

COORDINATED ENTRY, EMPLOYMENT, AND INCOME SUPPORTS

“Workforce systems already work with individuals experiencing homelessness, whether they identify themselves as such at a career office or not. By bringing homeless provider resources and staff into workforce offices, we are bridging a significant gap Similarly, providing workforce services to shelter and coordinated access locations [helps people with] finding employment, rebuilding their lives, and providing for themselves and their families.”

– Mike Temple, Director,
Gulf Coast (Texas)
Workforce Board and
Workforce Solutions

The HEARTH Act requires communities to implement a coordinated entry system so that people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness can access help in a streamlined way, have their strengths and needs quickly assessed, and quickly connect to appropriate, tailored housing and mainstream services. Effective assessments identify the best options to address individuals' and families' needs, incorporating participants' choice, rather than evaluating them for a single program within the system. The most intensive interventions are prioritized for those with the highest needs.

It is impossible to effectively assess the housing needs of an individual or family without considering their current income, as well as their potential for earned or unearned income. To effectively manage housing resources, participants in the coordinated entry system must work with people on alternative housing plans, including applying for affordable housing in the community, *increasing income from employment and benefits*, and exploring other housing opportunities available through the person's support network.¹

One strategy to help people increase their income from employment is to involve the local workforce development system and the American Job Centers as a component of a coordinated entry system. Homeless assistance agencies have in-depth experience with assisting people experiencing homelessness secure shelter and housing but less experience in workforce development. On the other hand, the workforce system funded by the U.S. Department of Labor offers assessment, training, and support services, along with access to job opportunities. Working together on coordinated entry can help build bridges across these two systems to improve both housing and employment outcomes.





In Snohomish County, WA, in conjunction with the mainstream workforce system, we are using the Employment Readiness Scale™ to assess the employment needs of people falling into homelessness in our community. It is an early intervention tool used as close to the beginning of an individuals' homelessness as possible, and may be done as part of the coordinated entry/assessment process.

– Sam Scoville
Grants &
Program Specialist

Coordinated Entry: The Basics

Continuums of Care (CoCs) are required to maintain a coordinated entry system for comprehensively assessing individuals' and families' housing and service needs.² Under the coordinated entry system, the CoC is required to first determine eligibility for housing and services and then establish priority for transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing.³ CoCs are required to follow a protocol for prioritizing permanent supportive housing based on chronic homelessness, the severity of service needs, and length of homelessness.⁴

According to HUD policy, a coordinated entry system uses the same assessment approach for everyone. In some systems, coordinated entry is available at every CoC agency, whether by phone or in person. Other systems provide easy-to-find access points where people may enter the system.⁵ The waiting lists for CoC housing resources are coordinated so that a person can apply for any housing resource at every point of entry. When an individual or family contacts a CoC agency, or is identified through street outreach, staff conduct a comprehensive assessment, using a standardized tool. Most tools currently in use typically ask minimal questions about employment and income.

Adding Income to the Mix

CoCs can offer people a more comprehensive response to housing needs by addressing their employment needs and interests. Although HUD only requires HUD-funded resources to be included in the coordinated entry system, HUD encourages the coordination with other systems serving the same population. For example, the coordinated entry process for families with children could use the data system of the state or local department of family services.⁶ The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has released guidance enabling VA staff to access HMIS to participate in coordinated entry.⁷

Some CoCs are coordinating successfully with mainstream workforce systems, supported employment providers, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and disability benefits advisors to ensure that people who are in need of housing have the income to pay for that housing and other needs. Five key reasons that communities should consider including employment and benefits in their coordinated entry system are:

1. It can help people who want to work, find work. A high percentage of people experiencing homelessness want to work, but this need too often goes unaddressed because they are struggling to find housing, and service providers focus on housing needs.
2. It can help homeless service providers do their jobs more effectively. Staff want to help people as best as they can, but many lack familiarity with employment resources.
3. It can help Public Housing Agencies improve their performance. Employment can help boost voucher utilization rates and housing retention rates because people will have higher incomes.
4. It can help landlords. With increased income comes increased rent payment in subsidized housing, and employment income enables some people to afford housing without subsidies.

