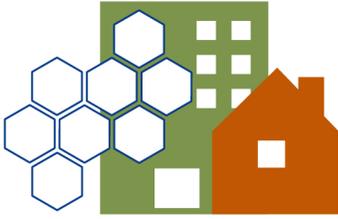




## 2. Identifying and Engaging with Key Partners for System Modeling Guide

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## Introduction

This guide to identifying and engaging community members to participate in the system modeling process is the second in a set of eight guides that are part of the **System Modeling Toolkit**. It comes after the community has oriented themselves to the system modeling process, defined its goal or purpose, and determined they are ready to begin (see [1. System Modeling Introduction](#)).

To begin the system modeling process, the first step is to form or identify a group to serve as the planning group. As mentioned in the System Modeling Introduction, this is the group of people determining the purpose, goals, and scope of the system modeling process. This could be an existing group in the CoC, such as the System Planning Committee, or a new group formed by representatives from the CoC, jurisdictions, private funders, and other key partners who are able to pull people together in support of a better homeless response system.

This guide is designed to provide the **system modeling planning group** with practical guidance on who else should be included in the system modeling process (key partner identification) and how to go about including them (outreach). The planning group will identify participants for the workgroup, the leadership group, and may also invite additional participants to join the planning group. The planning group will also select a facilitator to lead the workgroup. Depending on when the facilitator is selected, the facilitator may plan a role in identification and outreach. While this guide discusses identification and outreach to key partners, see [3. System Modeling Roles and Responsibilities](#) for guidance on how to organize the participants and what roles each should play.

*System modeling **key partners** are individuals and groups that have expertise or influence or are affected by homelessness and the local homeless response system, and so need to be included in rethinking it.*

Key partners understand the needs of people experiencing homelessness in the community and what services and projects are most likely to meet those needs. They include people with lived expertise of homelessness and direct service providers. They also can include other community members with knowledge of the homeless response system or the particular needs of people in the system; for example, advocates and representatives from related systems such as child welfare or health care. Finally, they can include individuals and groups that are in positions of power and influence over policy decisions and funding of the homeless response system, such as elected officials and funders.

This guide also addresses specific considerations for inclusion in system modeling of people with lived expertise.

*A **person with lived expertise** is a person who has direct, personal experience of homelessness.*



Once key partners have been identified, the planning group can reach out to individuals and group representatives to participate in the system modeling process. For potential partners that have not been previously involved in Continuum of Care (CoC) activities, the planning group might need to do some additional engaging and relationship building first.

**Outreach** is the process of identifying, engaging with, and inviting potential partners to participate in, provide feedback on, or implement recommendations of the system modeling process.

Outreach goals and strategies will vary depending on the individual or group and the purpose of the system modeling work.

## Identifying Key Partners

The aim of system modelling is to make the most informed and intentional decisions about how the homeless response system could be made to serve people efficiently, effectively, and equitably. To do that, it is vital to identify, seek out, and engage individuals and groups that interact most with the system, as well as those that are most affected by homelessness. In other words, the people closest to the problem are closest to the solution and should be included in the workgroup. One step out from them are others with expertise and insight to bring to the process, such as service providers, advocates, and researchers.

It is also important to identify and engage with individuals and institutions in positions to influence policies and funding decisions for the homeless response system. Engaging with them at the beginning of the system modeling process by including them in a leadership group will increase the likelihood that they will adopt and implement its results and recommendations. See the [8. System Modeling Results and Implementation Guide](#) for more information on that final stage.

### Essential Partners

- People with lived expertise of homelessness; that expertise will be different for each person, based on their specific experience of being homeless and their interactions with the homeless response system.
- Service providers, including frontline staff and organizational leaders:
  - Street outreach.
  - Emergency shelter.
  - Rapid rehousing.
  - Permanent supportive housing.
  - Prevention/diversion/housing problem solving.
  - Victim service providers.
  - Faith-based providers.



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- Staff representative of the [coordinated entry](#) lead agency or a member of the coordinated entry committee.
  - Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) lead or system administrator.
  - CoC lead.
  - City/county agencies that fund or administer housing or shelter projects.
  - Elected officials.
  - Homeless service advocates.
  - Public and private funders.
  - Public housing authorities.

### Potential Additional Partners

These individuals and organizations operate outside of the homeless response system but serve a clientele that includes people experiencing homelessness or they have other relevant perspectives and expertise. Which among them to engage will depend on what population the system modeling is targeting. Additional partners to consider:

- Health care providers.
- Mental health and behavioral health care providers.
- Child welfare.
- Mainstream benefits providers.
- Criminal justice, re-entry system.
- Education, including higher education.
- Local or national culturally specific and LGBTQ+ organizations.
- Food pantry or meal providers.
- Legal services.
- Other low-income service providers.
- Youth organizations.
- Employment or vocational services.
- Public safety.
- Peer-support programs.
- Collective impact agencies.
- Interfaith groups.
- Researchers

### Additional Considerations for Identifying Potential Key Partners

- Use local data to identify groups that disproportionately experience homelessness and groups who the homeless response system does not reach or serve well currently. For example, if the community had a many indigenous people experiencing homelessness, they should include representatives from area tribes and tribal service organizations in their system modeling work. See the [5. System Modeling Data Guide](#) for more information. Reach out to providers or other organizations that work with these populations.



