

Engaging Criminal Justice System Partners in CoC Governance and Planning

People with criminal records face some of the most challenging barriers to accessing stable housing. Together, CoCs and criminal justice system (CJS) partners can identify and address these challenges. Effective collaboration between CoCs, CJS partners, and people impacted by the criminal justice system reduces homelessness, advances racial equity, and improves public safety.

Key Strategies and Action Steps

- **Engage people with lived experience** of both homelessness and the criminal justice system
- **Identify CJS partners and establish formal roles within the CoC**, including as members of the CoC Board and relevant CoC committees
- **Engage CJS partners in strategic planning processes**, identifying specific strategies for increasing housing access for people impacted by the criminal justice system

Engage People with Relevant Lived Experiences

People with dual lived experiences of homelessness and criminal justice system involvement can provide invaluable insight into the unique housing barriers faced by those with criminal records. Communities should ensure that this perspective is meaningfully and intentionally incorporated into all planning, decision-making, and evaluation efforts and bodies.

Opportunities to Engage People with Relevant Lived Experiences

There are many opportunities for communities to incorporate lived experience of homelessness into planning and governance of the homeless system of care. To better address challenges faced by people with criminal records and other CJS impacts specifically, consider elevating people with the dual experience of homelessness and criminal justice system involvement for various roles and opportunities within the homelessness system of care. This may include:

- ❑ **CoC Boards:** CoC Boards are required to include people with lived experience of homelessness. By formally or informally requiring the CoC Board to include people with lived experience of both homelessness and the criminal justice system, communities can begin to identify and address the unique barriers faced by people involved with the CJS.

- ❑ **Lived Experience Advisory Boards:** Sometimes called consumer advisory boards, these Boards provide opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness to impact community decision-making. Consider reserving specific placements, or even developing specific lived experience advisory boards, for people with criminal records.
- ❑ **Interviews, focus groups, and surveys:** These are invaluable tools for incorporating the perspective of people experiencing homelessness into community planning and decision-making. Make sure that people with criminal records also have opportunities to provide feedback regarding the homelessness system of care by conducting specialized outreach and including relevant demographic questions around CJS involvement.

Best Practices to Engage People with Lived Experience

Successfully engaging people with lived experience frequently increases understanding of the unique position and challenges faced by those individuals. For people with lived experience of both homelessness and the criminal justice system, consider the following:

- ❑ **Work with CBO partners:** It can be useful to start by partnering with local community-based organizations and others that already serve people with criminal records. They can help identify people who may be comfortable participating and establish a baseline level of trust.
- ❑ **Be sensitive to trauma:** Any kind of contact with the CJS can cause trauma, which can make it difficult for people to discuss their experiences or feelings. People also may have concerns that sharing their CJS involvement might impact their eligibility for housing and services. Focus on building rapport and creating a judgement-free zone to let people with lived experience discuss personal information at their own pace in their own level of detail.
- ❑ **Set clear expectations:** When engaging people with lived experience of the CJS to participate in CoC tasks or committees, explain the value of having their voice at the table. Let them know the time commitment, technology requirements, travel requirements, processes for compensation, and how their opinions will be used so they can make informed decisions about participation. Whenever possible, explain how they can learn more about the outcomes of the process or provide report back processes for standing boards and committees.
- ❑ **Respect privacy:** Be clear to people with lived experience of the CJS that they are not required to disclose their status or any details of their involvement with the CJS in meetings, reports, or grant documents. If they do decide to disclose anything, make sure CoC members understand not to share that information without permission. If people with lived experience of the CJS will be in meetings or on boards with people working in the CJS, let them know and give them the option to opt out of participating.

Additional Resources

Additional resources regarding engaging people with lived experience of homelessness include the following:

- [SNAPS In Focus: Integrating Persons with Lived Experiences in our Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness \(HUD\)](#): Examples of meaningfully including people with lived experience of homelessness into decision-making structures
- [Nothing About Us Without Us: Seven Principles for Leadership and Inclusion of People with Lived Experience of Homelessness \(HUD\)](#): Principles for equitably including people with lived experience of homelessness in decision making
- [Partnering with Persons with Lived Experience Lessons Learned Webinar \(HUD\)](#): A webinar overview of the Partnering with Persons with Lived Experience Community Workshops, lessons learned, and suggestions for how to strengthen these partnerships
- [People with Lived Experience Must Be Meaningful Partners in Ending Homelessness \(USICH\)](#): Guidance for engaging people with lived experience of homelessness and examples of communities doing it successfully
- [Beyond Mere Principle: Strategies for Truly Partnering with People Who Have the Lived Experience in Our Work \(USICH\)](#): Guidance for operationalizing principles of engaging people with lived experience of homelessness
- [TIP SHEET: Strategies for Building Client Engagement \(National Health Care for the Homeless Council\)](#): Guidance from homeless service providers on engaging people with lived experience of homelessness

