptor Data Elements. I'm Julia Brown with Abt Associates, a technical assistance provider for HUD.

This brief presentation is intended to provide Sys Admins with detailed clarifications about project setup in the HMIS, based on the data standards that went into effect October 1, 2017. The new Longitudinal Systems Analysis, or LSA, report will require complete, correct data entry in all project descriptor data elements.

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Here's what we'll be covering:

- Project setup guidance, including a refresher on existing guidance and some new guidance on Joint Component projects – that is, those projects that combine TH and RRH funding in one CoC Program grant.
- Clarifications about why you might create new project records. If setup properly, each project record should tie out to a separate row on the LSA bed inventory and the HIC, so here I want to address the various reasons you might need to split a project into multiple project records.
- And finally, and perhaps most importantly, I'll talk about the reasons to create a new inventory record, and how your HMIS needs to be set up in order to make this work properly.

The HMIS Data Dictionary and Data Manual are the definitive sources for guidance, but we have put together these important tips based on frequently asked questions.

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Let's start with a refresher on how to set projects up in HMIS.

Don't forget that since the HMIS Data Standards went into effect in October 2017, all projects have been required to have a project record in the HMIS, regardless of whether they are participating in HMIS by collecting and entering client-level data.

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Generic project setup guidance describing the relationships between an Organization, its Projects, and its Projects' Inventory records can be found in the HMIS Data Standards. Additional guidance about how that project setup impacts data collection requirements can be found in the Setup Tool posted on the HUD Exchange. Project setup guidance specific to a federal partner funding source is provided in the HMIS Manuals associated with each federal partner. Those guides are also on the HUD Exchange.

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I want to call out that HUD is providing newly revised guidance on setting up joint-component projects. This guidance has been posted separately.

In short:

- These projects should be set up as two separate projects, one Transitional Housing and one Rapid Re-Housing.
- And you use data element 2.6, Federal Funding Source, to identify them as having both types of funding .

HUD has established guidance for how to enter and exit clients appropriately as they move from one component to the other.

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Next, let's focus in on the key reasons you should create a new project in HMIS so your CoC's inventory populates correctly in the LSA and the HIC upload functionality.

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In order for the AHAR research team to use uploaded LSA inventory data for extrapolation purposes, each project must have all or nothing in certain characteristics. Chief among these is HMIS participation. You should always set up separate projects to distinguish between HMIS participating inventory and non-HMIS participating inventory. Projects should either be 100% participating or 0% participating.

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Projects should reflect only a single housing type. Projects should not mix site-based and tenant-based vouchers together in a single project.

For emergency shelters, bed type at the inventory level should be consistent with the housing type attribute at the project level.

- So Facility Bed Type should always be site-based Housing Type, either single site or multiple site.
- And Voucher Bed Type should almost always be tenant-based/scattered site Housing Type.

So that means that Emergency Shelters with both facility-based beds and motel voucher will have two separate project records in HMIS.

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As I mentioned earlier, both LSA and HIC uploads will require complete, correct data entry in all fields of Data Element 2.7, Bed and Unit Inventory. This new scrutiny may reveal issues with data collection and reporting that were not obvious or significant in the past. Vendors and Sys Admins need to review the

handling of Data Element 2.7 from the point of system setup, through data entry, all the way to export in HMIS CSVs and reports.

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Data Element 2.7 is particularly confusing, primarily because of the Inventory dates. There are five different date fields that are relevant for the Inventory records, which obviously can be quite confusing.

So to try to clear some of it up, let's walk through a scenario. Imagine that on March 1, 2016, Hanna, a Sys Admin, realized she needed to clean up and prep her HMIS records to get ready for uploading her CSV files to HDX for the HIC. Since her last HIC, a PSH development project was fully funded and has broken ground on a small, 10 unit building with 1 bed per unit.

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After creating organization and project records as appropriate, she creates a 10-unit/10-bed inventory record for this under development project. The metadata element DATE CREATED for this inventory record is today's date, March 1, 2016. She can't modify that field; her action of creating a record is simply logged in the system.

Now, this project has a scheduled occupancy date of October 1, 2016, so that is the INVENTORY START DATE for this inventory record.

