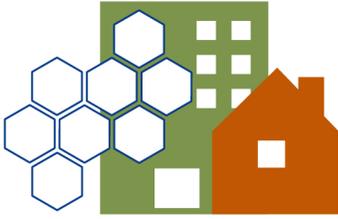




3. System Modeling Roles and Responsibilities Guide

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Contents

Introduction	1
Roles and Responsibilities	2
Three Core Groups	2
Additional Perspectives	3
The Facilitator Role	3
Facilitator Role with the Planning Group	4
Facilitator Role with the Workgroup	4
Facilitator Role with the Leadership Group	5
Administrative Support	6
Selecting a Facilitator	6
Key Attributes	6
Key Considerations in Selecting a Facilitator	7
Decision-Making Authority and Process.....	8
Relationship to the Continuum of Care.....	8
Decision-Making Protocols	9
Accountability for the Work.....	10



Introduction

This third guide of eight, part of the **System Modeling Toolkit**, comes after the community have oriented themselves to the system modeling process (see [1. System Modeling Introduction](#)) and have identified, engaged with, and invited key partners, creating a workgroup. The workgroup is diverse, inclusive, and demographically representative of the people experiencing homelessness in the community (see [2. Identifying and Engaging with Key Partners for System Modeling Guide](#)).

Within the context of system modeling, clarifying roles, responsibilities, and decision-making structures makes clear how the workgroup itself will operate and which entities external to the workgroup it is responsible to. This guide talks through the typical roles and their responsibilities in the system modeling process, and how decision making and accountability should be incorporated into it.

There are fundamental reasons why the system modeling process should establish clear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making practices:

- **To balance the weight of opinions and perspectives:** Key partners will enter the workgroup with various levels of systemic, positional, and personal power. Clear and equitable decision-making practices ensure that each workgroup participant has a voice in the process. They also increase the likelihood that the system model developed will represent the needs of the community and reflect current conditions. This also can increase trust in the process by ensuring that no one organization or part of the homeless response system unduly influences the planning process or outcome to its benefit.
- **To gain necessary buy-in:** It is vital to use the system modeling process to develop a plan that all the workgroup members can support. Defining the roles, responsibilities, and decision-making practices by which the system modeling process functions will create buy-in at all levels and engender trust and confidence in both the system modeling process and its outcome. Their buy-in paves the way to mobilize political support, funding, and successful implementation later.
- **To preserve and strengthen workgroup members' confidence:** Nothing distracts a workgroup or process more than having to deal with disgruntled or disengaged members who have lost confidence in it. Conversely, engaged and collaborative members benefit the process through social and emotional support – intangible but very valuable attributes that all groups and processes should strive to achieve and sustain.



Roles and Responsibilities

This section addresses the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the system modeling process. For more information on which individuals and groups to include in these various roles, see the [2. Identifying and Engaging with Key Partners for System Modeling Guide](#). The [4. System Modeling Facilitation Guide](#) addresses the role of the workgroup facilitator.

Three Core Groups

A community might end up naming their groups differently, but here are the main three groups of people to consider when planning a system modeling process. Each could be a pre-existing group leveraged for this purpose, or a new group established specifically for system modeling.

- **Planning Group:** These are the people determining the purpose, goals, and scope of the system modeling process. Tasks could include identifying key partners to include in the workgroup, determining timeline and scope of the system modeling, and selecting a facilitator.
- **Workgroup:** This team collaborates to develop the estimates, assumptions, and other inputs for the system model. Depending on the scope of the system modeling process, there might be multiple workgroups (e.g., one planning for individuals experiencing homelessness and one planning for families experiencing homelessness).
- **Leadership Group:** These people are the audience of the system modeling results and recommendations. They are in positions to influence policies and funding decisions for the homeless response system. This group could be as simple as the Continuum of Care (CoC) Board, but it could also include elected officials, funders, agency directors, and other leaders.

Part of planning for system modeling is determining which group (or other entity, such as the CoC) will be responsible for making recommendations, providing feedback or advice, and making decisions at each step of the process. For example, the planning group might decide which individuals and groups to invite into the workgroup and set the scope of the system model (e.g., a multi-year model for single adult households). The workgroup might decide on group agreements, meeting frequency, and data sources. The workgroup might make recommendations to the planning group of project types and pathways to include in the model. The planning group might provide feedback to the workgroup to guide the final model. The leadership group would determine resource investments and implementation timelines.

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each group will be an important component of their authentic engagement – and how they interact with any other entities involved. The [Responsibilities Matrix Template](#) is a good starting point for communities to clearly identify roles and assign responsibilities related to the system modeling process.