5. It can help employers. In many communities, employers struggle to fill vacancies, and people experiencing homelessness represent a labor pool that is too often overlooked.

Two examples of large CoCs employing this approach are Houston/Harris and Fort Bend Counties, Texas, and Seattle/King County, Washington. In each community, people experiencing homelessness receive help navigating employment services. The coordinated entry process helps to ensure that people receive needed referrals and follow-up, as people experiencing homelessness traditionally have not had a clear path to employment.

The Houston Model

The Houston area's system of coordinated access hubs integrates housing and employment in the Income Now initiative. Goals of Income Now include helping people obtain income as quickly as possible and maintain employment for as long as possible. Income Now is based on three phases:

1. *Assessment:* Information about income is included in the housing assessment performed at coordinated access hubs, and this data collection is built into HMIS.
2. *Matching:* An appropriate service package is identified. People needing primarily financial assistance, including those for whom rapid re-housing is appropriate, generally can benefit from Workforce Solutions services. People needing additional support, including those needing permanent supportive housing, may require SOAR, a program that helps people apply for disability benefits.
3. *Referral:* Based on needs and availability, people are referred to housing and services.

Workforce Solutions, the operating affiliate of the Gulf Coast Workforce Board, is a partner in Income Now. Workforce system and homeless provider staff are embedded at coordinated access hubs. Staff has received training to meet the specialized needs of people experiencing homelessness who are searching for employment opportunities, and emphasis is being placed on on-the-job training and work experience.

Participating in coordinated entry has helped Workforce Solutions provide customer-centered services. According to Mike Temple, director of the Workforce Board and Workforce Solutions: "Oftentimes, a customer will visit an office and identify themselves as homeless or precariously housed. Through our partnership with the homeless provider community, we are able to connect customers directly to shelter locations and emergency housing resources through the coordinated access hubs. Some of our offices have a higher volume of customers experiencing homeless circumstances than others. As a result, we have partnered with homeless provider agencies to place homeless provider staff in these offices. This level of collaboration not only helps the career office develop its capacity for serving homeless customers, but it also helps the homeless provider staff better understand Workforce Solutions' resources."

WORKFORCE SYSTEMS

The U.S. Department of Labor funds workforce systems nationwide. Each state is divided into one or more workforce areas, controlled by a local workforce investment board.

These boards operate American Job Centers (AJCs). Also known as One-Stop Centers, AJCs provide a full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof. Established under the Workforce Investment Act, and reauthorized in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014 (WIOA), the centers offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services. Customers can visit a center in person or connect to the center's information online or through kiosk remote access.

WIOA establishes service priorities for several groups, including people experiencing homelessness. Find a local AJC at <http://www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/americanjobcenters/find-american-job-centers.asp>





The Seattle Model

The Workforce Development Council (WDC) of Seattle-King County has a long history of working with people experiencing homelessness, serving 11,000 customers over 30 years. In the past 5 years, 58 percent of customers experiencing homelessness have gained employment, with an 85 percent retention rate. To continue this success, King County is incorporating income and employment supports into coordinated entry. The system connects interested and eligible people to one of three pathways:

- Pathway A: light service requirement for employment.
- Pathway B: medium or high service requirement for employment.
- Pathway C: other benefits or unearned income.

Staff performing coordinated entry asks a series of questions that help place people into these pathways. At the outset, staff asks two questions related to employment and income:

1. What are your current sources of income (earned income; unemployment insurance; Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF); state Aged, Blind, or Disabled (ABD); state Housing and Essential Needs (HEN); Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); SSI; SSDI; Veterans Affairs benefits)?
2. Would you like to explore a way to increase your income?

For those who are interested, follow-up questions are:

3. Do you think employment, education, or training can help increase your income?
4. Would you like assistance with finding employment, education, or training opportunities?

