



Understand the Prioritization and Data Connection: Prioritization 101 March 30th, 2022

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Learning Objectives

Define prioritization and how it is different from assessment

Identify data that can be used in prioritization, moving beyond assessment tools

Understand how and when to evaluate prioritization schemes

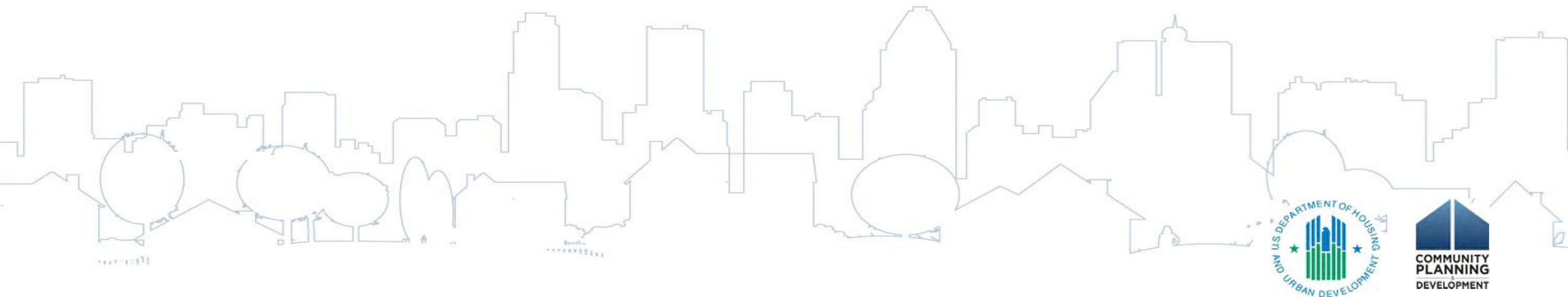
Poll: Which of these happen in your community?

1. Long list of people but few people are being assisted
2. Not enough of the specific resource(s) we need to help everyone who scores for it.
3. Routinely skipping over the highest need people without a plan to ensure they receive assistance.
4. List(s) quickly become out of date
5. Spend too long trying to locate people after assessment, or jump priority order to get to the people we can locate
6. Stakeholders (providers, funders, CE operator) don't have confidence in what the assessment score is indicating
7. The assessment process doesn't capture what is needed for eligibility – some people aren't eligible for the programs they are referred to
8. People are not prioritized because they are not document ready
9. People referred to housing tend to be more organized/resourceful; highest need persons fall through the cracks

Prioritization is Not Assessment

These challenges often occur as a result of conflating the assessment and prioritization processes—two distinct elements of coordinated entry

