

Effectively Onboarding Criminal Justice System Partners to the CoC

Effective onboarding ensures that new Criminal Justice System (CJS) partners can participate fully and effectively in the Continuum of Care (CoC) system. Without training and support, partners from other systems of care who volunteer for CoC governance or planning meetings may find that they do not understand the terminology, are not sure how to add value, or question whether CoC participation supports their own work and priorities. To support CJS participants in meaningful engagement, CoCs should ensure these partners understand how CoCs work and function.

Key Strategies and Action Steps

- **Provide CJS partners with foundational information** about how homeless assistance systems and the CoC works to support their active participation.
- **Encourage ongoing communication** between CoC members and CJS partners to share hopes and expectations and **adjust as needed to best leverage the partnership**.

Provide CJS Partners with Foundational Information

CJS partners may be very familiar with people experiencing homelessness but may not understand the workings of the homeless system of care and the CoC's responsibilities and activities. Providing this information can ensure that the CJS partner can participate fully in the CoC from the first meeting they attend.

Checklist of Information to Share

A CoC or strategic planning board may already have an onboarding packet for new members that can be used to support orientation for CJS partners. If a packet doesn't exist, gathering and providing materials about how the local homeless planning system works can help them understand and participate in CoC meetings. At the same time, the volume and complexity of resources on the CoC can be overwhelming and should be tailored to meet the needs of the audience. To that end, the following pages may be helpful to print and share.

Information you may want to share with new partners includes:

Local information to get involved:

- Meeting schedules and locations
- Website link and where to sign up for notifications
- List of group members, affiliations, and contact information
- Expectations of group members
- Strategic plans or other statements of CoC goals
- CoC Governance Charter or other relevant policies
- Summarized data from the local homeless system of care
- List of Coordinated Entry System (CES) intake sites or homeless system resources

Background information to understand the work of the CoC:

- Five Things to Know about Continuums of Care
- Homelessness Assistance: The What, the Who, and the How
- Prioritizing Resources: The Coordinated Entry System
- The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)
- Local acronym and defined term list

Five Things to Know About Continuums of Care

What is a CoC? Short for “Continuum of Care,” CoC is the term the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) coined for the group of that coordinates homeless assistance activities and resources in a geographic area.

1. **HUD designed the CoC structure to allocate CoC Program funding.** While a CoC’s main goal is to ensure that the area has housing and supportive services that meet the needs of the local sheltered and unhoused community, accessing CoC Program funding for the community is an important duty as well. CoC Program funding can be used for housing assistance and supportive services for people who are homeless, but not for homelessness prevention or emergency shelter. To compete for HUD CoC Program funding each year, CoCs must run a local project prioritization process and prepare a detailed and time-consuming community-wide application, linking the prioritized housing and services project applications.
2. **HUD relies heavily on CoCs to develop and oversee local efforts to respond to homelessness.** Through the application process, HUD places a number of planning and system oversight duties on CoCs. For example, HUD requires every CoC to have a Coordinated Entry system, which connects people who need housing and other supports to local resources in an equitable and coordinated way. CoCs also must create

a data system called Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) to collect and analyze data about people accessing homeless system resources.

3. **A CoC is usually not a legal entity and has to choose a legal entity to apply for CoC Program funds.** A CoC is most often a coalition of many types of partners, not an independent legal entity. While HUD provides funding for CoC activities, the CoC must designate a government agency or a non-profit to apply for and receive that funding. That entity is often referred to as the “Collaborative Applicant” or “CoC Lead Agency.” To be competitive for CoC funding, CoCs also must have a board made up of community representatives and at least one person with lived experience of homelessness.
4. **The primary purpose of a CoC is to promote a community-wide strategy to respond to and end homelessness.** Despite all the other activities the CoC undertakes, its primary purpose is to align a community’s efforts to respond to homelessness. Members of a CoC participate in community planning, coordinate activities, and attend meetings. While some members may apply for and receive CoC Program funding, a CoC’s membership must be *much* broader to reduce homelessness. In addition, non-CoC-funded members benefit from participation – they may be able to learn new information about resources in the community, improve their own effectiveness, and build useful relationships by participating in the CoC.
5. **Participants in the CoC commonly reflect a diverse group of community partners across different systems and sectors.** These partners often include:
 - Local governments (state, county, municipal, or tribal)
 - Public housing organizations
 - Affordable housing providers and developers
 - Law enforcement agencies and other criminal justice system partners
 - Educational entities, including K-12 and higher education
 - Health facilities and agencies providing physical health, mental health and substance use disorder services
 - Providers of social services (including outreach, food stability, employment & education, case management and many other services)
 - Community- and faith-based organizations
 - Local businesses and business organizations (including chambers of commerce or landlord organizations)
 - Organizations that serve specific populations (e.g., veterans, youth, LGBTQ+ people, , people with disabilities) and victim service providers
 - Advocates and coalitions on homelessness
 - People with lived experience of homelessness

