THE ROLE OF COC LEAD AGENCIES IN EXPANDING CAPACITY AND IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

This brief describes activities that local Continuum of Care (CoC) lead agencies, those tasked by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) with developing a systemic response to homelessness, can and should take to increase capacity and improve rapid re-housing (RRH) practices and performance. CoC leaders from across the country that have successfully increased capacity and improved performance were interviewed to identify strategies they found to be effective.[1]

Rapid re-housing (RRH) is an intervention designed to help individuals and families quickly exit homelessness and return to permanent housing through the provision of housing search, financial assistance, and case management services. Communities around the country have found that the intervention has transformed their response to homelessness by increasing the number of people they are able to serve, reducing the overall number of people experiencing homelessness on any given day, and ultimately helping households exit homelessness quickly to permanent housing and avoid a return to shelter.

CoC lead agencies are not uniform entities and can be:
*   Led by city or county government.
*   Led by a private nonprofit.
*   Managed at a balance of State (BoS) and statewide level by either a state agency or nonprofit.
*   Led by a United Funding Agency (UFA).

Additionally, the geography a CoC lead agency is responsible for can vary from a small town or suburb to a major city to an entire state. The structure and geography can affect a CoC lead agency's capacity to increase and improve RRH practice. As such, CoC leaders that were interviewed represent a mixture of CoC lead agency types. Community-specific examples can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

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[1] The CoCs included Cleveland, OH and Fairfax County, VA representing CoC RRH efforts lead by a city or county government. Mercer County Board of Social Services (MCBOSS), a key agency delivering services in Trenton/Mercer County, NJ, while not a CoC lead agency, is the primary funder of homeless service interventions for homeless families and provides an example of how an agency can generate political will and partnerships to expand RRH. Alameda County/Oakland, CA, while considered a nonprofit, is subcontractor to the county and may function more like a government agency. Richmond, VA, and Memphis/Shelby County, TN, represent CoCs managed by private, nonprofit agencies. West Virginia and Washington State CoCs represent examples of large scale efforts to increase RRH within BoS CoCs. Finally, Long Beach, CA and Columbus, OH, both have UFAs in place.

KEY LOCAL GOVERNANCE ACTIONS TO EXPAND RAPID RE-HOUSING CAPACITY AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Regardless of the Continuum of Care (CoC) structure or size, CoC lead agencies serve as an important catalyst for increasing and improving rapid re-housing (RRH) in a local community. The following are activities that lead agencies can take to increase RRH capacity and effectiveness.

1. **Build Support for RRH.** CoC lead agencies can use their leadership, convening, and resource management roles to encourage community-wide adoption of RRH. By serving in the role of a champion for the model and promoting it as effective in reducing homelessness, support can be garnered from public and private funding entitites. Examples of CoC activities that can be used to build support for RRH include:
   - Educating potential funders about the impact of RRH, including using local data and other research to build support.
   - Leveraging control over resources to encourage providers to adopt or expand RRH.
   - Creating a local governing body that encourages RRH adoption.
   - Developing written guidance that promotes effective RRH models.
   - Encouraging peer-to-peer learning around RRH.

2. **Build Strategic Partnerships.** CoC lead agencies are in a unique position to develop ongoing partnerships among government agencies, community nonprofit agencies, and other agencies administering public assistance benefits and employment supports with the goal of increasing resources and building RRH capacity. Examples of CoC lead agency actions include:
   - Developing partnerships with mainstream systems to increase RRH capacity through leveraging mainstream funding for rent assistance and services
   - Improving services to individuals and families served across homeless programs through activities such as linking housing stabilization and employment services
   - Partnering with other agencies to improve effectiveness of program administration
   - Connecting RRH providers and clients to community resources

3. **Braid Multiple Funding Sources.** CoCs rely on several federal funding streams as well as local resources to increase RRH capacity. These include: Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), CoC Program , and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program funds; Home Investment Partnerships Program Tenant-based Rental Assistance (HOME TBRA); and a variety of other local funds designated for homeless assistance programs. CoC lead agencies can strategically leverage and use additional funds to maximize RRH capacity. For example, some communities have received targeted funding to serve particular populations, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for families. This then allows communities to use their more flexible funding streams to serve other populations in their community, such as single individuals. CoC governing boards as well as lead agency staff can be integral in developing private funding for RRH.

