

# Building and Maintaining Cross-System Partnerships with the Criminal Justice System

While criminal justice systems (CJS) and homelessness systems of care are often serving a shared population, every system, agency, and program has its own priorities. Intentional engagement, shared goals, and clear responsibilities are key to sustaining an effective partnership across these diverse entities. To that end, the Collective Impact Model provides a valuable framework for partners who want to work together across systems to solve an overarching problem. This tool outlines strategies for using elements of the Collective Impact approach – establishing a common agenda, identifying mutually reinforcing activities, adopting shared metrics, and engaging in continuous communications – to build sustainable and impactful partnerships that improve housing outcomes for people involved with the criminal justice system.

---

## Key Strategies and Action Steps

- **Engage the appropriate partners to establish a common agenda** with shared goals
- **Identify mutually reinforcing activities** with clear roles and responsibilities
- **Adopt shared metrics** and systems for continuous communication

## Engage the Appropriate Partners to Establish a Common Agenda

Creating space for Continuum of Care (CoC) and CJS partners to meet and discuss their individual and shared challenges and opportunities can be tremendously impactful. This initial engagement phase of partnership building includes:

1. Bringing the right partners to the table
2. Understanding the respective priorities of each partner and areas of alignment
3. Developing a common agenda with mutual benefits that are clear to all partners

### 1) Bringing the Right Partners to the Table

---

- ❑ **Consider key questions to identify who to involve:** This includes
  - What relevant strategies has the CoC already prioritized relating to people involved with the criminal justice system?
  - Which local CJS partners have the necessary expertise, resources, authority, time, and interest?

- What opportunities present low hanging fruit, such as CJS partners already at the table or initiatives already underway?
- What strategies would be most impactful in advancing the community's goals in ending homelessness?

- ❑ **Conduct outreach to CJS partners:** As part of this process, consider participating on CJS-led planning bodies such as state-level reentry councils, criminal justice system advisory boards, or criminal justice coordinating councils (CJCCs) at the local level. These planning bodies are opportunities both to develop relationships with CJS partners and to support local decision-making. CoC leadership can provide valuable insight for CJS partners on housing strategies and barriers, advocate for CJS resources to support housing solutions for people going through the reentry process, and foster initiatives to deepen in-reach for housing providers in prisons and jails to connect people to housing solutions.

### **Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils**

Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils are bodies of criminal justice, government, and community partners that identify challenges and opportunities, and take collaborative action to improve the local criminal justice system. The National Institute of Corrections has [National Standards for Criminal Justice Coordinating Councils available on their website](#). While governance and membership procedures vary considerably by jurisdiction, the National Standards specifically encourage the participation of non-CJS partners, including housing partners.

## **2) Understanding Partners' Priorities and Areas of Alignment**

---

- ❑ **Consider the CJS partner's mission statement:** CJS agencies typically have a mission statement that reflects their institutional values and goals. This often includes priorities such as supporting public safety, reducing crime, supporting successful integration of people reentering from incarceration, advancing justice, and fostering a thriving community. Goals that align between the CJS and CoC can be a valuable starting place for discussion.
- ❑ **Identify areas of intersection that demonstrate mutual benefit:** While a CJS agency's mission may not explicitly mention housing, there is clear evidence that increasing access to housing for individuals impacted by the criminal justice system supports CJS goals such as public safety and reduced recidivism. Many CJS partners such as parole, probation, and reentry officers may have a housing focus as part of their job.

- ❑ **Leverage messaging and data about mutual impacts:** Relevant talking points can include:
  - Research shows that up to 15% of people in jails experienced homelessness prior to incarceration, and people are nearly seven times more likely to experience homelessness just by having been in prison once.
  - Numerous studies demonstrate that safe, affordable housing coupled with supportive services is associated with reduced returns to prison and jail, and reduces costs to CJS and other public systems.
  - Ninety-five percent of Departments of Corrections respondents to a 2022 national questionnaire indicated that a lack of affordable housing options was the number one barrier to housing for people reentering the community.
  - These housing barriers result from severely limited housing resources and the challenges CJS-involved individuals face accessing this limited housing. These challenges include stigma, restrictive housing practices, and many individuals' need for supportive services to foster long-term housing retention. With only 36 affordable housing units available for every 100 extremely low-income household nationwide, more housing opportunities are needed for this population.