Understanding Prioritization



Assessment vs Prioritization

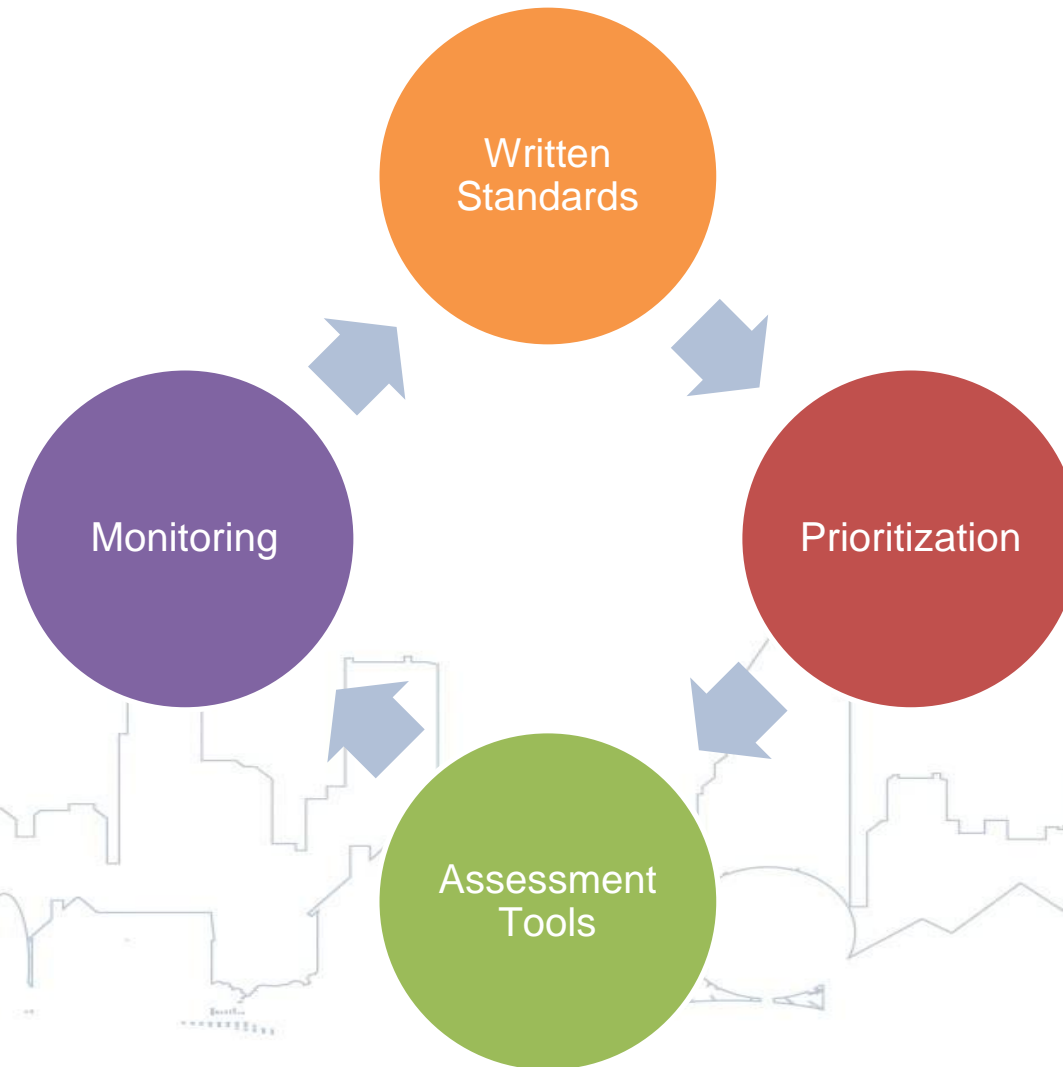
Assessment: What does the person need?

The process of documenting participant needs and strengths, identifying barriers to housing, and clarifying participant's preferences and goals

Prioritization: Who should the CoC serve first?

The process of identifying which households, among all those assessed, have the greatest needs and will therefore receive access to available housing and services within the CoC system

Prioritization and Assessment



Defining Prioritization

Prioritization = the process through which a person's needs and level of vulnerability are quantified *in relation to other people who are also seeking homeless assistance*.

Uses information learned from assessment and other sources

Manages the inventory of housing resources

Is equitable and standardized in approach

Ensures persons with the greatest need and vulnerability receive priority/access to the supports needed to resolve their housing crisis

Include all Individuals and Households

- Your prioritization should include all households seeking services (i.e., every client should have access to all resources for which they are eligible through Coordinated Entry)
- Ensure your community's prioritization scheme ranks those persons/households with the highest level of vulnerability, regardless of their subpopulation:
 - ✓ Single adults
 - ✓ Families with children
 - ✓ Unaccompanied youth
 - ✓ Survivors of domestic violence
 - ✓ Veterans
 - ✓ Those seeking homelessness prevention