Identify CJS Partners and Establish Formal Roles Within the CoC

CoCs should incorporate and reflect all relevant partners within the community's system of care. While CoCs and CJS entities serve different purposes, there can be considerable overlap in goals and philosophies, including shared goals of safety, successful re-integration of people into their communities, preventing recidivism, overcoming stigma associated with criminal records, and cooperation. CoCs can use this common ground to engage CJS partners to create mutual understanding, shift attitudes, and build thriving communities.

CJS partners may have resources and insight to help lower barriers and provide necessary housing for people with criminal records. For example, reentry service providers may have specialized knowledge of trauma-informed services for people who have been incarcerated and have experienced carceral trauma. In addition, some communities have specialized housing opportunities for people in reentry from jails and prisons that are funded outside of the CoC. However, CJS partners often don't have the context or capacity to use their resources optimally to address homelessness. Demonstrating that the CoC can fill in these gaps and has the expertise to administer housing resources effectively can help motivate CJS partners to collaborate.

As part of this process, it can be helpful to understand the priorities and capacity of potential CJS partners. The chart below outlines common CJS partners, their roles, and how they can advance housing goals.

CJS partner	Common roles	Examples of how they can advance housing goals
Community supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supervise and regulate the behavior and movement of people released into the community under parole or probation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May have housing, services, and/or funding dedicated for people under community supervision Officers have discretion regarding reporting
Court staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee the processes of the court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May have discretion to divert people to alternative courts or pre-trial diversion May control funding to pilot housing diversion Make decisions about pre-trial bail and sentencing that can impact housing
District attorney	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discretion to charge and prosecute people with crimes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discretion to clear convictions and unpaid fines May have the authority to divert people to alternative courts instead of prison
Jails and prisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detain people charged with and/or convicted of crimes Responsibly release people into their communities when their detention period is complete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can allow in-reach by community-based providers May be able to serve as a referral partner Can conduct release planning to ensure people aren't discharged into homelessness
Law enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authority to arrest or fine people for crimes of poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May respond to distress calls alongside social workers who can connect people to services May have a role in street outreach Can serve as a referral partner to homeless service system in lieu of arrest
Public defender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsible for representing people charged with crimes in court 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May control funding and programming to help clear convictions and unpaid fines Can connect clients to services

Opportunities to Establish Roles for CJS Partners Within the CoC

Communities should consider providing CJS partners with formal roles within the CoC's governance structure. This will help keep CJS partners engaged in the homelessness response system, more closely align cross-systems resources, and positively impact decision-making within both systems of care. Such roles could include:

- ❑ **CoC Board:** Providing CJS partners with a dedicated seat on the CoC Board can cement the relationship between CoC and CJS partners while ensuring CJS input and perspective regarding all elements of CoC decision-making.
- ❑ **CoC Committees:** Less formal than dedicated CoC Board seats, CoC committees are important opportunities for CJS partners to participate in CoC systems and policies. Communities should take steps to ensure CJS partners participate in CoC steering committees, coordinated entry committees, and other relevant work groups.
- ❑ **Lived Experience Advisory Boards:** Ensure that CJS-impacted individuals with lived experience of homelessness participate in any lived experience advisory body to ensure their perspective is incorporated into CoC decision-making and evaluation.
- ❑ **Strategic Planning Processes:** CJS partners should be included in all relevant strategic planning processes, including during planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. Strategic plans should incorporate relevant CJS-specific goals and action steps where appropriate.

Community Spotlight: Contra Costa County, CA

In Contra Costa County, CA, the CoC Governance Charter formalizes the role of CJS partners by designating seats on the CoC Board for a reentry service provider and a public safety representative. This partnership is also reflected by the participation of the CoC lead agency on the County's Reentry Strategic Plan. This collaboration ensures that the housing needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system are considered in policy and funding decisions made by the homeless system of care.

Best Practices to Establish Roles for CJS Partners Within the CoC

Ensuring formal participation from CJS partners in the CoC Board and committees can be an effective way of ensuring ongoing cross-system communication. Through participation, CJS partners will be aware of the plans, goals, and workings of the CoC and be able to offer their insight, perspective, and resources. This exercise in relationship-building can be vital to overcoming housing barriers for people with criminal records and ensuring that no one exiting the criminal justice system exits to homelessness.