#### **Community Spotlight: Denver, CO Social Impact Bond Initiative**

In 2016, the City and County of Denver launched the Supportive Housing Social Impact Bond initiative, using a Housing First approach to disrupt the homelessness-jail cycle. The Urban Institute and Evaluation Center at the University of Colorado, Denver, evaluated the impact of the program through a randomized control trial between 2016 and 2020. The study found that the City and County of Denver were able to avoid costs to services such as shelters, jails, courts, police, and public safety (\$3,733 per person annually). Approximately half of the total annual per-person cost of the Denver social impact bond was offset by reductions in costs of other public services, with some of the largest avoided costs being for jail days (\$2,386) and ambulance rides (\$1,662).

### **3) Identifying a common agenda**

---

- ❑ **Understand the CJS partner's perspective:** Set a meeting or meetings to allow all partners to describe their understanding of the community's needs. Ensure these discussion spaces provide opportunities for each participant to share their ideas and concerns, and to partake in respectful disagreement. While participants may not agree about all points of discussion, the purpose is to identify common, overarching goals that align with the priorities of each system.

- For example: Reducing rates of homelessness for people impacted by the criminal justice system might achieve CJS priorities by reducing recidivism, while benefiting the CoC by reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness in the community.
  
- ❑ **Work together to establish a written statement of purpose:** This brief, 1 - 5 sentence statement reflects common goals and grounds the collaboration in shared values and a vision for the future. Identifying and clearly articulating these shared goals is invaluable for keeping a partnership together in the face of differing working styles, priorities, and opinions.
  
- ❑ **Identify a set of actionable strategies to advance the shared goals:** Participants in the process may wish to hold a brainstorming session to identify ideas and then prioritize them using an action priority matrix that organizes potential strategies based on their degree of impact and effort. Ultimately all parties should arrive at a consensus regarding collective goals they want to achieve through this partnership. The chart below identifies potential strategies that participants may wish to consider.

Goal Area	Examples of Potential Strategies for Homelessness System	Examples of Potential Strategies for CJS Partners
<b>Identify people in need of assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct in-reach (or establish a peer in-reach program) at local correctional facilities to identify persons at-risk of homelessness on release.</li> <li>• Conduct “pop-up” or mobile homeless outreach and assessment efforts in partnership with reentry services.</li> <li>• Provide homelessness outreach workers with cultural-responsiveness training to address the needs of individuals involved with the CJS.</li> <li>• Include and compensate the participation of impacted persons participating in in-reach and cultural responsiveness efforts.</li> <li>• Support CJS partner efforts to develop processes to identify people at risk of homelessness upon reentry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a standardized system-wide process to identify individuals who are entering the CJS from an unstable housing situation for targeted housing focus during reentry.</li> <li>• Work with the CoC and behavioral health partners to ensure that housing need screening occurs, asks the right questions, and is trauma-informed.</li> <li>• Ensure that community supervision partners connect with housing partners early on in the housing planning process.</li> </ul>
<b>Reentry planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate local CJS partners on local homeless and housing resources to support reentry planning efforts.</li> <li>• Develop a Housing Plan template that can be used within correctional facilities to support housing planning and homelessness diversion efforts.</li> <li>• Audit, evaluate, and strengthen current services (e.g., in-reach) for reentry population in various custodial settings (jails, nearby prisons, ICE detention).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborate with the CoC on individualized reentry plans and discharge planning policies that adopt national best practices.</li> <li>• Assess and modify parole and probation conditions and residency requirements that may impact housing, so that any barriers to housing are as narrowly tailored as possible.</li> <li>• Create or revise policies that promote safe transitions from custody for medically vulnerable persons returning to homelessness, such as a standard release time,</li> </ul>