4. **Evaluate and Incentivize Performance.** Effective CoC lead agencies develop strategic goals for, and collect and disseminate data on, RRH program performance. Communities benefit from continuous quality improvement, constantly evaluating the impacts of their RRH program(s) and making these results public. Widely communicating RRH goals and performance can help to align and engage providers toward the same community-wide goals. In addition to maintaining clear, public benchmarks

for RRH goals, at a minimum, CoCs should track the number of people served, the average length of time people spend homeless before exiting to permanent housing with RRH assistance, and returns to homelessness rates. Performance on these measures should be examined within the context of local and federal goals for ending homelessness. The recently released Rapid Re-Housing Performance Evaluation and Improvement Toolkit can be a resource for developing effective RRH programs and measuring performance.

5. **Encourage Performance Improvement.** Communities are taking a number of steps to drive performance, including using performance-based contracting to push system-wide adoption of RRH and improvements in implementation. These include, creating funding set asides or requirements in Requests for Proposals (RFPs) that require specific program models and practices, such as those in the recently released Rapid Re-Housing Performance Standards and Program Standards. The include providing funding incentives for providers who meet contractual performance expectations. UFAs, in particular, are able to develop standards for RFPs that can drive performance above and beyond HUD requirements.

TABLE 1: ACTIVITIES TAKEN BY COC LEAD AGENCIES TO INCREASE RRH CAPACITY
Increase Rapid Re-Housing Capacity

CoC Type	Build Support for Rapid Re-Housing	Increase Capacity through Partnerships	Blend or Use Multiple Funding Sources
Government Agency	**Using control over resources to promote RRH. Using data to build local support; leveraging local governing bodies to encourage adoption; and developing written guidance to facilitate adoption of RRH.** **Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), Fairfax County, VA** supports a diverse CoC governing board and actively works to build support for RRH in the community. It meets quarterly to provide high-level policy direction. Community engagement efforts included promoting local housing partners that were engaged in a 12-month housing challenge and using social media as a way to communicate about RRH program effectiveness. **Cuyahoga County**, the CoC lead agency in Cleveland, OH, developed an MOU with written expectations on performance to guide provider services to homeless families referred for RRH. All families who come through coordinated entry are referred to RRH within 7 days of entering shelter. Data on RRH outcomes is communicated to providers to help them see the value of the RRH, progressive engagement model. **Mercer County, NJ**, began a year-long process (2008) of examining data on its homeless system, including costs and outcomes. Data showed that those in	**Leveraging other services and resources to encourage partnerships (e.g., linking housing stabilization and other mainstream systems, such as employment, etc).** **OPEH, Fairfax County, VA** promotes a community partnership of RRH providers by allocating ESG resources based on client need across the CoC's geography and multiple agencies. It creates standardized policies, procedures and written standards for coordinated access, assessment and referral. **Cuyahoga County** increases capacity of local partners by convening regular meetings to discuss system design, implementation, challenges and outcome issues. Shelter and RRH staff are encouraged to support their mutual efforts to rapidly exit families from shelter, and to assure housing stability. RRH Housing Locators meet with shelter staff and clients to assure communication and program knowledge. An MOU clearly states the responsibilities of shelter case managers and RRH case managers to encourage accountability and collaboration. **Mercer County Board of Social Services (MCBOSS)** in Mercer County/Trenton CoC partners/serves as the TANF and WOIA agency. After housing needs are addressed, it works to provide wraparound services, e.g., employment and/or other public benefits.	**Using a variety of funding streams strategically to maximize a community's ability to implement an effective RRH program. Blending local general funds for RRH for underserved or target populations.** **Fairfax County CoC** funds its RRH activities with federal CoC and ESG dollars, local general funds, and money from the state-funded Virginia Homeless Solutions Program. Consolidating most of the community's contracts in the OPEH office has improved local coordination and allowed the Office to drive funding decisions based on funder regulations and best practices. **Cuyahoga County** blends federal ESG entitlements awarded to the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, local Health and Human Services levy dollars, and Ohio Development Services, Housing Trust Fund resources, to fund coordinated entry and RRH. **EveryOne Home in Alameda County** CoC uses both local and state TANF dollars to rapidly re-house families, and state re-entry funding to re-house that population. The agency serves as a convener of community leaders and an advocate for housing programs. Flexible county general funds, which have resulted from efforts to engage the community, also pay for

