



PLEE FACING RECRUITMENT AND COMPENSATION

PURPOSE

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)¹ expects Continuums of Care (CoCs)² and community partners to work with persons with lived experience and expertise (PLEE)³ of homelessness to create and improve local homeless response systems. This type of partnership is called *engagement* or *engaging with persons with lived experience*.

This document assumes you are someone with lived experience of homelessness. It is meant to be a starting point to help you figure out if an engagement opportunity in your community meets your goals and needs in ways that make you feel safe, respected, and heard.

For the rest of the document, we will use the term PLEE because this is the term CoCs are most likely to use in their interactions with you when talking about people with lived experience of homelessness.

WHY DATA FROM PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERTISE IS IMPORTANT

You might wonder why your CoC is reaching out to you in the first place. CoCs and community partners understand that engaging with PLEE means their homeless response systems are designed with input by people who experienced or continue to experience them firsthand. Systems with this level of input are more just and fair for those that experience them. This is especially true when CoCs meaningfully engage with you and others from the beginning and at all points of the decision-making and systems-planning process.

When making decisions to change or improve their response systems, CoCs often rely on data. Data about persons experiencing homelessness is collected through local databases such as a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)⁴. The information collected could include demographics, length of time homeless, income, and referrals. This data helps communities identify the greatest differences in access, services, prioritization, referrals, and housing. But this type of data does not always reveal *why* communities see certain results or how people personally experience the system.

This is where qualitative data comes in. Qualitative data represents the stories, experiences, knowledge, and the real people behind the numbers in systems data. It can help answer the “why.” By sharing your experiences, expertise, and ideas, you can help shape the response systems in your community. Your input can ultimately impact your life and the lives of others in similar situations.

WHY ENGAGEMENT CAN BE DIFFICULT

Though there are benefits to engaging with your CoC and it can be personally rewarding, there is no denying the work is hard. CoC leadership must be willing to give up control and acknowledge past missteps that took away the power and voice from the people accessing their services. These missteps⁵ could include:

- Not sharing decision-making power with you and others
- Relying on one-off efforts such as listening sessions and surveys
- Consistently structuring engagements so that you and others are only brought in at the end to give feedback on work already done
- Appearing to only engage people with lived experience so they can check a box on a funding application or other requirement

Traditional engagement favors those who have the time to give feedback over those who don't. Providing your time takes away from other responsibilities. This can be true even if you are paid fairly for your engagement work. This can be true even if you are provided flexible options for when and how to participate. And this can still be true even if your CoC is following best practices for engaging PLEE. Some resources on best practices for PLEE engagements can be found [here on the HUD Exchange website](#).

During engagement work, you may also experience:

- Reliving trauma as you share your experiences
- Feeling like you are included just to “check off a box” for the CoC
- Frustration that your work is not leading to expected impact
- Pushback or denial from the CoC over your experiences and feedback

It is the CoC's responsibility to ensure there are policies and practices in place to make partnering with you and others meaningful, safe, and respectful. And we recognize that even with the right policies in place, engagement work can still be difficult.

Engaging with PLEE is often a new area for CoCs. This may be the first time the CoC is engaging with PLEE, and they are learning along with you. This does not mean you should suffer unfair treatment or that you should not speak out if it occurs. Your safety and well-being should be a major factor in deciding if participating (or continuing to participate) in an engagement is right for you.

If it looks like the CoC is doing their best to implement best practices, are learning from past mistakes, and are sincere in getting your feedback, please be patient and consider helping them get to that standard. This effort should be a partnership where everyone is working together for the common purpose of preventing and ending homelessness in your community.

But we also want to make clear that it is okay to say, “No, I do not want to participate in this engagement.” You can choose not to participate for any reason. *The decision not to participate in an engagement will not impact your ability to continue to receive the housing and services you are currently receiving or will apply for in the future.*

YOU SHOULD BE PAID FOR YOUR WORK⁶

In the past, PLEE have been expected to donate or volunteer their time while others around the table are paid. When you choose to partner with a CoC, you should be compensated fairly for that work. CoCs should be clear and upfront with you about payment before the work begins. There should also be discussions about when and how you prefer to be paid. These conversations are especially important if you have concerns about how payments may have tax implications or affect your eligibility for public benefits.

Payment methods can include compensation in the form of:

- Cash
- Money order
- Checks
- ACH transfers (direct deposit)
- Payment apps: Zelle, Cash App, PayPal, Venmo

When considering payment options, it’s important to remember that filling out a W-9 can impact income sources such as public benefits. Any compensation, including payment by gift cards, totaling over \$599 requires the issuance of an IRS Form 1099-NEC.

WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH YOUR COC⁷

Engagement can and should look different across communities. Each community has unique issues that need the insight of persons with lived experience to solve. This means there are a lot of ways in which you can partner with your CoC.

Engagement work can be very short (a one-time commitment that lasts one or two hours) or very long (several months or years). It can also have many entry and exit points, meaning persons with lived expertise are brought into the work at different points. We’ve included in this section a list of some common engagement roles along with the work these roles typically do during engagements, and hourly compensation ranges.

COMPENSATION RANGES

The hourly compensation ranges provided in the table below are based on 2022 data from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics’ Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics program](#). (More information about how the ranges were created can be found in [Appendix A of the CoC Facing Compensation Document](#).) The ranges are meant to be used as a guideline for what your time

is worth based on what your CoC is asking you to do. *The payment your CoC offers might not fall within the ranges.* If what the CoC offers is lower than the range for a specific role, this does not automatically mean the CoC is purposefully lowballing you.

The compensation that CoCs offer to PLEE partners can vary regionally, from state to state, and from one CoC to another. A CoC's capacity, funding, whether the engagement is short-term or long-term, and the local job market all impact payment options and ranges for an engagement. Some CoCs may offer benefits packages for longer engagements that would add additional value to the compensation rate offered.

Regardless of the exact amount, consider if the compensation offered by the CoC (including any benefits packages) is enough for you to meaningfully participate in the engagement.

TYPES OF ROLES

Some engagement roles focus on feedback such as weighing in on a local policy or practice as a consultant or providing public testimony of your experiences with the local homeless response system as a storyteller. Other roles are more technical where you might analyze data or help create a tool or product for your community. There are supportive types of roles, too, such as mentoring PLEE peers or working as CoC staff.

Built into each role is the opportunity to provide your insight and expertise as someone who has experienced homelessness firsthand. A CoC may not have all of the roles listed below for the engagement. Some engagements only use one type of role while other engagements use several. If a role on the list resonates with you but isn't currently part of the engagement, you can ask the CoC if there are ways you can fill that role either in the current engagement or in another engagement.

Not all roles have decision-making power. For example, you may be asked to be an advisor on a specific CoC policy, but you may not have the final say in decisions made about that policy. You may be asked to sit on the CoC Board, but you will not have the power to change the HUD definition of homelessness. CoCs should be upfront with you on the goals and limitations of the engagement and how your role will make an impact.

No matter the role, the CoC should strive to ensure you feel seen and valued as you lend your expertise. The CoC's goal should be to engage in ways that both meet you where you are and permit long-term relationship building, as you partner in this work.

ROLE	DESCRIPTION	WHAT THEY DO	COMPENSATION RANGE
Advisor	Provides information, feedback, and ideas related to a specific program, policy, or research area either as part of a group or as an independent consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Committees ● Workgroups ● Advisory Boards ● Review and feedback of work products 	\$29–\$54 per hour
Data Analyst	Collects, cleans, and interprets data sets to answer a question or solve a problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Research and evaluation ● Data analysis 	\$17–\$35 per hour
Leadership	Serves in leadership roles within organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Director/CEO of organizations that focus on or intersect with homelessness ● Organization management and coordination ● CoC Board 	\$24–\$52 per hour
Peer Mentor	Acts as a point person to help with questions, concerns, support, and regular, respectful check-ins for other persons with lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check-in facilitation ● Mentoring and coaching other PLEE ● PLEE-to-CoC liaison 	\$13–\$24 per hour
Staff	Works as a fully integrated member of the CoC/agency either as an employee or as a contractor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training and technical assistance ● Grant monitoring ● Research and evaluation ● Project management and coordination ● Mentoring and coaching other staff 	\$13–\$24 per hour
Storyteller	Shares insights and context about a problem or issue and/or educates outsiders about cultural experiences and perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listening sessions ● Interviews ● Surveys ● Public testimony 	\$29–\$54 per hour
Trainer/ Researcher	Collaborates on the creation, implementation, and/or oversight of products, programs, policies, practices, and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training and technical assistance ● Materials development ● Research and evaluation ● Consultation 	\$36–\$98 per hour

ENGAGEMENTS SHOULD BE FAIR⁸

HUD provides resources and outlines best practices for CoCs that engage with PLEE. HUD's expectation is that CoCs approach engagement work in ways that are fair, trauma-informed, and collaborative. When you participate in an engagement, the time and effort you put in should be supported by the right level of tools, resources, and payment by the CoC. These are conversations the CoC should already be having with you before an engagement begins.