Goal Area	Examples of Potential Strategies for Homelessness System	Examples of Potential Strategies for CJS Partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support and coordinate with criminal justice system partners around post-release transportation and warm handoffs.</li> </ul>	<p>transportation, or accurately and timely release information to support warm handoffs.</p>
<b>Coordinated Entry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider updating the CES to improve prioritization of vulnerable individuals involved with the CJS, including individuals discharging from the CJS and those with criminal records.</li> <li>Ensure that Coordinated Entry access points do not prematurely screen out people coming from jail or prison on the assumption that they are not eligible for housing programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build knowledge and staff expertise on how to connect persons in reentry and community supervision with the local coordinated entry system assessment.</li> <li>Work with homelessness systems of care to assess resource and information-sharing opportunities.</li> </ul>
<b>Shelter and Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Public Housing Authorities to set aside vouchers for individuals reentering the community from incarceration who may not be eligible for other federal homelessness housing resources.</li> <li>Provide a range of options for persons with criminal records that are low barrier with robust supportive services, in alignment with the Housing First model.</li> <li>Pursue innovative shelter and housing options that provide a less institutional setting (e.g., non-congregate shelter) for persons who have recently been discharged from the criminal justice system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify local, state, and private initiatives and resources that provide housing specifically to persons with histories of criminal justice system involvement beyond federally funded homeless response resources.</li> <li>Maximize options by including homelessness systems in conversations and planning around release protocols and reentry.</li> <li>Partner with housing and homeless services providers to educate custodial staff about community housing and shelter resources, and how people exiting custody can best access them.</li> <li>Provide opportunities for internal education on Housing First and seek external support and technical assistance</li> </ul>

Goal Area	Examples of Potential Strategies for Homelessness System	Examples of Potential Strategies for CJS Partners
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educate and partner with landlords to encourage them to end policies that screen out system-impacted people for housing opportunities.</li> <li>• Work with Public Housing Authorities to ensure that prior criminal convictions do not impede access to public housing or other housing assistance.</li> </ul>	<p>for troubleshooting around potential challenges with Housing First for reentry populations.</p>
<b>Supportive Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop tools and trainings for line staff at homeless services programs to ensure they understand the barriers and trauma affecting many people impacted by the criminal justice system, as well as resources available to them.</li> <li>• In line with Housing First principles, make engaging services voluntary rather than a condition of obtaining or maintaining housing.</li> <li>• Learn about and form relationships with targeted service providers offering programs for formerly incarcerated clients, such as record expungement programs and support groups for people in reentry.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invest resources in housing navigation and stabilization to support individuals reentering the community in securing and retaining housing.</li> <li>• Provide referrals to the following services as part of reentry planning for persons being discharged from correctional facilities: employment, education, skills for life on the outside, transportation, mental health, and substance use treatment services.</li> <li>• Consider the housing ramifications of any court or supervisory requirements or conditions placed on someone impacted by the criminal justice system. Ensure that any such restrictions are as narrowly tailored and individualized as possible to eliminate impacts on housing access.</li> </ul>

## Identify Mutually Reinforcing Activities with Clear Roles

To effectively implement the shared strategies, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of each participating individual and entity are clear.

- ❑ **Identify action steps to achieve each strategy:** Also identify the individual(s) responsible for leading the action step, who else will support, and the timeline. In identifying action steps, consider:
  - Who will provide administrative support for the strategy (e.g. coordinate meetings, set agendas, draft relevant documents)?
  - Who is responsible for outreach to necessary participants not yet at the table?
  - Who will provide the funds and coordination to support engagement of individuals with lived experience in the process?
  - Who will collect, provide, and analyze relevant data?
  - Who will communicate goals and achievements to the community?
  - Who will evaluate the process and identify opportunities for improvement and course corrections?
  - Who will solicit feedback for future opportunities?
- ❑ **Identify relevant partners and their roles for each strategy:** Ensure the plan is clear about who should be:
  - Responsible for completing the action steps
  - Accountable for decision-making authority and completion
  - Consulted before a decision or action is made
  - Informed after a decision or action is made
- ❑ **Develop the appropriate memoranda of understanding (MOUs):** Drafting and signing an MOU can help ensure all partners are in agreement about the partnership, including their roles, responsibilities, timeline, evaluation metrics, and resources they will commit. The MOU can be a valuable document to return to if confusion or disagreement between partners arises. Include components such as:
  - Time period of the partnership covered by the MOU
  - Amount of funding that will be provided by each agency and how it will be disbursed



- Tasks each agency will complete
- Metrics to evaluate completion of tasks
- Maintenance, protection, and sharing of data and records
- Reports outlining progress and results

### **Community Spotlight: Gwinnett County, GA**

In 2022, the Georgia Balance of State CoC, the United Way of Greater Atlanta (UWGA) and the Gwinnett County Sheriff’s Office entered into a partnership, memorialized by an MOU, to support people experiencing homelessness who are released from the county jail.