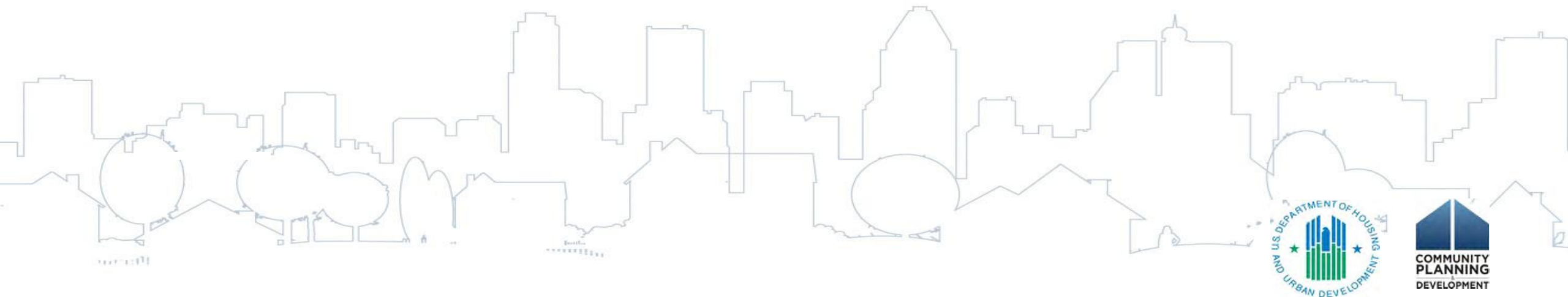
Prioritization Criteria

- Prioritization criteria may include any of the following factors:
 - ✓ Length of time experiencing homelessness
 - ✓ Severity of Service Needs
 - ✓ Linked/Engaged with Service/Treatment Provider
 - ✓ Vulnerability to Exploitation/Other Safety/Risk Factors
 - ✓ Other locally determined factors
- May be different for families, single adults, survivors of domestic violence, and persons seeking homelessness prevention services
- Prioritization policies should not be seen as static and should be refined as resources and needs begin to shift

Aligning Prioritization with Federal Civil Rights Laws, including Fair Housing Act

- CoCs are prohibited from using the prioritization process to discriminate based on *race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), familial status, and disability*
- It would be a violation of Fair Housing and federal civil rights laws if prioritization is based solely on a score produced by an assessment tool that consistently provides a higher score to persons with *specific* disabilities over those with other disabilities, or that provides scores that rely on membership in a protected class
- For more information, see HUD's FAQ:
<https://www.hudexchange.info/faqs/3464/my-coc-needs-to-prioritize-households-to-meet-the-requirements-of-hud>

Prioritization Data



Data on Prioritization Criteria

- No specific requirements around data points that must be used for prioritization
- Data used for prioritization is collected in the assessment phase of coordinated entry
- Sometimes data used for prioritization is originally gathered in a process not specific to coordinated entry (i.e. separate HMIS data)
- Sometimes data used for prioritization comes from outside of the homeless system through data sharing

Data On Hand

- Some prioritization criteria can be measured based on data in HMIS or elsewhere in the homeless system
- Matched administrative data
- Example: unsheltered status, used as an indicator of higher vulnerability
 - Enrollment in street outreach or shelter projects can confirm unsheltered or sheltered status
- Example: length of time homeless, used as an indicator of higher vulnerability and barriers to housing
 - Consider how to measure: Using the client's self-reported data? Or historical HMIS record? What are implications of each option?