Below is a table that lists some key practices of engagement work. The first column has questions you can ask your CoC to get a clearer picture of what the engagement is like and what the CoC offers in terms of payment and resources. The CoC's answers will help you judge if the engagement is more or less fair to you, and that your needs during the engagement will be met. You should feel empowered to ask questions and receive additional insight if you are told a suggestion is not possible.

The second column lists fair, best practices for engagements, and the third column lists unfair engagement practices. Some potential next steps that you can take are included.

It is important to recognize that what most CoCs do falls somewhere in the middle of the "Fair" and "Unfair" columns in the chart. How a CoC approaches these key pieces of engagement work may not reach best practice status. But it may not be grossly unfair either. What a CoC is able to provide you and others during an engagement is often tied to its own funding, staffing, and governing structures.

Compensation

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Will I get paid for my work during this engagement? ● If so, what are the compensation rates for this specific role? ● If I have questions about payment affecting my benefits, who can I talk to? 	<p>The CoC provides monetary compensation to PLEE who are not staff at rates that are comparable to industry standards for other types of experts.</p> <p>The CoC is open and clear about compensation rates and in what ways PLEE partners can be paid before the engagement begins.</p> <p>The CoC has a dedicated staff member who can answer questions about payment and benefit impacts, or the CoC connects PLEE partners to Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations.</p>	<p>The CoC does not provide monetary compensation to PLEE who are not staff, or if compensation is provided, it is at a rate below industry standards for other types of experts.</p> <p>The CoC does not talk about compensation before the engagement begins or may be inflexible in the ways PLEE partners are paid.</p> <p>The CoC does not have a dedicated staff member who can answer questions about payment and benefit impacts, or the CoC does not connect PLEE partners to Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) locations.</p>
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Decide if the compensation being offered (if any) is enough for your work in the engagement. ● If the CoC provides multiple ways they can pay PLEE partners, decide which one is right for you. ● If the CoC is limited in how they pay PLEE partners, provide feedback to the CoC about the way(s) in which you would prefer to be paid for your work. ● Work with CoC staff to answer questions you have about when and how payments are made and if there are impacts to any benefits you receive. 		

Orientation Materials

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What kinds of orientation materials are available to me before the engagement begins? 	<p>The CoC provides detailed orientation, background, or preparation materials for PLEE partners before the engagement begins.</p>	<p>The CoC does not provide orientation, background, or preparation materials for PLEE partners before the engagement begins or the materials provided are insufficient for full PLEE inclusion.</p>
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss with CoC staff where, how, and when materials can be accessed. If lack of materials and background information has you feeling lost, talk with the CoC. There is a good chance other PLEE partners feel the same. The CoC may not realize there are gaps in their orientation materials. 		

Resources

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What resources are provided for PLEE who participate in this engagement? Who can I ask if I need a specific resource or service? 	<p>The CoC asks what resources people need in order to participate (child care, transportation, technology assistance, mental health services).</p> <p>The CoC has a designated staff person or PLEE peer mentor to answer questions about specific resources or needs.</p>	<p>The CoC assumes or does not ask what resources people need to participate.</p> <p>The CoC does not have a designated staff person or PLEE peer mentor to answer questions about specific resources or needs.</p>
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a list of resources that you need that would make it easier for you to fully participate in the engagement. 		

- Talk with CoC staff to see if there are any specific steps or documentation needed to get those resources from the CoC.
- If the CoC is not able to provide the resources and services you need to fully participate, decide if participating in the engagement at this time makes sense for you.

Impact

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When and how will I know if my work had any impact? 	<p>The CoC has a plan to follow up after the engagement to report what impact the participant's feedback had, and, if relevant, communicate why input may not have impacted changes.</p>	<p>The CoC does not have a clear plan to follow up with PLEE partners after the engagement to report how feedback was or will be used.</p>
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for the CoC to provide you a meeting schedule that includes follow-up meetings. • If there is a specific way you want the CoC to follow up with you (for example, in-person, virtually, or in writing), talk about this with CoC staff to see if the CoC can accommodate that request. 		