Now, let's talk a little about INFORMATION DATE, which is probably the most confusing date. In essence, the INFORMATION DATE, just like the information date for client-level records, is an editable field that indicates when the information will be accurate.

In the Data Standards, the instructions say that in the case of inventory that isn't online yet, it's the same as the date the record was created. To clarify, that instruction assumes the record was created on the same date that it met the criteria for being created in the first place, in other words: having full funding. Hanna got the email that the project was fully funded on January 15th, and in an ideal world, she should have created the inventory record that same day. But we know that's not always possible, so the date is editable to allow you to modify the date. This date is the primary driver of whether a record will be included in a HIC or LSA calculation, so it's particularly important that this date reflect when the project meets the full funding requirement for the HIC, even if you end up creating the record and entering the data later. Generally speaking, this will never be AFTER the Date Created, assuming you are only using HMIS to store data about existing projects or those under development projects that meet the full-funding requirement.

So, Hanna enters January 15th as the INFORMATION DATE for this inventory record.

The metadata field DATE UPDATED is also populated by the system at this time, because it is supposed to be created by the HMIS when a record for any data element is first created, and updated by the HMIS every time the record is saved by an HMIS user. Since she just created the record, the DATE UPDATED for this inventory record is March 1, 2016. Hanna can't modify that field directly, again, her action of

creating a record is simply logged in the system as the most recent update until the record is updated again.

The project doesn't have a plan to end the availability of this inventory at any point – it's going to stay open once it opens – so there's no need to enter an END DATE for this inventory record.

Great! She's all set, she pulls her CSV and uploads it to the HDX, and this inventory record populates as a single "Under Development" row in the HIC.

And as long as these 10 units actually open on 10/1 and then they stay open, this inventory record never needs to be touched again.

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Well, let's imagine that on December 10th 2017, a little more than a year after opening, the project loses access to 5 of its units in a natural disaster. As we know, the loss of available units is a key reason to update a project's inventory.

Hanna was busy with other stuff, though, so she didn't get back to her desk to work on bringing her inventory up-to-date in HMIS until January 7th, 2018.

Now, because she's reducing inventory, she needs to make this update in such a way that preserves the information about all 10 of the units that were available and operating between October 1st 2016 and December 10th of 2017.

So she is going to enter an INVENTORY END DATE for the 10-bed inventory record on the day it was last fully available, which will preserve the record of those 10 beds while they existed. The INVENTORY END DATE for this record is December 9, 2017.

In addition, the system will automatically record the date Hanna made the change, January 7, 2018, as the new DATE UPDATED for that inventory record**.**

Now that takes care of the 10 beds that used to exist. There are still 5 beds functioning, so now she'll need to create a record to reflect that reduced inventory.

She's creating the record on January 7th, so that's the DATE CREATED and the DATE UPDATED, as we discussed before.

As you'll recall, the 5 remaining beds are unchanged from the 5 beds that first opened on October 1st, 2016, so that is still the INVENTORY START DATE for these units.

The INFORMATION DATE, again, is an editable field that indicates when the information will be accurate. In this case, it will be accurate to say that the project had 5 instead of 10 beds on December 10, 2017 and so that is the INFORMATION DATE for this record.

Again, the units are expected to stay open in perpetuity, so there is no END DATE for this inventory record. Hanna's all set again – there's no need to touch this record, as long as nothing changes.

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Well, surprise, surprise, on January 29th 2018, the project finished repairing the damage from the natural disaster and they've opened more units. They decided to rehab those 5 damaged singles into two 3-bedroom apartments.

Hanna gets this call in mid-February, just as she's updating her inventory for the HIC, and she decides to made this addition, even though it occurred after her CoC's PIT/HIC date for 2018. She could wait until she needs to clean data for the LSA, but she's doing a great job at keeping everything up-to-date and she doesn't want to forget about this.

Now, since she's adding units, but not taking away any of the existing units, she'll leave the old record intact and simply create a new record for the ADDITIONAL units.

She's creating the record on February 15th, so that's the DATE CREATED and the DATE UPDATED, as we discussed before.