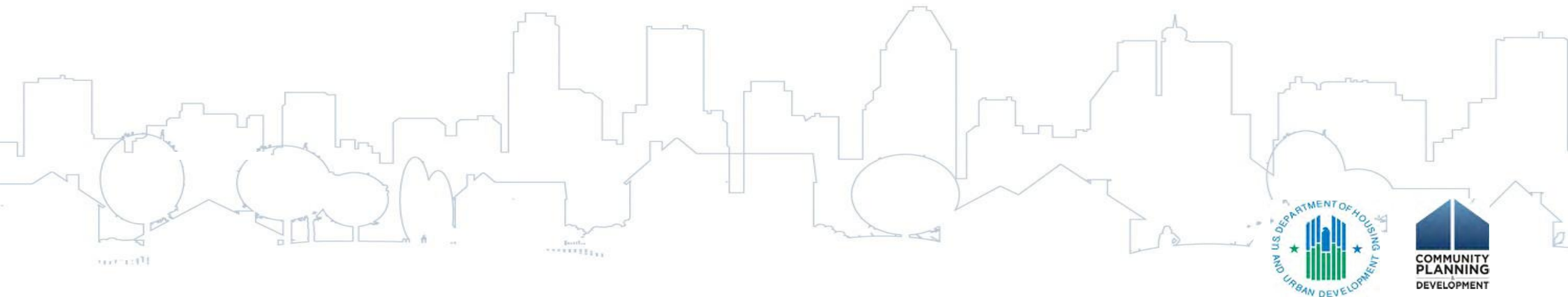
Assessment Tools

- Assessment tools are the most common data used for prioritization
- Assessment tools are questionnaires that gather information on numerous indicators of vulnerability and service barriers
- Most assessment tools have a numerical score based on questionnaire responses, and scores for all clients are entered on a list, with the highest scores most likely to be prioritized for housing
- Ensure proper training and resources to use assessment tools with fidelity
- **HUD does not require or recommend any specific assessment tool**

Data Sharing to Inform Prioritization

- Data sharing with other service providers outside of the homeless system is an advanced way to inform prioritization
- Need to ensure data privacy and security, and may need to obtain proper releases of information for data sharing
- Example: data on frequency of use of emergency services (hospitals, EMS, police), used as an indicator of vulnerability
- Example: court records on eviction filings or findings, used as an indicator of barriers to obtaining housing

Applying the Data: Methods of Prioritization



Methods of Prioritization

Static Prioritization

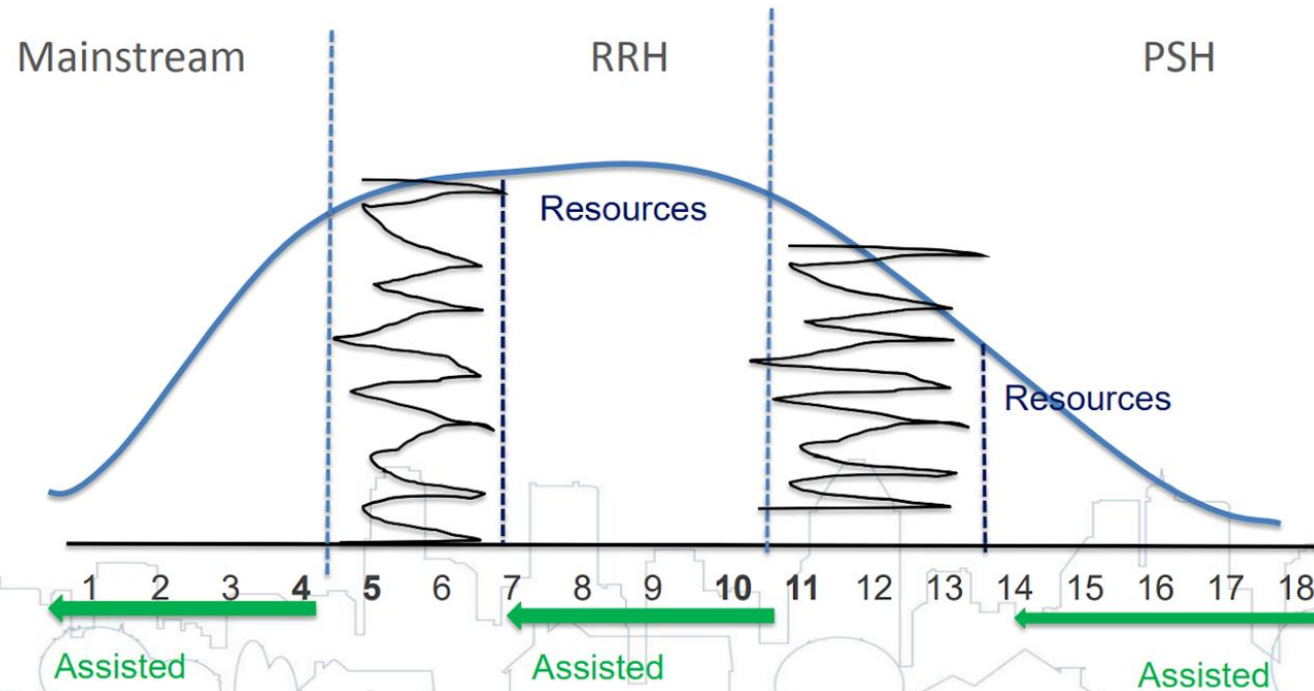
- Uses scores from initial assessment to determine the “most appropriate” intervention for that household and places person in queue for that intervention type
- People are placed in a static order on a “wait list” for a referral to an intervention type based on that score
- Does not consider resource availability; “matches” people to one specific intervention, often resulting in most vulnerable waiting the longest for housing