Additional Perspectives

A community's system modeling process can include additional roles for groups or individuals. Though the workgroup itself will be diverse in its membership and offer a variety of perspectives, expertise, and experience, broader community input should be sought throughout the process. The planning group or workgroup should determine how those others will be informed of the workgroup's progress and provided opportunities for input and feedback. Additionally, specific entities might want to be updated on the progress of the modeling work. For example, if the CoC Board wants regular updates, it will be important to determine how often to provide them and with what level of detail.

Incorporating additional perspectives and expertise at key points will help generate buy-in and trust in the overall process, as well as create opportunities for input and feedback from targeted groups. For example:

- Equity workgroup.
- Lived expertise committee.
- Data analyst(s).
- Provider forum.
- Youth action board.
- Domestic violence coalition.
- Funders collaborative.
- CoC membership.
- Performance improvement committee.

Example: The workgroup collaborates with the CoC to schedule roundtable sessions to solicit community feedback throughout the system modeling process. The topics for each roundtable are defined by the milestones laid out in the modeling plan.

See the [5. System Modeling Data Guide](#) for additional information about how the workgroup can use focus groups, interviews, or other qualitative data to inform the system modeling assumptions.

The Facilitator Role

The planning group will need to select a person to facilitate and lead the workgroup through the system modeling process. The facilitator might oversee the process, manage individual phases and steps of the process, facilitate specific planning meetings, or a combination of these activities. The following sections address how the facilitator interacts with each of the core groups.



Facilitator Role with the Planning Group

If a facilitator is part of the initial planning for system modeling, they could be involved in setting goals for the process, developing a project timeline, and identifying and reaching out to key partners. (See also [2. Identifying and Engaging with Key Partners for System Modeling Guide.](#))

During the system modeling process itself, the facilitator should meet regularly with the planning group to review the workgroup's progress, discuss any issues or questions that the workgroup has raised, and review and update the modeling plan as needed. Towards the end of the modeling process, the facilitator should review the initial modeling results with the planning group to get feedback on assumptions and review the results.

Facilitator Role with the Workgroup

Whether or not the facilitator is involved in planning the system modeling process, the primary role of the facilitator is to coordinate the process once it is underway and to facilitate the workgroup meetings.

The facilitator helps the workgroup:

- Understand and follow the steps of the system modeling process.
- Determine and adhere to a decision-making protocol.
- Identify needs for additional data or information; name who is responsible for getting the needed information (and when).
- Break down complex ideas into understandable terms; rephrase or explain language if necessary, so everyone can understand.
- Ensure that workgroup members with lived experience of homelessness get a fair share of time and access to participate, and that the group values their expertise.
- Engage with people across backgrounds and personality types. Ensure everyone has the opportunity to and feels comfortable with sharing their ideas, and that a few members don't dominate the discussion.

Managing group dynamics is a large part of the facilitator's role:

- Create group agreements and hold the group accountable to them ([link to template](#)).
- Create space for dialogue so that group members can focus on content. This includes managing time and the agenda and keeping things moving forward, but knowing when to deviate from the agenda to allow some exploratory discussions.
- Summarize and integrate ideas and questions raised by workgroup members. Analyze and organize topics that come up during discussions.



- Anticipate potentially difficult conversations and prepare members for open and productive discussion. Manage conflict. Help members work through conflicting ideas and find areas of common ground or agreements even when said differently.
- Monitor the “mood” and dynamics of a meeting, and step in to help if something isn't working. Be flexible and creative, and notice when a change is needed to increase participation or work through a challenging step.

Additional tasks to help workgroups run smoothly could be completed by the facilitator or delegated to someone else:

- Document key points, ideas, and decisions as they are shared (e.g., on a whiteboard or flip charts, where all meeting participants can see them).
- Reserve and set up a meeting space (in-person or virtual) and ensure all members can fully participate.
- Schedule meetings, send invitations, prepare meeting materials, and send follow-up information.
- Help connect the workgroup and others most directly taking part in the system modeling process with other community members who have an interest in the process (including homeless response system leadership, which could include political leaders).
- As appropriate, coordinate the multiple workgroups set up to complete the system modeling steps.

These workgroup facilitation activities can be carried out through different models. For example, two or more people could share the facilitator role and responsibilities. Choosing this approach makes communication between the facilitators critical, as is a clear, mutual understanding from the beginning of the division of responsibilities and an agreed-upon process for navigating any disagreements that might arise. Alternately, the administrative functions, such as note-taking, managing logistics, and timekeeping, could be delegated to other people.