These are new units and beds that weren't available before, so their project start date is the date they became available for occupancy in their current form. Therefore, the INVENTORY START DATE and the INFORMATION DATE for this inventory record is January 29, 2018.

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So, what does all this get you? Essentially, it gives CoCs a way to produce an accurate inventory as of any given day, based on the combination of start date, information date, and end date found in an export of the CSV files of the project descriptor data elements. For example:

- If you query between January 15, 2016 and October 1, 2016, you will see that there are 10 under development beds. Note that Hanna knew exactly when that project received full funding and merited inclusion in the inventory. If she hadn't, and she'd used the same INFORMATION DATE as the DATE CREATED, that Under Development project wouldn't have been included in the January 2016 HIC if she'd uploaded the CSVs to the HDX. That's because the Information Date is one of the key drivers of whether or not a project is included in the HIC in the upload process.
- If you query at any point between October 1, 2016 and December 10, 2017, you will see that there are 10 beds that are active in 10 units.
- If you query between December 10, 2017 and January 29, 2018, there would be 5 active, current beds. Note that the difference between the Inventory Start Date and the Information Date allows you to know whether that 5-unit records is showing you 5 units that are new to your CoC or not. In this case, since they're simply a continuation of those 5 units that opened back in October, they would not show as new.
- And finally if you query any point on or after January 29, 2018, you will see that there are 10 new beds and 5 current beds. Now note here that if Hanna uses the HIC upload functionality,

these 10 beds won't ever appear in the HIC as "under development" – in 2018, they won't appear at all, and then in 2019, they'll be new, active beds. However, if the CoC wanted the inventory to appear in the 2018 HIC as under development, Hanna could work with the project to determine when the funding was in place for that development and change the Information Date to reflect that date.

Please note that this ability to query the system on any given date does not mean that there is a need to maintain your inventory on a daily basis. It should only be absolutely necessary for a Sys Admin to sit down and bring PDDEs up to date a couple of times a year… once to make sure your inventory is accurate as of the HIC date, and once before you run your LSA report at the close of the federal fiscal year. If you do this, your resulting CSV will show an accurate inventory on the date of the HIC, and then, in the case of the LSA CSVs, on each of the 4 dates the LSA looks at utilization. Of course, it may be easier in the long run to sit down and make those updates to the HMIS records as major changes happen.

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Another situation where dates get confusing is seasonal beds. Here's a quick example there…

Let's say Hanna's CoC operates a seasonal shelter program that is set to run every winter from December 1st to March 30th the following year.

They're facility-based beds in the local armory, so it's basically 1 unit with a capacity of 100 beds. It serves Adult Only households.

So on March 1st, 2017, in preparation for submitting her 2017 HIC, Hanna is working on creating the Winter 2016-2017 inventory record for this shelter inventory.

As we've said, the DATE CREATED is metadata reflecting the current date, so the system populates March 1st. This record is being newly created right now, so that's also the DATE UPDATED populated by the system.

The beds opened on December 1st so that's the INVENTORY START DATE. This information will be accurate as of that same date, so that's the INFORMATION DATE here.

Hanna expects the beds to close according to their usual schedule on March 30th, so she enters that date as the INVENTORY END DATE.

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Hanna finally gets back to her computer on October 15th, 2017, cleaning up inventory for the LSA submission.

As it turned out, the shelter needed to stay open for an extra 2 weeks the prior winter due to severe weather. So she corrects that existing record to change the INVENTORY END DATE to reflect the real date the shelter closed up for the year. The DATE UPDATED is automatically updated, too.

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At the same time, she goes ahead and creates the inventory record for the seasonal shelter inventory scheduled to open on the upcoming December 1st and close on the following March 30th.

Again, each of these will allow for accurate analysis at any point in time from an export of the project descriptor data element CSV files.

These CSV files are included in the LSA Report files and can be uploaded to the HDX in order to populate the HIC each year.

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We hope you found this information helpful. We encourage vendors and Sys Admins to closely review their systems to make sure dates function as required and projects are up-to-date with accurate information. If you have any additional questions about the project descriptor data elements, please use the AAQ function on the HUD Exchange and thanks so much for listening to this brief presentation!