Include CJS partners on CoC Boards

Communities can consider incorporating CJS partners onto CoC Boards both formally and informally:

- **Assign dedicated seats:** The clearest way to incorporate CJS partners is to have language in CoC governance documents dedicating seats on the CoC board to CJS partners. To ensure a diversity of input, consider dedicating seats for specific partners across the CJS (i.e., law enforcement, public defenders, and jails).
- **Encourage participation:** If the CoC cannot dedicate seats to CJS partners, encourage CJS partners to apply for open seats on the Board. This may require active outreach to CJS partners to educate them about the CoC and the benefits of membership.

Include CJS partners on CoC committees

In most CoCs, the work of planning, coordination, and evaluation happens in CoC committees or workgroups. Where committees actively conduct much of the day-to-day work on behalf of the CoC, there are clear opportunities for cross-system coordination and partnership with the criminal justice system. Communities should consider:

- **Whether the committee or workgroup would benefit from CJS partner participation:** Take into account the general content of the committee's work, the mandate of the committee in the CoC governance documents, and any initiatives the committee is currently working on to determine whether CJS partner participation would be beneficial. If any or all of these relate to the work of CJS entities, client contact with the CJS, or barriers to housing access because of CJS involvement, then CJS partners could contribute to the committee.
- **Which CJS partners should participate in which committee:** Consider the roles of CJS entities, how they can advance housing goals, and their capacity to participate. Involve the CJS partners whose work, power, and resources align best with the goals of the committee. Inclusion will maximize opportunities to solicit valuable expertise and perspective from CJS partners.

Committees and/or workgroups that CJS partners should participate in may include any or all of the following examples:

- **CoC steering committees:** CoC steering committees often have agenda-setting power for the CoC as a whole. Participation by CJS partners could help ensure that people with criminal records are considered in a broader array of CoC activities.
- **Coordinated entry committees:** Coordinated entry committees are responsible for overseeing the community's coordinated entry system and, therefore, for assessment, prioritization, matching, referral, and placement. CJS partner participation can help ensure that people with criminal records are considered for prioritization.
- **Cross-system response workgroups:** These workgroups often exist to coordinate the activities of many systems of care, including the health, behavioral health, criminal justice, and homelessness response systems. Inclusion of CJS partners can help break down silos between systems of care.

Additional Resources

- [CoC Program Toolkit – CoC Governance and Structure \(HUD\)](#): An archive of HUD resources discussing CoC governance

Engage CJS Partners in Strategic Planning Processes

Strategic planning processes are opportunities for communities to collectively set near- and long-term goals. Because people with criminal records face some of the highest barriers to housing, CoC strategic planning processes should consider how to better serve these populations. Including CJS partners in the development of strategic plans can ensure goals for serving people with criminal records are realistic, coordinated, and effective.

Opportunities to Engage CJS Partners in Strategic Planning Processes

Communities should engage CJS partners throughout all stages of relevant strategic planning processes, including by:

- Planning and Oversight:** Include CJS partners and people with lived experience at the beginning of the process, during kickoff meetings, brainstorming sessions, and on any steering committees to better formulate all aspects of the strategic planning process to meet the needs of people impacted by the criminal justice system.
- Feedback:** Ensure that people with lived experience and CJS partners have opportunities to provide feedback whenever the community gathers qualitative information through interviews, focus groups, and surveys.

- ❑ **Lived Experience:** Particularly work to ensure that people with lived experience of both homelessness and the criminal justice system are included in all facets of strategic planning processes.
- ❑ **Goals and Strategies:** Ensure that input from people with lived experience and CJS partners is solicited and incorporated into any relevant strategic plan goals and strategies. This may include identifying CJS partners as champions for various goals and strategies, where appropriate.
- ❑ **Publicity:** Ensure that all CJS partners are aware of any relevant strategic planning goals and strategies and enlist their aid to inform the public of the results of strategic planning processes where appropriate.

Best Practices for Strategic Planning Processes

Strategic planning processes that are tailored to address the needs of people with criminal records should strive to identify specific strategies to address their unique housing barriers and challenges. Communities can use strategic planning processes to better serve this population by considering the following:

- **Tailor strategic plans:** Develop and write a strategic plan specifically for serving people with criminal records and/or people in reentry. This allows for a coordinated vision and specific strategies to lower barriers and house these populations.
- **Tailor strategies and goals:** If capacity does not allow for an entire strategic plan for serving this population, then include goals, strategies, and cross-system partnerships to better serve people with criminal records in the CoC's standard strategic plan.
- **Be sure the goals in your strategic plan are SMARTIE (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Relevant, Time-bound, Inclusive, and Equitable):** This will ensure all partners have clear guidance and increase the chances of successful implementation.
- **Measure impact:** Be clear and explicit about how the impact, effectiveness, and success of strategic plan goals will be evaluated. This will ensure all stakeholders know how to measure the progress and completion of goals.