Whatever model the planning group selects, a facilitator should not delegate the functions most critical to productive and equitable meetings, such as making sure all members can contribute ideas and helping to translate and summarize ideas shared.

Facilitator Role with the Leadership Group

In some communities the facilitator could be responsible for reporting to the leadership group about the system modeling process, its initial and final results, and its recommendations. In other communities, the facilitator might help the planning group prepare a presentation, but not be responsible for making it. See [8. System Modeling Results and Implementation Guide](#) for further discussion about engaging the leadership group.



Administrative Support

It might be the role of the facilitator to ensure the administrative functions for the workgroup are fulfilled. These functions include fully supporting the workgroup in their work by ensuring members receive agendas, taking minutes during meetings, assigning action items from meetings and providing timelines for completion, providing any technology to be used during workgroup meetings, scheduling meetings for days and times that meet the workgroup's needs, and ensuring the workgroup's members are aware of the deliverables and timelines as laid out in the modeling plan.

If the facilitator will not be supporting the workgroup in these ways, the workgroup should determine how those functions will be fulfilled, either within the workgroup itself or through outside support, such as from the CoC staff or from a CoC committee. Establishing how administrative functions will be carried out, and by whom, will help to ensure the workgroup keeps moving forward and is accountable. See the [4. System Modeling Facilitation Guide](#) for more information on this topic.

Example: The facilitator of the workgroup provides agendas for each meeting, and the workgroup establishes a rotation for taking notes during meetings. The workgroup member assigned with taking notes during any given meeting is also responsible for keeping track of action items that arise during it. The facilitator engages workgroup members to determine meeting days and times that work best for the group, as well as the technology they will use to attend virtually.

Selecting a Facilitator

Key Attributes

Below is a list of key qualities, skills, and characteristics a planning group will look for in a system modeling process facilitator. Someone can be a great facilitator even if they do not match every characteristic listed below. However, these are qualities that would help a person be successful in this role.

Facilitation Experience. Experience facilitating system processes will be particularly helpful. However, experience with the following can be beneficial, as well:

- Facilitating or running workgroups or meetings.
- Project management.
- Other oversight of groups or processes that involved multiple people and included a series of discussions and decisions.
- Conflict management.
- Racial equity impact analysis.

Subject Matter Knowledge. The facilitator role is focused on process. However, subject matter knowledge can be extremely helpful in the context of homeless response system modeling. Someone familiar with the following will be better able to support a



community through the process. If the selected facilitator does not have content expertise, they should consult or partner with others in the community who do.

- The community's homeless response system – its infrastructure and funding sources, major programs and providers, available resources, critical needs, and interpersonal dynamics.
- Common elements and best practices for implementing a homeless response system, including Housing First, trauma-informed care, coordinated entry, the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and system-level landlord engagement.
- Other aspects of the community that are relevant to homeless response; for example, politics, demographics, geography, other systems of care.
- [Targeted Universalism](#) and a [racial equity](#) framework to ensure that disparities are identified and addressed in modeling an ideal system.
- Authentic engagement with people with lived experience of homelessness.
- The system modeling process itself (see [1. System Modeling Introduction](#)).

Comfort with Data. The facilitator does not need to be a data analysis expert. However, they should feel comfortable with data and be able to do the following either directly or by partnering or consulting with someone who can:

- Access the data needed for the system modeling process.
- Explain the source(s) of data that are needed for the process.
- Respond to questions about data.
- Understand and explain the limitations of what data can tell people about a community's current system.
- Name what data points are needed to talk about addressing racial and other inequities through the system modeling process.

See [5. System Modeling Data Guide](#) for more information on the types of data analysis needed for system modeling.

Key Considerations in Selecting a Facilitator

The planning group will want to consider the following in selecting a facilitator.

- Who should select the facilitator?
- Should there be a formal search and application process?
- Should the community form its system modeling workgroup before selecting a facilitator so that the workgroup can take part in or oversee the selection? Conversely, should the facilitator be identified first and then play an active role in identifying and engaging key partners to assemble the workgroup?
- Are there local politics or homeless system dynamics that need to be navigated? Should the facilitator be an insider or someone outside the politics or the system?



- Are there well-known and trusted people in this space who would be good candidates? These might be people beyond “conventional” partners in the homeless system, especially those known and trusted by people experiencing homelessness.
- Is there a champion (a person or organization that can access resources for the system and who would add credibility to the modeling process) who could partner with the facilitator?
- Is the candidate a professional facilitator who will work as a consultant? Or will facilitating be in addition to their regular job; if so, will they be paid to facilitate? If the facilitator will be paid, who is paying them?
- Will the facilitator share some of the key responsibilities? If so, who will select the other person?
- Who will manage the facilitator and hold them accountable during the system modeling process?