Dynamic Prioritization

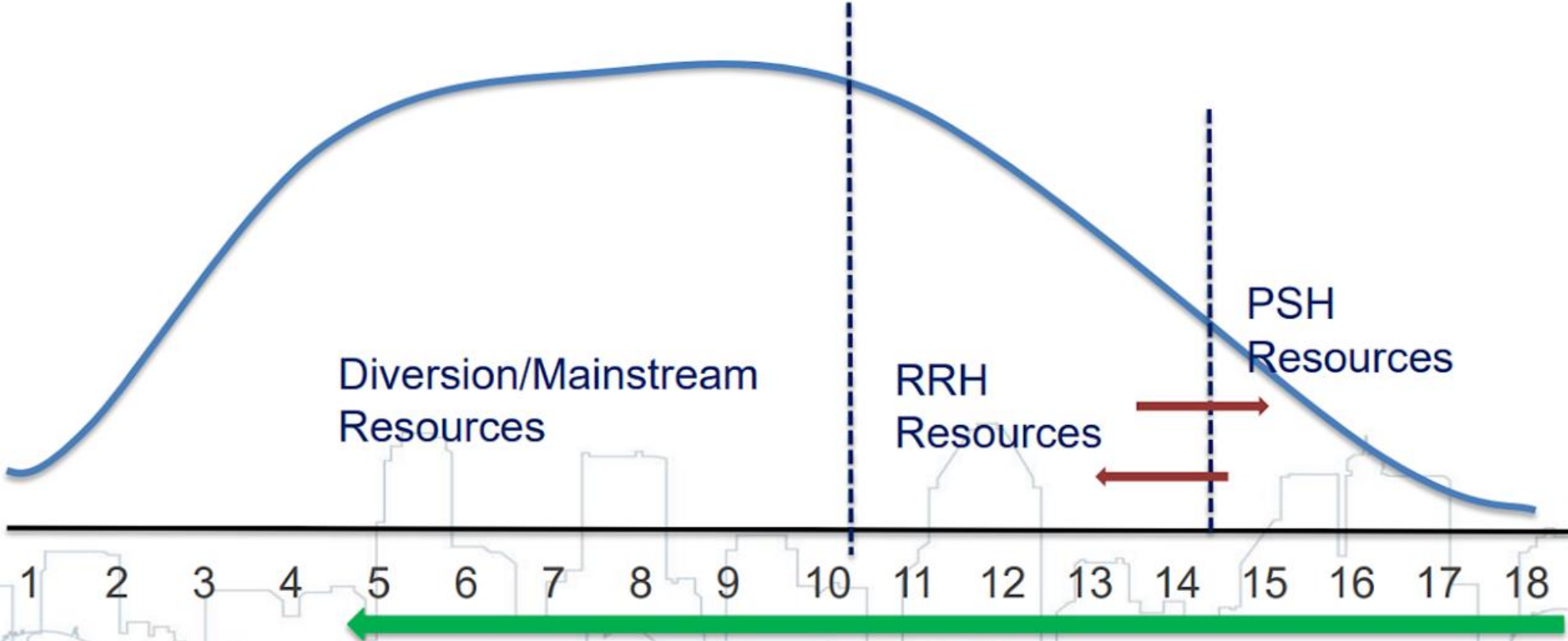
- Uses prioritization criteria to identify a pool of the most vulnerable clients based on the number of anticipated housing placements across all resources that will occur over a set period of time in the near future
- The number in the prioritized group is adjusted to the available inventory
- Those who are not prioritized are not on a waitlist for an intervention and are offered diversion/problem solving strategies or connected to mainstream resources