Community	Relevant Goals and Strategies
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Strategic Plan Goals Specifically for Housing People in Reentry	
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<p><u>Contra Costa County, CA</u></p>	<p>The Contra Costa CoC developed a 5-year strategic plan specifically for meeting the housing needs of people in reentry.</p> <p>The CoC convened a Local Planning Group to develop the plan, which included representatives from several CJS partners in the county: the community advisory board to the Community Corrections Partnership, detention health, district attorney’s office, public defender’s office, sheriff’s office, probation department, reentry network, and reentry success center.</p> <p>After conducting extensive stakeholder engagement and needs assessments, the Local Planning Group convened four times in three months to develop the plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting 1: Review previous strategic plan’s mission and guiding principles; review needs assessment • Meeting 2: Prioritize needs and draft goals for each need • Meeting 3: Draft measurable objectives for each goal • Meeting 4: Review objectives, activities, and resources for each goal <p>The strategic plan’s six main goals were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement structures, tools, and procedures necessary to help returning residents achieve successful transition from jail to community 2. Ensure timely and appropriate connections to effective services and resources that support reentry 3. Increase the likelihood of post-release success by enhancing opportunities for returning residents to attain economic security 4. Improve housing accessibility matched to the needs of clients 5. Improve timely access to behavioral and health care services 6. Enhance the use and coordination of data to ensure quality of services and inform decision-making
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Community	Relevant Goals and Strategies
Strategic Plans with General Coordination and Planning Goals for CJS-Impacted People	
<u>Atlanta, GA</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End Family Homelessness by 2020: Partner with the school system and the Department of Family and Children Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice to target those precariously housed and at imminent risk of homelessness • End Youth Homelessness by 2020: Work with the Department of Juvenile Justice and the DFCS to create mandated discharge policies
<u>Harris, Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties, TX</u>	<p>Goal: Prevent Homelessness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy 1: Coordinated Access. Provide specialized support materials and training to strengthen outreach and entry points. Refine triage and intake protocols for Coordinated Access referral partners – hospitals, criminal justice, faith community, and schools – to ensure community partners understand what resources are available to people experiencing a housing crisis and how to make referrals. Strengthen family violence risk-assessment protocols for all households seeking crisis services to ensure limited shelter resources are directed to highest-need households. • Strategy 5: Discharge Planning. Engage in discharge planning with mainstream system providers such as behavioral health, physical health, criminal justice, juvenile justice, and child welfare. Work with mainstream partners to identify appropriate housing opportunities for discharged people so that crisis housing and shelter are not used as a temporary housing placement strategy. <p>Goal: Build Strong Cross-System Partnerships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy 3: Criminal Justice. Support development and implementation of a common release of information and information exchange protocol across systems to support coordinated interventions for justice-involved individuals. Improve standardization of system screening tools to identify justice-involved individuals who are at-risk of homelessness or are experiencing literal homelessness and triage them to an appropriate housing intervention.
<u>San Joaquin County, CA</u>	<p>Goal: Coordination with law enforcement to deflect people with histories of public intoxication and others away from jail and into program services.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a coordination and engaged regional system of care: Consider integrating related systems of care, such as re-entry from criminal justice system or hospital discharge to further improve coordination • Ensure households experiencing homelessness have access to affordable and sustainable permanent housing solutions: Examine the discretion held by the Office of the District Attorney and the courts regarding the clearance of criminal convictions and unpaid fines for people that are homeless in order to remove landlord concerns regarding criminal and credit history.
<p><u>King County, WA</u></p>	<p>The Seattle/King County CoC’s strategic plan includes detailed, quantifiable evaluation metrics for each goal.</p> <p><u>Goal:</u> Increase supportive transitions for individuals who are exiting King County jails and the Northwest Detention Center who are in need of homelessness services</p> <p><u>Evaluation metrics:</u> % people exiting to homelessness; % receiving jail release planning, # of individuals assessed for CE, # of assessors conducting assessments in jails</p>

Additional Resources

- Guide to Strategic Planning for a Rural or Balance of State CoCs (HUD): A guide to the steps of strategic planning, overcoming common challenges, and community examples