

Housing problem-solving (HPS) strategies can help communities target staff time and financial resources in ways that will decrease the number of people who experience homelessness. The HPS model includes an emphasis on resolving people's housing crises quickly and calibrating their engagement and supportive services based on their unique resources and needs.

[The use of a Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#) should guide HPS system planning and implementation given the environmental and structural factors that result in the disproportionate rates of deep poverty and homelessness among Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Adapt screening tools, program eligibility, and languages for documents as indicated in the assessment. Below are profiles from three selected communities that illustrate the use of effective, equitable HPS strategies in a range of geographies.

## 1. Seattle/King County: Case Study on Diversion

Seattle/King County focused on taking diversion to scale throughout the homeless response system by pairing equity-driven training provided by regional diversion champions or "coaches" with flexible client assistance administered by a centralized fund source. In response to COVID-19, the coaches are delivering training online to keep community education going and strengthen access to diversion. Over 540 households have been served at an average cost of \$2,100 per household.

The region has a commitment to integrating anti-racist principles throughout the system's response. Diversion coaches are selected to reflect the community experiencing homelessness; included among the coaches are people with lived experience. The program's use of an inclusive process for selecting the nonprofit administrator of the Centralized Diversion Fund also led to the selection of an organization led by people of color who predominantly serve the Black/African American community. Although this organization had less experience with public funding, they had the capacity to meet the objectives of the centralized fund.

### *Profile at a Glance*

**Funding Sources:** Private, city, and county funding.

**Community Partners:** Africatown International is contracted to provide the fiscal administration of the Centralized Diversion Fund.

**Activities Funded:** Mediation, family reunification, housing location, crisis resolution, flexible financial assistance, diversion staffing.

**Community Linkages:** Mainstream benefits and broad community supports.

**Conversation Approaches:** Occurs at any entry point of the crisis response system.

**Participating:** Staff are trained to have diversion conversations by diversion coaches who include individuals with lived experience of homelessness.

**Key Takeaways:** Central Diversion Fund helped to scale up diversion and promote equity in access to resources. The expertise of diversion coaches (including people with lived experience) needs to be adequately compensated.

### *Additional Resources for Seattle/King County*

[King County Diversion Home Page](#)

[Seattle/King County Diversion Guidelines](#)

## 2. Montgomery County, PA: Case Study on Crisis Resolution and Progressive Engagement

HPS principles for Montgomery County include crisis resolution and progressive engagement, maximization of community resources, and commitment to the trauma-informed principals of client choice, respect, and empowerment. Specifically, Montgomery County implemented:

- Eviction prevention through tenants' rights advocacy,
- Mediation services and legal aid,
- Support in finding and retaining housing through connections to the lowest-cost housing possible, and
- Creative brainstorming with households presenting for services to avoid entering the homeless services system or to rapidly exit back into housing.

The effectiveness of the intervention is being evaluated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and household size. Several interventions in the community are targeted toward directly addressing inequities. One prevention pilot targets zip codes where a high proportion of people experiencing homelessness last resided. These identified zip codes have a disproportionate number of African American residents. Montgomery county also realizes the importance of considering racial equity as part of staffing operations as people of color are more likely to be front-line staff than management and are often paid at very low rates. Lastly, this homeless system is also partnering with organizations that have experience providing services to the Latinx and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities for better outreach and engagement outcomes.

### *Profile at a Glance*

**Funding Source:** Continuums of Care (CoCs), Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), state and local grants, private funds.

**Community Partners:** Legal Aid of Southeastern Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement fund.

**Activities Funded:** Call center staff, shelter case management, outreach, direct client assistance, rapid rehousing lite.

**Community Linkages:** Linkages to tenants' rights advocacy, mediation services, and legal aid.

**Conversation Approaches:** Homeless hotline, street outreach, shelter.

**Coordinated Entry:** Homeless assistance is centrally located through 211 hotline.

**Participating:** Five trained call center staff, five outreach workers, case managers at emergency shelter.

**Key Takeaways:** Leadership identified staffing as a primary operational expense. It is critical to fund time and intensity of services, not just financial assistance. Even so, this approach can be difficult as few funders want to pay for staff time.

