Many communities have indicated a need for more information about where and how to start rebuilding and transforming a housing system that is shifting due to the pandemic. In the midst of this, communities must move quickly to re-house individuals and families experiencing homelessness by creating clear pathways to housing. *Here are four key frameworks to begin strategically planning, dedicating, and implementing your resources.*

Develop a coordinated funding approach that starts right away

Inclusive planning will increase equity and strategic use of resources while you are making quick decisions about deployment of new funds. Build out that process with more complex planning in a few months.

1. *Convene a coordinated group right now to make initial decisions:*
   - Convene key COVID-19 decision makers that are coordinating new CARES Act funds, especially CoC, ESG, CDBG, and HOME representatives to make allocation decisions together using data. Where your CoC includes multiple entitlement jurisdictions, include them all, and move forward with those who will join. If you already have people with lived expertise structurally included in similar processes, include them (i.e. through Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) or your CoC board). If you do not, build the capacity to do so at the same time as you reach out to your local YWCAs, Urban Leagues, Community Development Corporations, and NAACP chapters. Involve these groups at the beginning of the process; now is the time to reach out to them.

2. *Use data to inform decision-making:*
   - Use a planning tool that links costs to a population need (like a system modeling tool or spreadsheet) to make quick decisions about your community's need and use of new resources right now to address shelter and housing needs.
     - Come prepared to your planning conversations with the inputs needed for the tool you are using.
     - Bring exact amounts of new federal, state, local, and private resources across jurisdictions to be able to make decisions about how to allocate them across eligible uses.
   - Use specific data inputs and the resource estimates to be explicit about the housing and prevention goals you can achieve with new resources like CDBG-CV and ESG-CV.

3. *Create your funding plan:*
   - Set a goal to permanently house everyone in your system that is experiencing homelessness (including in sheltered and unsheltered settings) with rental assistance and services, using the flexibility of rapid rehousing (RRH) as the guide. Determine how much it would cost to do so.

   - Identify one or more goals for homelessness prevention (e.g. preventing homelessness from institutions, diverting people who request shelter, preventing evictions) and calculate how much funding will be needed. If you try to help everybody who will be eligible for homelessness prevention, or if your goals are not clear, you may have more people applying for assistance than you can serve.

   - Design new or supplement existing creative problem solving/diversion programs to round out the array of interventions needed to meet the need where ongoing rental assistance is not necessary.

   - Identify any limitations on allowable activities and programs that will need to be included in the resource allocation process. Consider how existing funding and inventory can meet the identified needs. Assign ESG-CV, CDBG-CV, HOME, and private resources to cover costs strategically, funding the rental assistance and services that adequately meet the need.

   - Maximize the use of FEMA Public Assistance. If FEMA Public Assistance is approved, determine how much it would cost if you need to use ESG-CV to supplement FEMA reimbursement for case management or deeper service needs for people in new non-congregate shelters who are at high risk of severe illness.

4. *Revisit your planning assumptions in regular intervals:*
   - Revisit assumptions when you receive additional new funds, when you are setting new CoC NOFA priorities, and (at least) at quarterly intervals until the current crisis subsides.

Build and strengthen a diverse array of safe and stable housing interventions

Start, but do not end, with the people who are right in front of you now.

1. *Current inventory tips:*
   - Dig into staffing solutions and virtual strategies to restart and continue moving people into currently funded housing assistance programs (like supportive housing and RRH) quickly.

   - Find out each program's average time from enrollment to move-in since social distancing began in your community. Centralize and systematize landlord recruitment to reduce that time.

2. *New housing investment tips:*
   - Give yourself the flexibility in funding decisions about housing to meet a range of needs. For example, for RRH, keep length of assistance limits flexible in solicitations, contract negotiations, and program design

   - Be flexible in planning: budget for and allow a longer length of rental assistance and services for everyone in your system. If you have data on average length of assistance, use it, but adjust up to a slightly longer time frame to accommodate for the current health and economic crisis.

   - When implementing programs, use progressive engagement, but be mindful of structural issues for youth and people of color that lead to barriers like eviction history, poor credit, and criminal justice system involvement.

   - Change ESG and CoC written standards for RRH to make them flexible and align with the planning and implementation bullets above.

3. *Expediting and streamlining re-housing tips:*
   - Streamline steps and cut through red tape. Consider "consolidated application" or "surge" strategies that create efficient rehousing processes and placement (e.g., expedite identification and housing quality standard inspection paperwork, eliminate documentation requirements, etc.).
     - Have virtual, pre-identified landlords on deck and adjust your housing inspection process.

   - Mobilize your housing support or housing navigation team. If you do not have one, create one.

   - Use your coordinated entry system data to determine bottlenecks with referrals. Talk to those providers and see what rules or processes they can change.

4. *Coordinated entry tips:*
   - With a significant influx of new resources from the CARES Act, look for opportunities to create simple criteria focusing on health and transmission risk for ESG-CV-funded rapid rehousing.

   - Determine what your overall goal(s) are for ESG-CV funding for people experiencing homelessness. Next, draft your coordinated entry system priorities to match your goals. For example, your goal(s) might be to reduce the number of people in high-risk shelter, house people who are exiting non-congregate shelter (NCS), and house people who are unsheltered. If you decide a goal is to house people who are in particularly high-risk shelters, then set your policies to allow automatic matching of people in those shelters with ESG-CV RRH.