Emotional Support

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will emotional support be provided during the engagement? • If it is provided, is it by someone with lived expertise? 	<p>The CoC has a person or group of people who are trained and receive CoC support to provide emotional support to PLEE partners when sharing stories or processing data. This emotional support structure is either led by a PLEE peer mentor or has been informed by PLEE feedback.</p>	<p>The CoC does not provide emotional support to PLEE and still expects them to share their stories or process data even if doing so could result in reliving traumatic experiences.</p>

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

- Talk with CoC staff about how to get emotional support during the engagement if you need it.
- If this is of interest to you, ask if the CoC is willing to share the training materials given to their emotional support staff.
- If emotional support is not provided and this is something you are both interested in and the CoC has shown they are willing to provide ongoing support and training, either consider becoming a PLEE peer mentor.
- If emotional support is not provided, you may decide participating in the engagement is not right for you at this time.

Methods of Participation

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Are there different days and times that I can choose to participate? ● If I can't come in-person, are there other ways for me to engage? 	<p>The CoC offers a variety of days/times and ways to participate (in-person, virtually, in writing, through social media).</p> <p>Meeting places for the engagement are spaces PLEE partners feel comfortable and safe to be in.</p> <p>The locations are either near public transit and easy to get to or PLEE partners are given assistance to get to the meeting place if needed.</p>	<p>The CoC has only one or a set of fixed ways to participate and schedules meetings at times, in places, or in ways that make it difficult or impossible for PLEE to engage.</p>

POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS

- Decide if the meeting times and locations work for you, and if they don't, talk with the CoC to see about other options.
- If there is a specific way you would prefer to participate (in-person, virtually, in writing, through social media, or another way), discuss this with the CoC.
- Make suggestions to the CoC about meeting locations that are more accessible to you and other PLEE partners.

Expectations

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How much time (in hours or days) will I be expected to give during this engagement? • When does the engagement start and end? 	<p>The CoC provides a clear timeline of when the engagement begins and ends for PLEE partners along with meeting schedules, and other dates that are important to the engagement.</p> <p>If the time commitment for an engagement is different depending on the PLEE role, the CoC is upfront about those differences.</p>	<p>The CoC does not provide clear expectations for how long the engagement will last or how much time PLEE would need to give to fully participate in their specific role.</p>
POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide if the amount of time the CoC is asking of you is something you can commit to. • If you can't commit to the amount of time the CoC is asking but would still like to participate, talk with the CoC to see if there are other ways you can join the engagement or if you can participate with a reduced time commitment. • Ask the CoC to give you a timeline for the whole engagement including when it begins, when it ends, meeting dates, and any other important dates that are relevant to the engagement. 		

Decision-Making Authority

QUESTIONS FOR YOUR COC	FAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES	UNFAIR ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the role you are asking me to fill have any decision-making power? • If not, what are other impacts I can expect to see by providing my time in this role? 	<p>The CoC is open about whether PLEE partners are making final decisions on things like local policies or how their community's homeless response system operates.</p> <p>If PLEE partners will not be making direct decisions, the CoC is open about how decisions are made. For example, PLEE feedback about their experience with the community's Coordinated Entry System may be taken back to a committee who reviews the feedback and decides on changes to policies regarding Coordinated Entry.</p>	<p>The CoC does not clearly communicate to PLEE partners if they have decision making power in their roles before the engagement begins.</p> <p>The CoC is not open about how final decisions are made, who is involved in those decisions, and what kind of impact the PLEE partnership has on those decisions.</p>
<h3>POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS</h3>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide if the role the CoC is asking you to fill is something you are interested in doing. • Describe to the CoC what impact you think your work and feedback will have. What changes or actions do you expect to see from the CoC once the engagement is over? Does that line up with the CoC's expectations for the engagement? • If you are interested in a role that has decision making power, talk with the CoC about other types of roles you might fill such as sitting on a committee. 		

ENDNOTES FOR TERMS, DEFINITIONS, AND RESOURCES

1. Department of Urban and Housing Development (HUD): The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development is one of the executive departments of the U.S. federal government. It administers federal housing and urban development laws.
2. Continuum of Care (CoC): A CoC can refer to a geographic region, a funding stream, or a governing body that collects information on housing projects within the homeless service system and the people they serve. A CoC is responsible for systems operations and planning.
3. Persons with lived experience/expertise (PLEE): An individual who has ever experienced homelessness or housing instability.
4. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A locally administered database which collects program and client level data about persons experiencing homelessness or at-risk of experiencing homelessness.
5. This list was adapted from [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Engaging Individuals with Lived Expertise](#). (HUD).
6. Information about compensation best practices were taken from [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Paying People with Lived Experience and Expertise](#). (HUD).
7. Some of the PLEE engagement roles in the table were adapted from [Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience](#). (ASPE, 2021).
8. Some of the engagement practices in the table were adapted from [What Does it Look Like to Equitably Engage People with Lived Experience?](#). (ASPE, 2022)