Using Data for Consolidated Planning

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1. Introduction

Grantees assemble and analyze a lot of data when preparing their Consolidated Plans. The eCon Plan Template makes data more accessible to grantees, but grantees remain responsible for interpreting this data and supplementing it as needed with local data. They can use the citizen participation and consultation processes to aid in this collection and analysis and to field test their conclusions.

This guide discusses several considerations grantees need to weigh when working with data during the consolidated planning process and is intended to help grantees use data in a way that is rewarding and informative.

2. Collecting and Interpreting Data

Data Quality is Essential

The Consolidated Plan Needs Assessment and Market Analysis will be the foundation for the grantee's Strategic Plan, policy, and investment decisions. The eCon Plan Template and CPD Maps provide grantees with current, reliable population, housing and economic data collected through the United States Census, HUD, and other federal agencies. Grantees may find this data sufficient to describe their housing and community development needs and market conditions, or they may want to supplement the Template with other data from local, state and federal sources. The Using Data for Consolidated Planning tool included at the end of this booklet is designed to help grantees identify other possible data sources. Before using the data, grantees always should consider its source, quality, and community relevance. The data used in Con Plan must be as accurate and up-to-date as reasonably possible.

Regardless of the source, the needs assessment and market analysis should clearly state the assumptions on which the data are based and any limitations in the data. For instance, some professional real estate brokerage associations publish information on sales by their members. This data may exclude transactions not involving their members. If the grantee were to use this data, it should explain this data limitation.

Quality
Is this data from a reliable source?
Does this data lead us to other useful sources?
Does this source include historical data to help us understand recent trends?
Can we compare this data with other geographic levels, e.g. jurisdiction, region, state?
If the data is from a primary source, is it statistically valid so we can use it to generalize about the population or issue? If not, how can we use this data?
Relevance
Does this data speak to a community need that we have verified?
Will this data help us illustrate a community condition?
Will this data help us assess investment opportunities?
Will this data inform our decisions?

Interpreting Data

Interpreting data requires strong analytical skills, an understanding of what the data represents and its limitations, and an ability to view the data from different perspectives. Data must be examined in its proper context. This includes the socio-economics of the community's population, its economic base, built environment, housing supply and demand, regional dynamics, and the impacts of catalytic events, such as natural disasters.

Data can also be used to predict trends in your community; in fact, this is a key activity in consolidated planning. Since populations, the economy, and housing markets are fluid and data is measured at a fixed point in time, it is a challenge to determine how needs and market forces are likely to change in the future. Historical trends can provide helpful context, but they do not necessarily predict future trends. Grantees will need to consider population dynamics and market conditions from several angles before making projections.

Demographers and economists use mathematical models to determine population growth and economic forecasts. Grantees may want to seek out expertise at local universities to assist with this analysis.

Tips for interpreting data

Have an open mind. The data may reveal something that even the most seasoned professional did not expect.

Test the assumptions behind the conclusions to make sure the conclusions are sound.

Using Data to Predict Trends

For Con Plan activities, ideally grantees should be confident that there is enough demand to support the grantees' proposed activities over the next three to five years. However, the Annual Action Plan provides grantees the opportunity to make adjustments in their strategies and activities should there be unforeseen changes in circumstance.

It is often helpful to have people with different perspectives contribute to the interpretation of compiled data. One strategy is to establish an ad hoc committee or task force made up of developers, real estate agents, lenders, service providers, employers, institutional representatives, and others to review and discuss the data. By doing so, the grantee can tap expertise from the community.

3. Using eCon Planning Suite Data in Conjunction with Local Data

The eCon Planning Suite provides grantees with pre-loaded data from several federal and HUD sources. This data helps grantees understand the overall demographic and economic trends in their jurisdictions including areas of need and market conditions that may present investment opportunities.

Prepopulated data in the Consolidated Plan template should be supplemented with data that goes to smaller levels of geography. For example, CPD Maps allows users to drill down to the census tract using national data sets, and this is a good starting point.