Homelessness Assistance: The What, the Who, and the How

WHAT: The supports that are often available for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness may include:

- Housing or housing assistance (short-term or permanent, sometimes with services)
- Street outreach and emergency shelter
- Basic needs (e.g., food, laundry, showers, transportation)
- Supportive services (e.g., case management, health care linkages, education or employment supports)
- Financial resources (e.g., rental assistance, to overcome a housing barrier)

Understanding Evidence-Based Practices

Information about evidence-based and best practices to end homelessness can help CJS partners understand CoC strategies and priorities and participate more effectively in committees and planning discussions. CoCs may also want to share information about local programs that are particularly effective, and how their success is measured.

General resources about best practices in serving individuals and families experiencing homelessness include:

- [NAEH Housing First Fact Sheet](#)
- [NLIHC The Case for Housing First](#)
- [Urban Institute Housing First Breaks the Homelessness-Jail Cycle](#)
- [The Effectiveness of Assertive Community Treatment for Homeless Populations with Severe Mental Illness](#)
- [USICH Core Elements of Effective Street Outreach to People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
- [HUD Housing Problem Solving](#)
- [USICH Seven Principles for Addressing Encampments](#)
- [Abt Associates Center for Evidence-based Solutions to Homelessness database.](#)

WHO: In most areas, a variety of governmental and non-profit agencies provide diverse resources and services to households at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Services are often divided not just by type (e.g., shelter versus transportation) but also by population (i.e., one provider specializes in serving youth, another in people with mental health needs). Providers often coordinate their efforts to leverage each other's strengths.

Q: What is "Local" for Homeless Systems of Care?

A: In many communities, the boundaries of the homeless system of care aligns with the county borders. In rural areas, local coordination may involve partnering across the state.

HOW: In almost every community, the number of people who need homelessness services exceeds the resources to respond. Communities address this need by:

- Seeking federal or state government funding and private funding to expand resources available;
- Coordinating at a local level to be efficient and effective;
- Using evidence-based practices, such as Housing First approaches, to ensure that resources are being used as impactfully as possible; and
- Prioritizing resources for the most vulnerable community members.

Q: Who gets prioritized for homeless resources?

A: Each community decides that locally. In most communities, people living outside, in cars, or staying in shelter receive priority. More intensive housing and service resources are usually prioritized for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness, meaning they have been homeless for more than a year and have a disabling condition.

Prioritizing Resources: The Coordinated Entry System

What is Coordinated Entry? Coordinated Entry (CE) is the HUD-required process each CoC designs to assess and connect people who are experiencing homelessness to the housing and services they need. The purpose is to streamline access and to allocate resources fairly.

What Does HUD Require? HUD requires that the CE:

- Use a **standardized assessment** approach with every household that seeks housing to determine strengths, vulnerability, needs, and eligibility for resources.

- Organize a dynamic, community-wide list or queue for housing resources that **prioritizes based on vulnerability and severity of need** rather than on a first-come, first-served basis.
- Provide **access to housing resources** via one intake and referral process.

HUD requires that all housing vacancies and rental assistance vouchers funded through HUD's CoC Program be filled through the CE process. Ideally all homeless housing and service providers participate in CE regardless of funding source, to improve the system's effectiveness.

What Can the CoC Control? While HUD requires the use of a CE process, the design of the process is left up to the local CoC and are memorialized in a set of policies and procedures. Ideally these policies are developed and updated through a community process, with regular evaluations of effectiveness and challenges. CoC's can determine:

- Where and how intake occurs;
- How to assess households;
- How to prioritize households (i.e., how to determine vulnerability);
- How to match and refer people to housing; and
- How to evaluate CE and when to make changes.