Results of Static Prioritization

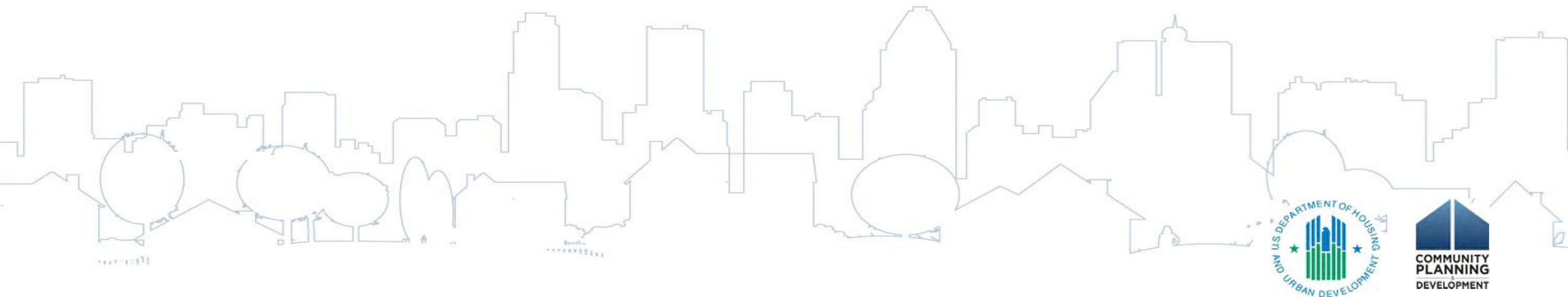
“Matching” to Specific Intervention Type



Results of Dynamic Prioritization



Ensuring Equity in Prioritization



Develop a Strategy Designed to Pursue Equity

Be honest about your local decision-making structures (who holds power?)

What are your community's goals?

Embrace an iterative process

How can data help understand your community and its needs?

Leverage housing problem solving

Continually revisit and revise

Execute change

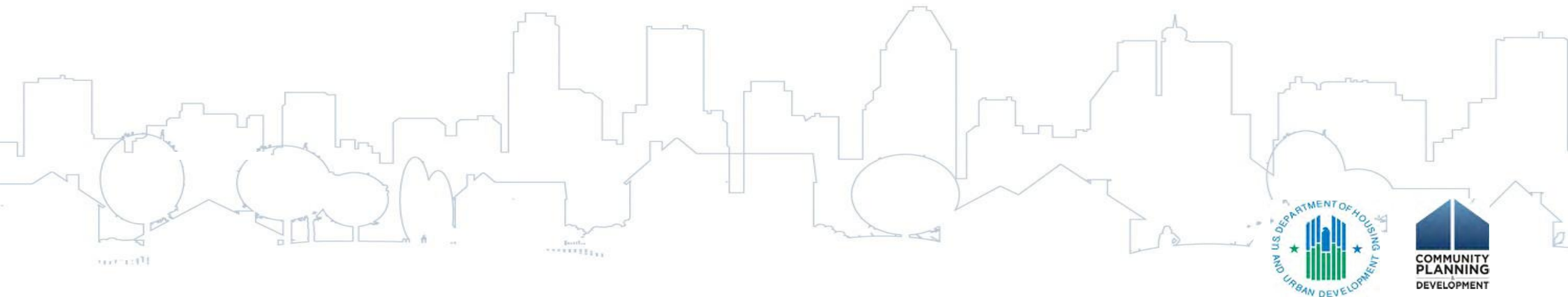
Equity in Prioritization

- Prioritize explicitly to address systemic racism
- Center equity through prioritization of those with housing barriers such as criminal records, poor credit histories, and histories of evictions
- Use local data to determine the zip codes or neighborhoods where clients are most frequently entering the system
- In addition to self-reported data, use data sources you already have to capture risk factors and to understand who's falling behind in access to move-in, who's taking longer from project start to move-in, and who's being impacted by COVID-19 at disproportionate rates
- Monitor for different assessment results by subpopulation, agency, and assessor

