

COVID-19

Homeless System Response: Rapid Expansion of HMIS: Things to Consider

As part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, many communities will receive significant one-time allocations of funding through the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program, referred to as “ESG-CV” funds, that can be used to quickly rehouse individuals and families experiencing homelessness and disproportionately at risk of COVID-19. ESG-CV recipients and subrecipients will need to record data about those assisted with ESG-CV funds in their Continuum of Care (CoC)’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Here are several key pieces to consider when rapidly expanding your data collection system.

Connect ESG Recipients and HMIS Leads

ESG recipients will need to ensure their subrecipients have licenses and user accounts to enter client data in HMIS. To do so, they will need to understand how the HMIS is structured in their communities. Different implementations of HMIS have different cost structures, governance standards, and user agreements. HMIS Lead contact information is listed on the HUD Exchange [here](#).

HMIS Leads will need to know about all projects awarded ESG-CV funds to ensure proper project setup and reporting. Clear communication between the ESG recipient and HMIS Lead will be critical to a successful reporting process.

Funding Allocation Decisions

When budgeting and authorizing uses for the ESG-CV funds, ESG recipients should consider costs associated with data collection, subrecipient monitoring, HMIS technical support, and reporting. Costs to consider are:

ESG-CV Reporting

ESG-CV funds require more frequent report submissions and shift the HMIS reporting burden from ESG subrecipients to the HMIS Leads, which will be an unanticipated strain on HMIS Lead’s staffing and system resources.

New HMIS Organizations, Projects, Users

HMIS Leads will need to be able to quickly add new organizations, projects, and users to the system. This will require HMIS Leads to enter into agreements with new organizations, properly set-up new projects, secure additional user licenses, and train the new users on the system. The number of trainings available may need to increase to meet the demand for influx of new users. Online trainings may need to be developed or enhanced for rapid expansion. Agencies may also need funds to support user training and data collection support.

HMIS Monitoring

All ESG-CV funded projects must be regularly monitored for data quality, in line with the CoC’s Data Quality Management Plan. Poor data quality can lead to ESG-CV reports being rejected and will cause major inaccuracies in system-level reports if not immediately addressed. The HMIS Lead and ESG recipient may need additional staff to manage an effective data quality monitoring process.

HMIS Support

Increased participation in HMIS will require additional helpdesk support. HMIS Leads will need to keep response times reasonable, and should consider additional avenues of providing support, such as hosting office hours for new users and regular refresher trainings.

Support for Comparable Databases

Victim services providers **must** record data on clients served within projects they operate using a comparable database. To be truly comparable, it must be a relational database that meets all HMIS Data Standards and the minimum standards of HMIS privacy and security requirements, including HUD’s most recent reporting standards and comma separated value (CSV) format specifications.

Then aggregate project-level reports will need to be shared with the ESG recipient to be consolidated for HUD reporting purposes. The [Comparable Database Decision Tree](#) helps communities understand who should and should not be utilizing a comparable database for recording and reporting client-level data to funding partners. Victim service providers may need to consider if they will need resources to program the required ESG-CV reports, and ESG recipients may need additional reporting resources to merge and produce the required report.