What Problems Does Coordinated Entry Fix?

- Before CE, people experiencing homelessness spent significant time getting on multiple waiting lists, and when they did get a resource, it might not have been the resource they actually needed
- The lack of a centralized process resulted in duplication in the system of care and wasted resources
- The most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness often could not access resources

What Are the Goals of Coordinated Entry?

- House people with severe need first (similar to emergency room triage)
- Simplify complicated systems for people accessing the homeless system
- Connect people to the specific resources they need no matter where they access the system of care

Coordinated Entry System Elements	
System Access	People in crisis contact the system. This often occurs by calling 211 or reaching out to a homeless services provider.
Assessment	Everyone is assessed consistently, using the same process – often a standardized tool or tools. Assessments may ask about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household needs, strengths, and preferences • Housing barriers • History of homelessness • Other vulnerability
Prioritization Based on Need	CoCs determine what households to prioritize based on relative vulnerability
Matching to Resources	CoCs create a process to match prioritized households to housing resources that meet their needs and for which they are eligible
Referrals	Matched households are connected to the housing program
Placement	Eligible households are housed when units are ready

The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)

What is HMIS? The Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is the data system that communities use to collect and analyze client, service, and housing data.

HUD requires that CoCs create an HMIS to understand who is being served and how. HUD requires CoCs to track specific data elements and has created a set of data standards and reporting requirements that guide CoCs in creating their data systems. HUD does not require use of a certain software system, as long as the system meets these requirements.

What does HMIS track? Required data elements include information about:

- Each person who accesses resources (e.g., name, age, race)
- Special needs the person may have (e.g., health needs)
- The person’s income and benefits
- The resources in the homeless response system that they have accessed

How does HMIS help the CoC? Having shared data across the community makes service coordination much easier, improves community understanding of the type and level of services that are needed, and informs the community about system and project level performance.

What are the main challenges with HMIS?

1. **Lack of Participation:** While HUD requires the CoC to have an HMIS, not all programs are required by their funder to enter information into the system. Lack of participation by all programs results in large gaps in the picture created by the data.
2. **Poor Data Quality:** HMIS data is input by a wide variety of people across many agencies, which can result in missing or incorrect data. In addition, HMIS data is largely self-reported and as a result may be incomplete or inaccurate.
3. **Lack of Resources:** Homeless systems must prioritize resources for the most urgent issues. As a result, often CoCs do not have the resources to address data quality issues or to analyze HMIS data to meaningfully understand the needs of the community.

How do CoCs measure impact?

- CoCs use the data in the HMIS to **track system performance measures** required by HUD, as well as additional measures the community identifies.
- System performance measures include data points such as:
 - Length of time persons experience homelessness before securing housing
 - Rates of successful placements or retention of permanent housing
 - Returns to homelessness after receiving permanent housing
 - Overall number of people experiencing homelessness and the number of individuals experiencing homelessness for the first time
 - Employment and income growth for people in CoC-funded projects
- These measures can help the CoC understand its strengths, recognize successes and improvements to the system, and identify opportunities to deepen impact in ending homelessness.

Commonly Used Acronyms

This list of acronyms is a starting place. CoCs will want to add state and local acronyms or other terms to support active CJS partner participation.