Disrupt Old Decision-Making Structures

- Meaningfully interrogate current decision-making structures
 - Who holds power and how can this be more equitable?
- Group should meet frequently and be empowered with authority to make decisions and move strategies forward
- Ensure that this group:
 - Is **representative** of those experiencing homelessness in the community
 - Includes **voices of lived experience** of homelessness
- New structures must be responsive to the needs and lived reality of people who have previously been denied a seat at the table
 - When are meetings scheduled?
 - How are people reimbursed appropriately for their time?

Changing Your Prioritization



Changing Prioritization

Prioritization should change whenever:

- ✓ There is a (substantial) change in the availability of resources
- ✓ There is a (substantial) change in the needs and/or vulnerabilities of people experiencing homelessness
- ✓ The existing prioritization scheme(s) fail to prioritize the most vulnerable persons
- ✓ The existing prioritization scheme(s) fail to achieve equitable results

Revisit prioritization annually to ensure it still reflects community needs

Identifying needed Changes to your Prioritization Scheme

- What specific changes to your community's prioritization scheme(s) are necessary? Why?
- What goals do you expect to accomplish and how does it fit within the values of your coordinated entry system? Will it increase equity?
- Do any of these changes require changes in the information collected directly from people experiencing homelessness or from other data sources?

Who to prioritize?

The CoC will need to determine what factors will be considered for prioritization based on analysis of population data

The CoC should specifically look at:

- ✓ Extent of unsheltered homelessness
- ✓ Extent of chronic homelessness
- ✓ Rate of recidivism
- ✓ Length of time homeless
- ✓ **Equity and disparities**

Methods to Adjust Your Prioritization Process

- Prioritization categories can be made more or less broad depending on the amount of resources available to your community (drawing fine distinctions between people's vulnerability/needs is more important if there are fewer resources to go around)
- Ordering of prioritization categories should be based upon need and/or vulnerability and supported by data
- Center equity through prioritization of those with housing barriers such as criminal records, poor credit histories, or histories of evictions

Simplify Criteria

An influx of resources may make it possible to prioritize people based on very simple criteria, even when that includes many people (e.g., all unsheltered persons or those in congregate shelter):

Simplify assessment and prioritization

Rehouse sheltered and unsheltered individuals

Adapt CE policies to effectively utilize resources for swift placement into permanent housing

Monitor your new prioritization scheme(s) and make changes as necessary

- Ongoing process of looking at the outcomes of your adjustments
- Should happen at least quarterly

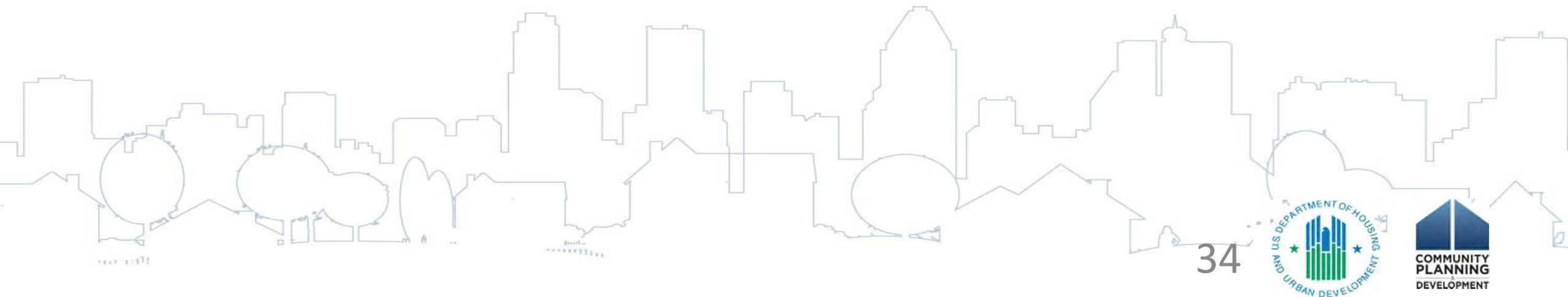
Topics to consider:

- ✓ Housing outcomes in different demographic groups
- ✓ Length of time to referral, to housing
- ✓ Prioritization in different demographic groups

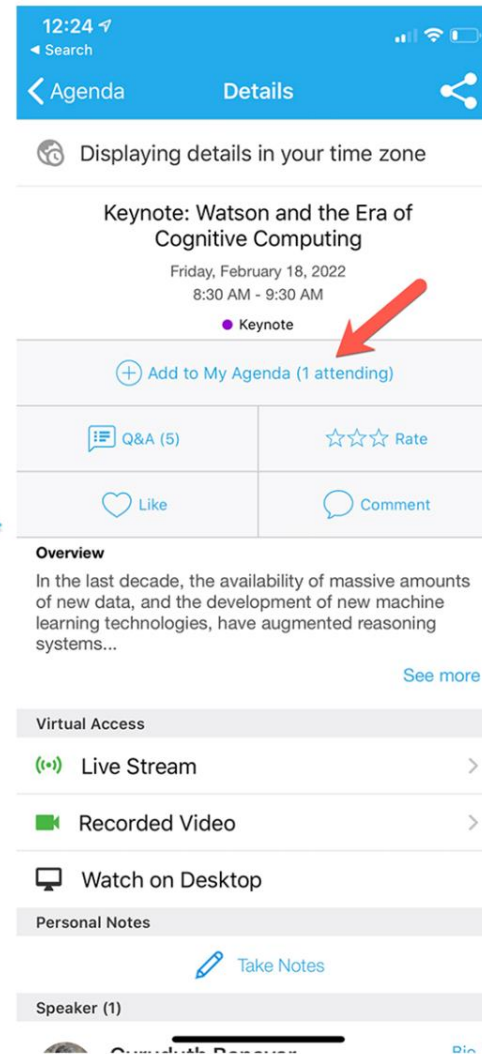
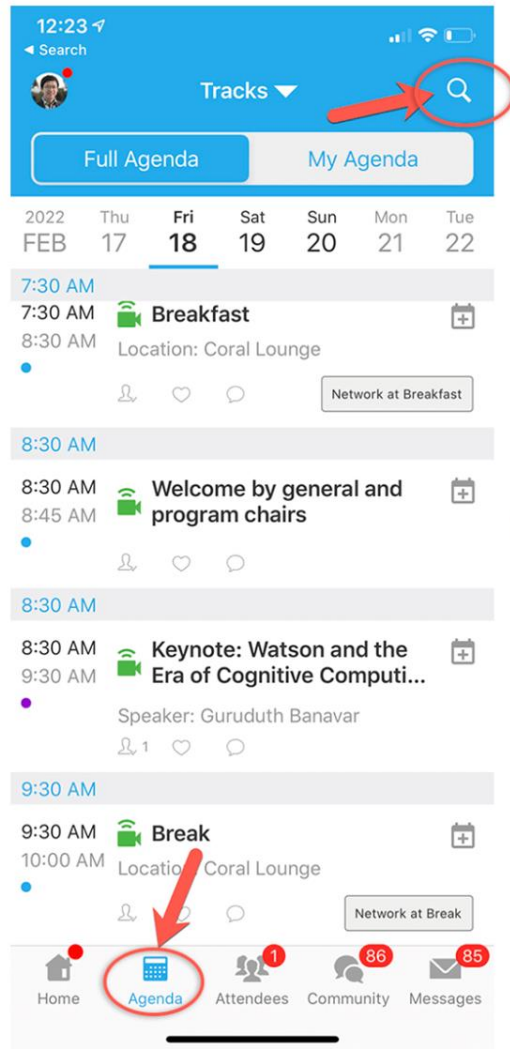
Q&A / Conversation

Please let us know if you changed your prioritization during COVID.

What questions do you have about data and prioritization?



Rate this Session!



Thank you!

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