Govern-ment Agency	transitional housing had the lowest need, poorer outcomes, and highest cost. Data was used to involve and educate the community in a reallocation of funding from transitional housing to a RRH model. Mercer County created the Homeless Advocate Group and Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness, as well as funders subcommittees that helped to develop a vision and community mission toward ending homelessness.		RRH and address service gaps. The CoC engages funders on its board, primarily local government agencies, which allows for direct involvement in system design, etc.
Nonprofit Agency	**Using non-profit agency role to encourage peer-to-peer learning around RRH.** **Homeward's (Richmond, VA, CoC lead)** status as a nonprofit allowed them to more easily facilitate peer-to-peer interaction, which garnered more provider and community support for RRH. **CAH, Memphis, TN CoC** demonstrated to funders and providers the cost-effectiveness of rapid re-housing and was the driving force behind shifting resources away from transitional housing and towards RRH. With an original goal of reducing transitional housing beds in the community by 50% over 5 years, Memphis/Shelby County has achieved a 60% reduction in the number of transitional housing beds and a 25% reduction in family homelessness.	**Partnering with other agencies to improve effectiveness of program administration and increase program capacity.** **Homeward (Richmond, VA, CoC lead)** hosts community-based formal and informal capacity-building efforts to increase capacity and facilitate partnership development. **Memphis/Shelby County CoC's Community Alliance for the Homeless (CAH)** manages multi-partner initiatives focusing on funding, advocacy, and coordination. This allows other providers to focus on direct services. The Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association (MIFA) focuses on operating the actual RRH activities, including the program's central intake point for coordinated assessment. The CoC has also developed a faith-based partnership of local congregations to support RRH, successfully combining public and private funds.	**Blending of a variety of funds to serve vulnerable population with RRH.** **Homeward in Richmond, VA** was able to combine funding streams beyond federal HUD and state and local funds to expand rapid re-housing capacity. The organization engages private funders in this work. **Memphis/Shelby County CoC** uses CoC and ESG funds, city general funds, and donor dollars raised by a private nonprofit and a faith-based partnership of local congregations to support RRH, successfully combining public and private funds.

Balance of State (BoS) or Statewide CoCs	**Building support in a BoS requires staff be active in the field, as well as regular communication and meetings.** **Washington State BoS** found that effective RRH implementation relied on monthly meetings among all of the key partners to constantly refine the steps they need to take to reach common goals. The effects are not isolated to rural communities. These champions would be helpful in any CoC setting. **The West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness**, lead agency for the BoS and a provider of homeless services, is responsible for overseeing a diverse array of services that are uneven throughout the region. Staff must be present in communities to ensure needs are being met and that consumers are being connected to needed community services to support RRH activities.	**Staff that can develop partnerships to connect RRH providers and clients to community resources.** Typical of a BoS CoC, which typically covers a large geographic area and has diverse and limited services available, staff from the **West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness** must travel throughout the state to ensure that consumers are able to connect to needed services, to encourage stronger partnerships and to understand the needs of the communities. In **Washington State**, the Department of Commerce uses its links to state agencies to connect providers and clients to community resources such as McKinney-Vento school liaisons and TANF case managers. Commerce also contracts with the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to provide employment services to families receiving TANF assistance through a program called Community Jobs. DSHS further partners with the Economic Security Department, the state agency administering unemployment compensation to workers who have lost their jobs.	**Blending local government, foundations, churches, and other local supporting partners for RRH.** **Washington State CoC** collects the majority of its funding through flexible, local general funds, and document recording fees, which are collected at county government offices when residents record real estate transactions.
UFA	**Uses relationships with federal and local partners to build support for RRH.** **City of Long Beach, CA** UFA has the ability to encourage the movement of funds towards RRH. The City also operates the CES/multi-service center, coordinating the point of entry to all CoC programs.	**Leverages relationships with local and federal partners to inform funding decisions.** As a UFA, the **City of Long Beach, CA** has more flexibility and a mechanism to push best practices and be an innovative partner for the programs.	**UFAs are in a unique position to braid numerous funding streams and redistribute unused program funds to RRH programs.** **Long Beach, CA**, UFA is able to recapture funds that are unused and redistribute them to current projects. For example, the UFA recaptured unused funds from a child care project and reallocated $100,000 to double the operating budget of a RRH program for families.