In addition, many grantees will want to supplement the data supplied in the eCon Plan Template with other locally-generated data, such as parcel-level data about vacant and abandoned properties. When the grantee is able to analyze data at a sub-geography like a neighborhood, census tract or block group, the grantee gains a richer perspective as the socio-economic and market differences within the jurisdiction become apparent. The Housing and Economic Development Data Toolkits within CPD Maps facilitate census tract level analysis of housing and economic conditions allowing the grantee to select multiple areas to analyze and compare results with jurisdiction-wide, county, state and national data. Following is a list of the data sources pre-loaded into the Template.

eCon Planning Suite Data Sources

American Community Survey (ACS)

The American Community Survey (ACS) is conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau every year. It collects information on a small percentage of the population through random sampling and provides a wide range of statistics on household demographics, economics and housing conditions. The ACS supplies data at several geographic levels and as small as the census block group.

Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS)

CHAS data is a special tabulation of American Community Survey data specifically for HUD that demonstrates the extent of housing problems and housing needs in communities, particularly for low income households.

Fair Market Rents (FMR)

FMRs are gross rent estimates published yearly by HUD. Public Housing Authorities use FMRs to calculate payment standards for the Housing Choice Voucher program. FMRs are also used to specify the rent ceiling in the HOME rental assistance program and rent levels for several other HUD programs. Each year, HUD estimates the FMRs for metropolitan areas and non-metropolitan counties in the U.S. Included in the calculation is an estimate of the 40th percentile rent for recently occupied units plus tenant-paid utilities such as heat and hot water. HUD uses three data sources to calculate FMRs: 1) the Decennial Census, 2) the American Community Survey, and 3) Random digit dialing telephone surveys.

HOME Program Rent and Income Limits

Each year, HUD calculates HOME Program Rent and Income Limits. These are calculated based on percent of area median income.

Homeless Data Exchange/Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) Data

HUD works with communities to collect data on homeless populations through the Point-In-Time (PIT) and the Housing Inventory (HIC) counts. The data is published in the AHAR each year and reports figures at the national, state, and Continuum of Care (CoC) levels and reports numbers of homeless persons, as well as estimates of chronically homeless persons, homeless veterans, and homeless children and youth.

Assisted Housing (National and Local)

HUD maintains several datasets that include information on assisted housing units. The data includes information on subsidized households, families living in Public and Indian Housing, developments financed through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, and other HUD Multifamily data.

Physical Inspection Reports

HUD routinely conducts property inspections of public and multifamily housing. The results from these inspections are available online and are organized into two datasets, one for public housing and the other for multifamily assisted properties.

HUD also maintains the following data sources that grantees may find useful when preparing their Consolidated Plans: Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) Database, Qualified Census Tracts and Difficult Development Areas (QCTs and DDAs), the Neighborhood Stabilization (NSP) Mapping Tool, and HUD User. HUD has recently released the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Data and Mapping Tool. This Tool supplies data on residential housing patterns and the existence of housing segregation among protected classes.

Required Local Data

In addition to the data supplied by HUD through the eCon Plan Template and CPD Maps, grantees must use data from the local housing authority and CoC to evaluate the needs and market in their jurisdictions.

Housing authority data includes: waiting list numbers; breakdowns of waiting list by race, ethnicity, income and disability status; household type; and waiting list preferences. Some housing authorities may also have data on people who applied for Housing Choice Vouchers during an open enrollment period, including those not selected to remain on the waiting list. These data points can provide insight into unmet housing needs, disproportionate housing needs, and the needs of public housing residents. Grantees should also request Section 504 Needs Assessments for public housing projects as part of data collection to determine the accessibility of housing authority owned properties, or lack of accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Grantees will need to work with the local CoC to collect data on the jurisdiction's inventory of facilities and services for homeless individuals and families, including special subpopulations. Grantees request the Housing Inventory Chart from all CoCs operating in their areas. In some cases, grantees will need to compile information from multiple CoCs to complete the MA-30 screen of the eCon Plan Template.

The homeless facility inventory includes emergency shelter, transitional and permanent supportive housing. The services inventory includes those targeted to homeless individuals and families as well as mainstream services that complement homeless services.

Supplemental Local Data

Grantees often look to local, state and other federal data to supplement what is provided in the eCon Plan Template when assessing needs and markets for the Consolidated Plan. This data may come from multiple sources depending on what is relevant and available and enriches the grantee's understanding of its community dynamics. Some sources for local data are the building, school, public works, health, police, fire, and human service departments. Some data, such as school enrollment demographics, may be collected by states as well. The data checklist at the end of this booklet identifies many potential sources of local data.