### ***Additional Resources for Montgomery County, PA***

[Your Way Home \(Montgomery County, PA\) Operations Manual](#)  
[Outcomes Dashboard](#)

### 3. Washington, DC: Case Study on Secondary Prevention

The goal of the Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP) is to prevent families at risk of becoming homeless from needing shelter by providing services and resources that stabilize families in their communities. The program implements a progressive engagement model: a strategy of delivering targeted services starting with a small amount of assistance for a large group of people and then providing additional assistance as needed.

Racial equity is embedded in the day-to-day practice at HPP. Policies are developed with a racial equity lens and trainings incorporate equity competencies for case managers to build into their practice.

#### *Profile at a Glance*

**Funding Source:** Local public funding.

**Community Partners:** Four community-based HPP providers offer prevention services while the central intake for families at risk of homelessness is provided by the Department of Human Services at the Virginia Williams Family Resource Center (VWFRC).

**Activities Funded:** Case management, mediation, family reunification, housing location, direct client assistance, central intake/assessment staff, prevention program staff.

**Community Linkages:** Public benefits/child and family services, employment/education, upstream emergency rental assistance, legal aid, food banks, budgeting/credit repair/financial wellness workshops, connection to mental health services, parenting workshops.

**Conversation Approaches:** Initial conversations take place at the central point of intake for families to determine initial eligibility for homeless services.

**Coordinated Entry:** VWFRC is the central access point for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness in the district. Staff will assist families experiencing housing instability to identify any safe alternative to entering the homeless system prior to referring to emergency shelter.

**Participating:** Families engage with community HPP partners to receive a range of services.

**Key Takeaways:** The HPP was introduced to provide alternatives to shelter placement to ultimately slow the rate of shelter placement through redesign of the intake process. Measuring the success of the HPP process has been focused on reduced rates of shelter entry and returns to the system. DC has intentionally not set targets for diversion at intake to ensure families are not disincentivized to ask for, and ultimately get connected to, services they need.

#### *Additional Resource for Washington, DC*

[Department of Human Services](#)

## Rural Considerations

**Diversion:** Partnerships are integral to diversion activities in rural areas. Diversion can be a component of the Coordinated Entry System (CES) or conducted through service providers such as Community Action Agencies or local Department of Human Services (DHS) offices. These providers likely deliver some level of prevention services that will assist households to resolve their housing crisis without entering into the homeless system.

Churches and faith-based organizations, civic groups, and other nonprofits can support diversion activities through funding and problem-solving. Also, reframing the diversion conversation to think about presenting households as part of a larger network (faith, family, or friends) can help resolve a housing crisis through reconnection or reunification at no cost while reserving financial assistance for those without such networks.

**Staffing:** Each of the three communities highlighted the need for staff with creativity and problem-solving skills. In rural areas, this specialized skill set equates to a higher salary. Consider subsidizing federal funding with local sources. Offering diversion services to the faith-based community is one way to do this. Households seeking assistance often go to churches first, but church staff likely do not have the skill set needed to triage and refer clients. If faith organizations pool their money to support a diversion program (including staffing), churches can quickly refer any household to the diversion team and it will not pull them away from their daily work.

Additionally, rural and Balance of State CoCs often cover large geographic expanses, so diversion team members must be mobile. Supporting a mobile team includes ensuring there is enough money budgeted for mileage, and that the necessary technology (including a hotspot) is provided to allow the mobile team member to triage, assess, and refer anywhere in their catchment area. Complementing a mobile team is hotline access, rather than a physical location, so team members can meet clients where they are. This promotes client choice.

Communities should use their data to inform how the diversion team is staffed. The team should mirror the demographics of those experiencing homelessness, especially those least likely to feel comfortable accessing services from the homeless response system. As in the Montgomery County, PA example, a racial equity lens should be applied to all levels of the organization(s) providing diversion services.

**Marketing:** As homelessness looks different in rural communities, consider who may be in contact with homeless households, including cashiers and convenience store clerks, librarians, grocery stores, and park rangers. These community stakeholders should know how to get in touch with the diversion team at any time, as they can extend the reach of the team to all parts of the catchment area.

**Key Takeaways:** All members of an organization are needed to ensure diversion activities can be carried out across a large geographic area. Consider traditional and nontraditional partners to support diversion, and give staffing the ability to be mobile instead of place-based.