

# Homeless System Response: Untapped Expertise: Strategies for Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement When Developing Your Coordinated Investment Plan

When developing your local Coordinated Investment Plan, it is critical that you partner with a diverse range of local stakeholders to ensure your investment plan is rooted in equity-based decisions. There are various population groups that are either disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 or facing elevated risks. People belonging to these populations, and the organizations that work with them, are well positioned to lead communities in assessing the impact of COVID-19 on marginalized groups and devising culturally responsive housing solutions. Population groups to consider when building your team include:

- Black, Asian, Latinx, Pacific Islanders, and indigenous populations
- People who identify as LGBTQ and transgender and gender-expansive people
- People living with disabilities
- People with experience with the criminal justice system
- People with lived experience with homelessness
- Seniors

Creating inclusive decision-making teams is crucial during this time, but communities should sustain these relationships beyond the Coordinated Investment planning process. Sustaining these teams will position Continuum of Care (CoC) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) jurisdictions to be more responsive to the diverse needs of people experiencing homelessness as they implement and adjust their rehousing strategies.

ESG and CoC teams who do not have existing relationships with these stakeholders should use local resources at their disposal to quickly bring more people into the decision-making process. Below are things to consider when building teams.

**Use Local Expertise:** Reach out to local chapters or affiliates of national, culturally specific organizations like the Urban League, NAACP, Native Americans in Philanthropy, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, National Latin@ Network, or the National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders. Local leaders from these organizations can serve as stakeholders and connect you to local faith-based groups, social service agencies, and community-based organizations that have a wealth of insight and expertise. In addition, organizations like the YWCA and Boys & Girls Clubs are well established in and have the trust of underserved communities. You should also extend the request to city or county leadership. They should be familiar with organizations led by or in service to the populations listed above.

**Amplify the Voices of those with Lived Experience:** CoC board membership must include people with lived experience; they can be a good initial resource for ESG jurisdictions. To include more people with lived experience, reach out to CoC and ESG providers—particularly people belonging to key underserved populations and those with recent experience with homelessness and homeless service systems. Those with lived experience have the best understanding of the problems that exist in the homeless system, and knowledge of the services and interventions that are the most effective solutions to prevent and end homelessness. Your CoC point of contact should be able to help recruit individuals with experience as direct service providers who are well versed in homeless services and allocations. You can view the listing of [CoC point of contacts by geographic area](#). It is critical that people with lived experience are centered in the engagement process to ensure that programs and policies are shaped by the populations homeless systems serve.

**Center Intersectionality in Your Analysis:** Systems transformation is more effective when communities address interdependent systems of oppression and injustice. For example, data shows that Black women with low incomes are

A Coordinated Investment Plan documents the community or state's plan to strategically align and commit resources from multiple funders or sources to fund a community's rehousing strategy developed through a collaborative planning process.

evicted at higher rates than other racial groups and should be targeted for prevention measures.<sup>1</sup> Also, transgender-identified people face more discrimination in housing than non-transgender people, but Black transgender-identified people face the highest rates of discrimination and violence, which should be considered in service delivery. When coordinating your community response, amplify the voices of those whose insight reflects multiple identities. Doing so requires the team to take intersectionality into consideration not only in their analysis, but also in your stakeholder engagement. Do not force people belonging to multiple identities to speak to all facets of themselves; instead, when the insight is offered, allow it to broaden your understanding of the people experiencing homelessness.

***Pay People for their Expertise:*** Paying people belonging to key populations for their expertise and contribution demonstrates understanding of the value they bring to this work as experts. ESG-CV and CoC planning resources can be used to compensate people who participate in the planning process. Avoid tokenizing people by having an entire planning team that is truly representative of the populations you serve.

***Develop a Mission Statement Rooted in Racial Justice:*** Start your work by developing a mission statement that exhibits a commitment to racial justice. When the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) launched an Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness, they started the process with a guiding statement that provided the basis for the committee's final recommendation. Their objective was to eliminate racial disparities impacting Black people experiencing homelessness by ensuring racial equity within the homeless crisis response system. They also defined racial equity as the condition achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares.<sup>2</sup> Talking through your mission leads to shared understanding and ensures that everyone plays a part in determining what equitable outcomes look like for your community. The group should revisit the statement throughout the process to ensure your work is consistently grounded in equity.

<sup>1</sup> See the MacArthur Foundation's policy brief, [Poor Black Women are Evicted at Alarming Rates, Setting Off a Chain of Hardship](#) and Colorlines' article, "[Study: Women of Color Living in Poverty Face Highest Risk of Eviction.](#)"

<sup>2</sup> See LAHSA's [Report and Recommendations of the Ad Hoc Committee on Black People Experiencing Homelessness](#) for additional information on their planning process and a full list of recommendations.