4. Importance of Qualitative Data

During consolidated planning, grantees rely on both quantitative and qualitative data to understand the needs and markets within their communities. The eCon Plan Template and other data resources described above support a quantitative analysis of existing and historical community conditions. Grantees can use qualitative data, gathered through community meetings, interviews, focus groups and the like, to bring these statistics to life, enhancing their understanding of needs and opportunities within their communities.

In addition to what the data shows, it is important for grantees to understand the community's perspective and how it prioritizes needs and understands the market. Sometimes needs that seem the most urgent or critical on paper are not what concern the community the most. Sometimes what the data shows as an obvious and distinct condition is not as straightforward according to the community. And sometimes there are community needs or market circumstances that are not indicated through data, possibly because the population with the need is not part of routine data collection efforts or there are hidden issues that people do not report. Therefore, it is essential that grantees test their data-driven conclusions with the community to determine if the conditions the data points to are what they seem as well as to deepen their understanding of the circumstances behind these conditions.

The grantee should view the community as a resource that can help validate and direct its quantitative research. While it is important for grantees to have an understanding of issues before approaching the community, the community can also guide the grantee to seek out data as evidence for reported community conditions. The grantee's partners, such as community organizations, are an especially good resource. Their records may be a first-hand data source for the grantee in documenting that a need or condition exists.

Grantees should use stories and other types of qualitative data to round out their understanding of community conditions. Peoples' stories humanize statistics and compel others to listen. Sometimes data alone does not get the point across.

Collecting Qualitative Data

Grantees can collect qualitative data through several means during and outside of the consolidated planning process. The citizen participation and consultation processes provide a forum for the grantee to hold community meetings and focus groups with partners to explore issues. In addition, grantees may want to interview people with a range of perspectives. Surveys or questionnaires can also be helpful sources of both quantitative and qualitative data. The *Tool for Using Stakeholder Input in Consolidated Planning* offers further guidance to grantees on consulting with the community and its partners.

5. Avoiding Information Overload

With access to so many data sources, it is easy for grantees to become overwhelmed with too much information. It can be difficult to sift through multiple data sources that may refer to different time periods or have different data collection methods. As discussed above, grantees must have a good understanding of the quality, accuracy, and methodology of any data source and should be careful when making comparisons across data sources that they are comparing as they may not represent apples to apples comparisons.

The following list of questions can help grantees avoid information overload when preparing their consolidated plan. In addition to these, a grantee may want to make its own list of questions to ensure that the data it collects is relevant and useful.

Questions

Starting Questions
What do we already know about this community?
What do we need or want to know about this community?
What is essential for us to understand about this community?
Who can tell us about this community?

Grantees should try to focus on the issues that matter in their communities. While the Con Plan asks for a lot of information, grantees should hone in on what is relevant to their jurisdiction and delve deeper into those areas. Also, knowing when to stop collecting data is important. Often grantees spend a lot of time on data collection and leave little time for analysis and strategy development. Once a grantee has a clear understanding of the need or issue, it is time to stop. Grantees do not need to exhaust every possible data source to demonstrate that a condition exists.

6. Data Checklist

The *Using Data for Consolidated Planning* tool below is designed to help grantees identify supplemental data sources to refer to while completing their Consolidated Plan. The tool presents these sources organized by the corresponding eCon Plan Template section.

While these data are not necessarily required to complete the Consolidated Plan, they can help to provide a more complete story in understanding communities and their needs. The sources outlined below are good places to find additional information on housing needs, subsidized housing and in particular information on access to opportunity at the local level.

Before using any data, grantees always should consider its source, quality, and community relevance. The data used in Con Plan must be as accurate and up-to-date as reasonably possible.