With financial resources provided by the Sheriff’s Office, UWGA provides an array of services and support, including coordination of housing, services, case management, and project management; coordination of beds for individuals with substance use disorders discharging from the jail; and evaluating and tracking program progress. The Sheriff’s Office provides referrals, tracks recidivism data, and helps to ensure all clients receive housing, counseling, job skills, substance abuse treatment, crime prevention, and intensive case management assistance.

## **Establish Shared Metrics and Systems for Continuous Communication**

- ❑ **Establish a set of shared metrics:** Partners should review metrics on a regular basis together to track success or identify the need for course corrections. Common metrics include
  - Increased exits from homelessness to permanent housing for individuals with criminal records
  - Reductions in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness who enter the jail system (and/or reduced recidivism in program participants)
  - Reduction in the number of individuals who are discharged into homelessness from incarceration
- ❑ **Ensure CJS partners are tracking and sharing relevant data,** such as the housing status of individuals involved with the criminal justice system. While it is generally not advisable to provide HMIS access to CJS partners in order to protect the privacy of individuals whose data is in the HMIS, the CoC can identify other strategies for sharing aggregated, de-identified data with the CJS to support their engagement and tracking of outcomes. CoCs can also work with jails to ensure individuals currently in jail are included in the local Point-in-Time Count.

### Community Spotlight: Albany, NY

Beginning in 2014, the Homeless and Travelers Aid Society (HATAS) assumed the reentry parole contract for Albany County, NY. Through its Solutions to End Homelessness Program, HATAS began providing rapid rehousing for single adult individuals with significant needs experiencing homelessness or chronic homelessness. Following the program's initial success, HATAS successfully applied for funds through the CoC award to establish the Next Step Rapid Rehousing Program for single adult individuals who are CJS-involved. On average, a person will participate in the Next Step Program for less than a year; initial data from the program indicated that 85% of program participants did not return to either homelessness or incarceration.

HATAS attributes its success to taking the time to understand its partners' needs, deepening their understanding of parole and probation and simplifying the referral process to make it easier for its partners to connect people to its program. In addition, HATAS also took part in the Albany County Reentry Task Force, which served as a natural facilitator for these partnerships. This task force was co-chaired by the Chief of Parole and the Commissioner for County Mental Health and included numerous providers within the community. This task force met every other month to discuss milestones and other issues. By participating in this task force, HATAS was able to advocate for the importance of housing, helping to expand the focus of resources from employment and treatment to also include housing. By establishing these ongoing relationships, HATAS expanded its knowledge of the parole/probation process, which allowed them to weave together the case for funding and the connections needed to support this effort.

### Additional Resources

- [Collective Impact \(Stanford Social Innovation Review\)](#): This article establishes and defines the steps of the Collective Impact Model for cross-sector coordination
- [Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people \(Prison Policy Initiative\)](#): A report on homelessness rates among people who have been incarcerated
- [Can Housing Interventions Reduce Incarceration and Recidivism? \(Urban Institute\)](#): A report explaining how housing interventions can reduce the burden on the CJS
- [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Justice Partnerships and Reentry Solutions \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A tool to support ESG and CoC stakeholders proactively engage key justice system partners and define roles and actions

- [Thinking Outside the Box Webinar Series \(CSG\)](#): Webinars with tools for meaningful collaboration with housing, behavioral health, and other key partners to provide housing for people impacted by the CJS
- [Explainer: Building Effective Partnerships with Continuums of Care to Increase Housing Options for People Leaving Probation and Jails \(BJA\)](#): FAQs for reentry coordinators, discharge planners, and other CJS partners on how to work with the CoC to connect people in reentry with housing
- [Veterans Re-entry Search Service \(U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs\)](#): A resource to support criminal justice system staff to identify and connect veterans in jails and prisons to reentry services