Acronym	Definition
APR	Annual Performance Report (for HUD programs)
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, People of Color
CES	Coordinated Entry System, the process to intake, assess, prioritize, and refer people experiencing homelessness to a community's housing and/or homeless services programs
CDBG, CDBG-CV	Community Development Block Grant and Community Development Block Grant CARES Act coronavirus allocation (federal programs)
Collaborative Applicant	The entity that applies for CoC Program funds on behalf of the community, receives the CoC Planning funds, and generally staffs and operates the administrative aspects of a CoC.
Continuum of Care (CoC)	Local stakeholder group leading efforts to respond to homelessness. Also refers to federal grant program promoting and funding permanent solutions to homelessness.
CoC Board	A CoC Board is responsible for the overall direction of the CoC. The CoC elects Board members.
Con Plan	Consolidated Plan, a locally developed plan for housing assistance and urban development under CDBG.
DV	Domestic Violence
ESG and ESG-CV	Emergency Solutions Grant and Emergency Solutions Grant CARES Act coronavirus allocation (federal programs)
FMR	Fair Market Rent (maximum rent for Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance/CoC grants)
HDX	Homelessness Data Exchange (for CoCs to submit data to HUD)
HIC	Annual housing inventory count of all homeless assistance beds and units
HMIS	Homeless Management Information System
HOME	Home Investment Partnerships (federal program)
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (federal)
NOFA/NOFO	Notice of Funding Availability/ Notice of Funding Opportunity
PIT Count	Annual or bi-annual homelessness point-in-time (PIT) count of all people experiencing homelessness
PHA	Public Housing Authority
PWLE	People With Lived Experience of Homelessness

Acronym	Definition
PSH	Permanent Supportive Housing, permanent housing or housing subsidy with supportive services, usually prioritized for people who are chronically homeless or otherwise have high housing barriers
RRH	Rapid Rehousing, a short term (3-24 month) housing subsidy with supportive services
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration
SPM	System Performance Measures
SRO	Single-Room Occupancy housing units
SSDI	Social Security Disability Income
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TA	Technical Assistance
TAY	Transition Age Youth (usually ages 18-24)
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (federal)
VA	Veterans Affairs (U.S. Department of)
VASH	Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing
YHDP	Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (federal program)

Encourage Ongoing Communication and Adjust as Needed

As CJS partners join and start to participate in the CoC, both CoC members and CJS partners should frequently check in to ensure that the relationship is benefitting both parties and making the best use of limited resources. A CJS partner that is not sure of the value or goals of CoC participation will not engage as fully in CoC activities.

To support active and ongoing engagement, CoCs may want to:

- Have a one-on-one meeting prior to the first CoC event** the CJS partner attends to answer any questions your CJS partner may have and to share your hopes for how they will participate in the CoC. For example, you may want them to raise concerns about the potential impact of proposed CoC policies, make suggestions for needed programs or resources, or share trainings in topics like de-escalation with provider staff. This initial meeting is an important opportunity for the CoC and CJS partner to identify common goals and expectations.
- Introduce and welcome the CJS partner** at the first CoC meeting. This can include introductions of everyone else at the meeting, and a request for each person to share how they might help the CJS partner and what they hope the CJS partner can bring to the CoC.

- ❑ **Check in with the CJS partner after each meeting** for the first 3-4 months to discuss any questions or concerns, deepen understanding of their priorities, and see if there are ways the CoC might be more valuable to them in their role.
- ❑ **Change or update meeting agendas** to bring value to all of the CoC’s members. This might include, for example, moving “provider announcements” to the end of the meeting.
- ❑ **Identify a short-term project** that supports the goals of the CoC and of CJS partners. A “quick win” can support long term sustainable partnerships, building trusting relationships for mutual collaboration. Consider the strategies identified in the section above on *Best Practices for Strategic Planning Processes* for ideas on potential projects.

Additional Resources

- [Introductory Guide to the CoC Program \(HUD Exchange\)](#): This resource provides a high-level overview of the CoC program.
- [CoC Program Roadmap Prezi \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A presentation overview of the CoC program.
- [CoC’s Coordinated Assessment System Prezi \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A presentation overview of the Coordinated Assessment System requirement in the CoC Interim Rule.
- [Notice CPD-17-01: Notice Establishing Additional Requirements for a Continuum of Care Centralized or Coordinated Assessment System \(HUD Exchange\)](#): Notice establishing new requirements for development and use of a Coordinated Entry (CE) system.
- [Coordinated Entry Core Elements \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A guidebook for CoCs outlining HUD requirements for CE and to help plan and implement a CE process, as well as consider implementation of additional implements beyond the basic requirements.
- [Coordinated Entry Community Samples Catalogue \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A collection of CE tools, policies, and related documents created by CoCs from around the country.
- [Coordinated Entry as a Tool for Equity: Training on Fair Housing and Coordinated Entry \(HUD Exchange\)](#): A training to provide an overview of CE and explain the applicability of federal fair housing laws to CE, as well as identify best practices to address inequities.