Decision-Making Authority and Process

Relationship to the Continuum of Care

CoCs have documented governance protocols through their Governance Charter and bylaws that lay out how decisions are made on behalf of the CoC and at various levels: the CoC Board, CoC committees, and CoC workgroups, including ad hoc workgroups. Understanding what is already documented around roles, responsibilities, and decision-making practices can be a great starting point for the system modeling workgroup. If a CoC does not have clearly developed governance protocols, or if the system modeling workgroup sits outside of the CoC structure, this guide is meant to outline key considerations and best practices.

The CoC, the planning group, and the workgroup must come to a shared understanding of the decision-making authority and protocol for each as it relates to the system modeling process. If the workgroup is functioning on behalf of the CoC or a committee of the CoC, the decision-making authority of the workgroup will need to be specified. It will be beneficial to determine whether the workgroup is an advisory group, making recommendations back to the CoC to approve and adopt; or can the workgroup make decisions directly, on behalf of the CoC. The CoC's existing decision-making protocols can help inform how the workgroup operates in this regard. If the workgroup is not officially functioning on behalf of the CoC, it will be beneficial to determine how the completed work of the workgroup will be integrated into the CoC's overall homeless response system planning and funding.

Whether the CoC or another entity convened the workgroup to engage in system modeling, that entity should share with the workgroup the entity's values, priorities, and any other information that would be helpful in the system modeling process. This could be framed as a vision statement for the workgroup, to focus their work as they move



forward. The value that *no family be unsheltered*, for example, would mean that the model of the ideal system would have to ensure that there was sufficient family shelter capacity to accommodate all family households expected to be homeless at a point in time.

Here are two examples of system modeling structure and decision-making practices:

CoC Committee Example: The community's CoC is engaging in system modeling work with the priority of addressing family homelessness. The workgroup serves as a subcommittee of the CoC's System Performance Improvement Committee. The CoC's Governance Charter states that its committees vote on recommendations to bring back to the CoC Board for approval and adoption. In such a structure, this workgroup, functioning as a subcommittee of one of the CoC's committees, will be advisory, making recommendations to the CoC Board for it to review, approve, and adopt. The CoC's vision statement for this system modeling process is that *no family with children experiences unsheltered homelessness*. This vision helps the workgroup focus their work to create a system model that ensures sufficient emergency shelter capacity to accommodate all families with children expected to experience homelessness at any given point in time.

Community Example: A local organization that provides support services for youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or more (LGBTQIA+) is engaging in system modeling with the priority of strengthening the response to youth homelessness. The organization sits outside of the CoC structure. Its workgroup works with key partners, of which the CoC is one, and includes a member from the CoC's Youth Action Board (YAB). This structure provides the workgroup the authority to make decisions, with the local organization that convened the workgroup tasked with presenting the results of the modeling process to the CoC and community to determine next steps. The organization's vision statement for this system modeling process is that *LGBTQIA+ youth will not experience sheltered or unsheltered homelessness for longer than 30 days before being permanently housed*. This vision helps the workgroup focus their work to create a system model that ensures a sufficient amount and variety of permanent housing options.

Decision-Making Protocols

An important consideration is to determine how the workgroup will make decisions. Regardless of whether the workgroup is an advising body making recommendations back to the CoC or an independent, decision-making entity, it should discuss and determine how the workgroup will move through decision making. Here are two common decision-making models to consider.



Decision-Making Model	Pros	Cons
Consensus	All workgroup members must agree, which increases buy-in Discussions are facilitated to understand differing opinions	Workgroup members could feel compelled to agree with the majority to avoid conflict Consensus process is time-consuming
Majority Rule	Not all workgroup members must agree Can be more efficient	Workgroup members who do not agree with the majority could feel that their opinion was not valued Can end up with disgruntled members, which can undermine confidence in the process

The workgroup also needs to determine how decision making can occur when members are absent from a meeting where a decision must be made. For example, the workgroup could allow an alternate to attend in a workgroup member's absence.

Accountability for the Work

Whether the workgroup is inside or outside the CoC affects not only decision-making authority and protocols, but also which entity is accountable for the work done by the workgroup. Understanding which entity is accountable is important to ensuring that once completed, the work moves beyond the workgroup itself and leads to change within the homeless response system. It is the responsibility of the planning group to determine how the work ties back to and is communicated to CoC leadership and is incorporated into the homeless response system.