An individual's responses may indicate that the person is not interested in pursuing employment but is interested in pursuing Pathway C, benefits or unearned income. For those who show interest in employment, further inquiry helps to determine the appropriate service pathway:

5. What are your largest barriers toward working, education, or training?

The partners in Seattle's system include the WDC, which operates WorkSource Seattle-King County (seven full-service AJCs and 22 satellite locations); the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR); and the CoC agency. For people with light service requirements—such as those who have immediate goals or recent employment history—the referral may consist of a “warm hand-off” to WorkSource staff, who have received training in meeting the needs of people referred through the coordinated entry process. Other options include job training and community or technical colleges, for those who require training or education to increase their earning potential.

To help those who have medium service requirements, due to criminal justice history, lack of work experience, or health problems, CoC staff take a more hands-on approach, ensuring that the individual receives help navigating employment services and receives ongoing one-on-one support. People with high service requirements, because of chronic homelessness or behavioral health disorders, may be referred to Supported Employment programs or DVR services. The WDC also funds community agencies specifically to work with people experiencing homelessness, using funding from the U.S. Department of Labor. A voter-approved county tax levy also supports WDC's community partners.

PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

1. **Build relationships with workforce systems.** Communities that have successfully included employment services and income supports in coordinated entry have built relationships over time. The WDC in Seattle has a 15 year history of collaborating with the CoC, as well as 30 years of experience as an employment services subcontractor on HUD contracts. Find a local AJC at <http://www.careeronestop.org/localhelp/americanjobcenters/find-american-job-centers.aspx>
2. **Involve workforce systems in designing (or redesigning) the coordinated entry system.** Workforce systems know how to most efficiently screen for employment support needs (based on local needs) and what types of services people may require.
3. **Link services at all levels, not just intake.** For example, housing providers and case managers can encourage employment and provide transportation to job centers.
4. **Identify champions who will see the collaboration through to successful implementation.** Having a representative, with authority to make decisions, regularly participate, rather than sending rotating representatives, increases the chance of success.
5. **Don't sell people short**—give them the chance to fail or succeed. People experiencing homelessness face many real barriers to employment, but they have strengths that are often overlooked. Take a client-centered, strengths-based approach to increasing income, and don't let your doubts stand in the way of someone's dreams.
6. **Coordinate Release of Information (ROI) forms** so that information can be shared across systems. Workforce systems are listed on ROI forms in many communities.
7. **HMIS is an essential tool.** Build coordinated entry to employment in HMIS. There may already be the capacity to collect employment information, or you may need to expand the data fields collected. Encourage the workforce system to designate people who can enter data or have “read only” access.
8. **Co-locate staff.** Having workforce staff at coordinated entry sites, or vice-versa, makes referrals easier and more effective while building the working relationship.
9. **Make services visible.** For example, hang coordinated entry banners at AJC site or make workforce brochures available at all coordinated entry sites. Seattle-King County also has “virtual” sites at provider locations, which include signage and online access to WorkSource services and entail minimal costs.

Endnotes

- ¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (June 2017). Coordinated Entry Core Elements Guidebook. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Core-Elements.pdf>
- ² 24 C.F.R. § 578.7(a)(8) 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2017-title24-vol3/xml/CFR-2017-title24-vol3-part578.xml#seq-num578.7>
- ³ 24 C.F.R. § 578.7(a)(9) 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2017-title24-vol3/xml/CFR-2017-title24-vol3-part578.xml#seq-num578.7>
- ⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (July 25, 2016). Notice on Prioritizing Persons Experiencing Chronic Homelessness and Other Vulnerable Homeless Persons in Permanent Supportive Housing, No. CPD-16-011. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5108/notice-cpd-16-11-prioritizing-persons-experiencing-chronic-homelessness-and-other-vulnerable-homeless-persons-in-psh/>
- ⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (February 2015). Coordinated Entry Policy Brief. Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Policy-Brief.pdf>
- ⁶ Ibid
- ⁷ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2015). VA Releases Guidance on HMIS “Read-Only” and “Direct-Entry” Access—Policy Q&A. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/ssvf/docs/VA_Releases_Guidance_on_HMIS.pdf