   - Work with your local hospitals and jails to identify persons who are homeless and need shelter or housing as they may not access your traditional coordinated entry system access points.

5. *Housing with equity tips:*
   - Identify where there are the greatest disparities in race, gender, and sexual orientation, or where underserved populations like youth are located and target resources to those areas. Be vigilant about assessing who is unable to access housing because of new coordinated entry system prioritization policies, with a focus on whether that is intended or not. Make adjustments if you are unintentionally granting disparate access based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or age.

- Young people and people of color have disparate access to employment, are more likely to have lost employment during COVID-19, and face hiring discrimination that results in longer job searches. Make sure that programs are designed to give everyone the flexibility to be successful, especially if they face these structural barriers.

- Track your housing placement rates, including who is and who is not getting housed during the pandemic. Assess (and reassess often) whether you are hitting the mark for people of color, LGBTQ people, and youth; if you are not, reach out to this population to determine barriers and systematically implement corrective changes.

- Track how long it takes for marginalized populations to be housed. If it is taking longer for young people, or people of color, reach out to this population to determine barriers and systematically implement corrective changes.

- Contract with organizations that have expertise and are trusted by communities of color, the LGBTQ community, and young people.

- When building up the landlord bench, reach out to marginalized communities for landlords that may not have properties listed in mainstream lists. Local minority media outlets and faith communities are resources that can widen the landlord search.

Only expand temporary housing in a way that is truly a response to the crisis

Be strategic with resources available to accommodate health and safety needs instead of increasing the supply of shelters with shared sleeping areas.

1. *Temporary housing investment tips:*

- Prioritize creating NCS options for safety. It is difficult to keep people safe in shelters with shared sleeping areas. This is generally true during any public health emergency but is exacerbated by the contagiousness of COVID-19.

- Estimate who needs NCS and be clear about who is eligible for FEMA-supported units (if available). For those who are not eligible, use ESG-CV, CDBG-CV, or other funds.

- Make sure people have the services they need while staying in NCS so they can exit to safe and stable housing. Use some of your ESG-CV or CDBG-CV for housing-related services (e.g., case management, housing navigation and deposits), and utilize mainstream sources for other wrap-around service needs, like Medicaid. These services will help people while they are in NCS to prepare for exiting to housing and help stabilize them once they are in housing.

- Use temporary NCS to protect health and safety. Increase positive exits from shelter to reduce the overall need for shelter.

2. *Temporary housing equity tips:*

- Determine whether there is disproportionality in who is accessing homeless assistance and who is accessing NCS. While people of color are more likely to face severe illness with COVID-19, it does not mean that people of color are proportionately accessing NCS. Track disproportionate access, assess people in shelters that disproportionately serve people of color, and provide NCS when eligible.

- Many people of color, youth, and LGBTQ people avoid accessing homeless assistance. You should assume a distrust in some of your outreach and identification strategies based on past and current racist and discriminatory treatment. In general, but especially with new funding, hire staff who marginalized people do trust (e.g., people with lived expertise), and pay these people well to provide these services. Contract with organizations that people accessing your services trust.

Set clear goals for homelessness prevention

ESG-CV should leverage other resources available for prevention.

1. *Targeted homelessness prevention tips:*

- You have the greatest chance of being successful at preventing homelessness if you target assistance to specific groups of people. If you create a broad set of eligibility criteria, your prevention program is likely to be overwhelmed by applicants. Set goals with clear categories of households that will be eligible. For example, people with prior experiences in your homeless system; people exiting jails, hospitals, or other

institutions; and people living in targeted neighborhoods that are also the places that a disproportionate number of people most recently lived before experiencing homelessness.

- Practice diversion and creative problem-solving alongside your prevention efforts.

- Divert people leaving other institutions and systems like jails and hospitals. This is especially important as people exiting institutions are at high risk of experiencing homelessness and high risk of having and transmitting COVID-19.

- Case conference with detention centers as people are being released to prevent homelessness and divert to other options where possible.

- Send people who are skilled at having complex problem-solving conversations to hospitals to conduct discharge planning for people who would be exiting without a place to stay. If you do not have creative problem-solving experts, create this capacity with new funds.

2. *Broader prevention efforts tips:*
- Utilize broader anti-poverty programs to assist with homelessness prevention. Practice diversion and creative problem-solving alongside your prevention efforts.

- Make sure people who need funding to stay in their homes understand they have access to resources. For example, create a hotline or coordinate between hotlines with enhanced scripts that provide access to an array of resources such as unemployment resources, and help people access their Economic Impact Payments.

- Work together with state and local partners to understand the full range of resources that can be leveraged as disaster response—Coronavirus Relief Fund, the Paycheck Protection Act, enhanced unemployment, and private philanthropy.

3. *Equity in prevention tips:*
- Bias lives in programs and people and we make decisions about who gets access filtered through these lenses. Make system policies and hotline scripts that account for bias and work to deliver by funding local grassroots organizations led by people of color. Make sure assistance is guided by the needs of individuals as they express them.

- Obtain a map and draw circles around the neighborhoods where high proportions of people lived before entering your homeless system. Target prevention resources to those areas. This is a good tactic to counter structural racial inequities that drive communities of color into homelessness.