- System modeling for a subpopulation should include individuals and organizations that have expertise in that population, and not limited to key partners working within the homeless system. For example, to inform a model of the ideal system for Veterans, key partners should include Veteran health care providers, but they would not be needed if modeling for youth.
- Rural or [Balance of State CoCs](#) should include key partners from each region or service area.

## Conducting Outreach

### Creating the Outreach Message

Different groups of potential partners likely will need customized outreach messages, as will the different system modeling roles. For example, a workgroup might meet much more frequently than a leadership group, and their tasks will be very different, so outreach should reflect the different levels of effort being requested.

Regardless of the type of individual or organization receiving the outreach, all outreach materials should describe:

- The purpose and mechanics of the system modeling process.
- The role the individual or organization is being invited to fill (workgroup, leadership group, etc.).
- Why the individual or organization should participate, and what unique perspective they will contribute.
- How and where system modeling meetings will be convened.
- The expected level of effort, both within meetings and between meetings.
- What compensation exists to enable participation.
- Whom to contact with questions.

### Selecting the Messenger

Those conducting outreach to potential partners must fully understand the outreach message and should be well versed in both the mechanics and the purpose of the system modeling process. They should have appropriate language, technical, and cultural competency skills to successfully engage the targeted individuals and organizations.

When possible, the messenger should be well known to and trusted by the outreach target. Particularly when engaging subgroups traditionally underrepresented in decision making, using a trusted messenger can ensure that the outreach is being conducted by someone who knows and understands the diverse and complex needs of that specific subgroup. Because trauma, including racial trauma, is both a cause of homelessness and an effect of homelessness and the homeless response system, a [trauma-informed approach](#) is critical in outreach and engagement and all steps of the system modeling process.



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## Sending the Message

Community partners can help with reaching new key partners by:

- Allowing access to their mailing lists for mailings from the system modeling process.
- Having their leaders send out notices on behalf of the process.
- Posting notices to their websites or social media.
- Co-hosting events (e.g., the facilitator/planning group and the domestic violence coalition co-hosting a system modeling workgroup meeting).

## Inclusion of People with Lived Expertise

Input from people with lived expertise of homelessness—who have themselves been homeless—is critical to develop relevant solutions that work best for the people in the community. Including people with lived expertise in every step of the system modeling process ensures that decisions made about the homeless response system are directly informed and influenced by the people it is meant to serve.

People with lived expertise of homelessness have a perspective on the system and the community of people experiencing homelessness that no other individual or group can bring to the table. They can provide firsthand experience about the effectiveness and impact of the current system and what would have worked better to meet their needs. They also are able to speak firsthand about trauma, stigma, and discrimination they might have faced within the system, to help others better understand potential unintended consequences of the system design choices being made.

It is imperative to engage key partners who reflect the populations most affected by homelessness locally, including not just those being served but those who are unserved by the local homeless response system. For example, in every U.S. state, Black people are [more likely to experience homelessness than are White people](#). Therefore, it is essential that Black people are considered and treated as vital in a system's decision making and strategic planning.

The planning group/facilitator should include people with lived expertise that represent other populations disproportionately affected by homelessness or underserved by their homeless response system, including but not limited to:

- People who are lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other (LGBTQIA+).
- People whose primary language is not English.
- People who are Indigenous or a member of a Tribal Nation.
- People who are undocumented.



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## Supporting Participation of People with Lived Expertise

People with lived expertise can face material and access barriers to fully participating in the system modeling process. The [Facilitation Guide](#) includes strategies to ensure an inclusive, equitable, and impactful workgroup process. Here are some things the planning group should consider to support full participation of people with lived expertise, as well as participation of any other individuals facing barriers:

- Identify a person to serve as a point of contact to meet accessibility and other needs of workgroup participants, including access to technology for communication and participation in virtual meetings.
- Make meeting content accessible to people with a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, skills, and knowledge. Speak and write in plain language; particularly, avoid jargon and overuse of acronyms (e.g., for programs or agencies) and define any jargon or acronyms used.
- Provide training for all stakeholders, especially those who may not be familiar with program language, data points, funding processes, etc. To help facilitate meaningful participation, provide access to materials in advance and match new participants with group members who can clarify or answer any questions about those materials.
- Provide additional supports as needed, such as food or childcare during meetings and transportation vouchers or reimbursement.
- Compensate participants adequately for their time, as any other subject matter expert would be. Compensate for meeting time as well as work completed between meetings.

Engagement with key partners should be ongoing throughout the system modeling process. Additional key partners might need to be identified and added to address gaps in representation and participation that become evident at later steps.

## Additional Resources

- [Using Stakeholder Input in Consolidated Planning](#) [booklet]
- [Integrating Persons with Lived Experiences in Our Efforts to Prevent and End Homelessness](#) [website]
- [Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise](#) [information sheet]