The 2022 Continuum of Care (CoC) Supplemental Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness (FR-6500-N-25S) makes $322 million available to assist communities in addressing unsheltered and rural homelessness. Evidence-based solutions and data play a significant role within the NOFO process. Strategic use of these tools will increase the odds of communities having a successful application.

Evidenced-Based Solutions

The NOFO emphasizes the value of evidence-based solutions, which help ensure that government investments are spent on strategies reasonably calculated to be successful.

Housing First

Housing First is a homeless assistance philosophy and approach that prioritizes permanent housing as a means of stabilizing lives, making it easier to pursue other needs such as substance abuse or mental health treatment. Through rigorous evaluations, Housing First has proven successful at maintaining housing stability and reducing a household's time spent homeless. Some studies point to other quality of life improvements, while at least one found increased outpatient service utilization.

The NOFO, published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), emphasizes implementation of the Housing First approach:

Page	Language	Context
2	"Through this Special NOFO, HUD will award funding to communities to implement coordinated approaches -- grounded in Housing First and public health principles -- to reduce the prevalence of unsheltered homelessness . . ."	Included in a summary description of the NOFO and its goals.
50	"CoCs must describe the current strategy, including their use of a Housing First Approach, and demonstrate how well it performs at providing low-barrier and culturally appropriate access to permanent housing . . . "	Describing criteria for being awarded 3 points in the application scoring process (unsheltered and rural).

Close fidelity to the Housing First model has been associated with better results. Using a list of questions for a program, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) summarized fidelity to the model as follows:

1) Are applicants allowed to enter the program without income?
2) Are applicants allowed to enter program even if they aren't "clean and sober" or "treatment compliant?"
3) Are applicants allowed to enter the program even if they have criminal justice system involvement?
4) Are service and treatment plans voluntary, such that tenants cannot be evicted for not following through?

Both HUD and USICH have resource pages to guide Housing First implementation.

Street Outreach

The NOFO awards 3 points for street outreach strategies (for both unsheltered and rural projects) that meet criteria that includes the following language:

> *"CoCs must identify evidence-based practices used to conduct street outreach and local strategies used that are based on data and performance." (Page 50).*

An example of an evidence-based models is Assertive Community Treatment (featuring multidisciplinary teams, low caseloads, and community-based treatment), which has recently found success in cities like Santa Monica, CA.

More generally, agencies/organization like USICH, the Alliance, and the National Health Care for the Homeless Council have available guidance materials on street outreach.

Data

Data plays a central role within the NOFO, both in how communities collect data on homelessness and how they use it to shape decisions.

Data Collection

New funds are available for expanding and improving a CoC's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Communities could 1) ensure more unsheltered people are included in the database, and 2) improve efforts to un-duplicate records (thus improving system accuracy).

Such efforts are useful in understanding the population a community serves. Through improving data collection, CoCs could learn more about people who experience unsheltered homelessness throughout the year – not just during the Point-in-Time (PIT) Count. HUD's Universal Data Elements, when applied to more people through expanded use of HMIS, would broaden a community's access to information about subpopulations (e.g., unsheltered older adults who are not a part of PIT reporting) and outcomes for those living outside.

Data-Informed Decision-Making

Beyond encouraging CoCs to expand and improve data collection, the NOFO awards unsheltered project grantees for actually using that data. Eight points are available for CoCs that demonstrate ways they will:

> *"continuously review data and best practices and use that information to update their strategies to reduce unsheltered homelessness." (Pages 50-51)*

Communities should use their data to improve the performance of street outreach, shelter, and permanent housing efforts. To receive the full eight points, a CoC must demonstrate that street outreach is connected to coordinated entry or HMIS.