Screen	Data Table	Default Data	Possible Sources of Supplemental Data
NA-10	Demographics Data Table	ACS	• General or comprehensive plans • Area market studies
	Number Of Households	CHAS	• ACS • General or comprehensive plans • Area market studies
	Housing Problems	CHAS	• Building/Code Enforcement Department • Focus group(s) with Real Estate Agents, Lenders, Developers, Landlords • PHA waiting lists • Recent studies
	Housing Problems 2	CHAS	• Focus group(s) with Real Estate Agents, Lenders, Developers, Landlords • PHA waiting lists
	Cost Burden >30% And >50%	CHAS	• Focus group(s) with Real Estate Agents, Lenders, Developers, Landlords • PHA waiting lists
	Crowding	CHAS	• For supplemental overcrowding data, jurisdictions may want to consult their code enforcement departments to determine if single family units are being illegally converted into multi-unit properties. • Jurisdictions may also consult with the local CoC to determine the level of "doubling up" and "couch surfing" that is occurring. • Focus group(s) with Real Estate Agents, Lenders, Developers, Landlords, Service Providers • PHA
	Households W/ Children Present	none	• ACS • School Department
NA-15	Disproportionately Greater Need	CHAS	• Focus groups with service providers, neighborhood organizations
NA-20	Disproportionately Greater Need Table—Severe Housing Problems	CHAS	
NA-25	Disproportionately Greater Need Table—Housing Cost Burden	CHAS	
NA-30	Discussion	none	

Screen	Data Table	Default Data	Possible Sources of Supplemental Data
NA-35	Totals In Use	PIC	• All fields are pre-populated – if not pre-populated, use the alternate data to provide data collected during consultation with the PHA
	Characteristics Of Residents	PIC	
	Race Of Residents	PIC	
	Ethnicity Of Residents	PIC	
	Narrative		
NA-40	Homeless Needs	None	• Most of the data for each Continuum of Care is accessible in CPD Maps. When reviewing the Continuum of Care data in CPD Maps, grantees should consult with the Continuum to determine which portion of the data is attributed to the grantee's jurisdiction
	Rural Homeless Needs	None	• Grantees must consult with their local Continuum of Care to generate this data for the grantee's jurisdiction.
NA-45 (HOPWA Grantees only)	HOPWA	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HIV Surveillance.	
	HIV Housing Need	HOPWA Performance Data based on the HOPWA CAPER and the HOPWA Beneficiary Verification Worksheet	• Department of Public Health • Focus groups with service providers • Housing needs assessments/studies
MA-10	All Rental Properties By Number Of Units Table	ACS	• Assessor's records
	Unit Size By Tenure Table	ACS	• Assessor's records

Screen	Data Table	Default Data	Possible Sources of Supplemental Data
MA-15	Cost Of Housing Table	U.S. Census (base year), ACS (most recent year)	• Multiple Listing Service • Local real estate data collection services • Nielsen Site Reports
	Rent Paid Table	ACS	• The grantee can use any properly conducted local survey or reliable source (i.e. Apartment Association Market Survey).
	Housing Affordability Table	CHAS	• Local Housing Authority • Waiting lists for subsidized vouchers and units
	Rents Table	HUD Fair Market Rents and HUD HOME Rents	• Focus groups with realtors
MA-20	Condition Of Units Table	ACS	• Building department • Public health department • Code enforcement
	Year Unit Built Table	ACS	• Assessor's records
	Risk Of Lead-Based Paint Hazard Table	CHAS	• Public health departments, local and state
	Vacant Units Table	None – Local data only	• Assessor's records • Building department • Police and fire departments
MA-25	Total Number Of Units Table	PIH Information Center (PIC)	
MA-30	Facilities Targeted To Homeless Persons Table	None	• Most of the data for each Continuum of Care is accessible in CPD Maps. Use the Alternate Data button to add an Administrative Data Source. The Administrative Data Source should summarize how the grantee consulted with their local Continuum of Care to obtain the data for the grantee's jurisdiction. States and local jurisdictions with multiple Continuums of Care should present combined data across for ALL Continuums within the geographic area of the jurisdiction. • Surveys to homeless service providers

Screen	Data Table	Default Data	Possible Sources of Supplemental Data
MA-35	HOPWA Assistance Baseline Table (HOPWA Grantees Only)	HOPWA Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER) and the HOPWA Beneficiary Verification Worksheet	• Surveys to HIV/AIDS service providers • Focus groups with service providers
MA-40	None		
MA-45	Business By Sector	ESRI Business Analyst and ACS	• Nielsen data • Locally produced reports, bond prospectus
	Labor Force	ACS	• Nielsen data • Focus groups with major employers, business owners
	Occupations By Sector	ACS	• Nielsen data
	Travel Time To Work	ACS	• Local traffic studies • Transit authority (usage statistics)
	Educational Attainment	ACS	• Nielsen data • Local school department graduation rates
	Median Earnings In The Past 12 Months	ACS	• Nielsen data