CoC Type			
UFA	Columbus, OH UFA has two bodies that oversee its funding decisions, the CoC and the lead agency's board of trustees. The UFA has strong and ongoing partnerships with its local PHA and mental health board.	Columbus, OH's UFA structure encourages flexibility to blend funding sources for the majority of its projects. With over 80 federal, state,and local public funders and a variety of private sources, it can blend funds creatively to provide more RRH. In fact, the UFA has used 23 sources to support one project.	

TABLE 2: ACTIVITIES TAKEN BY COC LEAD AGENCIES TO IMPROVE RRH PERFORMANCE
Improve Rapid Re-Housing Performance

CoC Type	Evaluate and Incentivize Performance	Provide Performance Improvement Opportunities/Performance-Based Contracting
Government Agency	Developing RRH goals, including written guidance, for incentivizing performance and community involvement. Engaging leadership to enforce performance goals and share data. Fairfax County, VA, CoC through OPEH developed community-wide goals, which were used to build community support for RRH. The CoC also shares data on performance through a variety of means including social media, printed reports, and community presentations. Cuyahoga County, the CoC lead agency, developed an MOU with written expectations and milestones to guide shelter and RRH partners in implementing RRH for families. Data on specific outcome metrics is presented to partners on a quarterly basis. Data includes: shelter length of stay; time between referral to RRH and move into housing; housing inspection pass/fail records; length of time from housing referral to housing inspection; exits to permanent housing; and returns to shelter. Coordinated Entry data is evaluated to track the number of newly homeless; the number of households diverted; the number placed in shelter; length of stay; and permanent housing outcomes.	Continuous evaluation of performance to inform decision-making. OPEH, Fairfax County, VA incorporates performance measures into RRH contracts with CoC providers. This establishes expectations for reducing the average length of homelessness for families and individuals. MCBOSS in Mercer County/Trenton CoC's continuous evaluation process examines performance across all CoC projects, including lengths of stay, income outcomes, fiscal management, and funding expenditures. This informs funding decisions. Specific program performance is used by the Executive Committee of the Continuum of Care and by the funders when making funding decisions, including about reallocation.

	MCBOSS in Mercer County/Trenton CoC has a monitoring team for funded agencies, including CoC staff and CoC executive members. The System Monitor examines program data and produces reports (which are widely distributed) on program performance, population data, etc. Reports inform quarterly reviews, program and funding adjustments. **EveryOne Home in Alameda, CA** shares the results of its RRH with the community and its network of providers through the publication of a comprehensive Annual Outcomes Report that it posts on its website.	
Nonprofit Agency	**Facilitating peer-to-peer engagement in an effort to improve RRH performance.** In **Richmond, VA**, Homeward uses its unique role as a nonprofit entity to align service providers, decision makers, and the community in developing performance goals. **Data sharing on RRH performance to inform decisions.** The **Memphis/Shelby County CoC** has developed a "performance culture." The Community Alliance for the Homeless (CAH) shares data on a monthly basis with all partners, including agency statistics. Extraordinary performance by a particular agency or staff member is highlighted in Consortium meetings. Funding decisions are based on performance as determined by the annual Performance Scorecard. The Scorecard contains benchmarks including length of time homeless, returns to homelessness, and income growth. Programs are also evaluated on how they perform relative to other programs.	**Monitoring of performance to build capacity.** **Homeward in Richmond, VA** monitored performance as part of public funding processes and as part of community capacity-building efforts. **CAH, Memphis, TN,** provides on-going technical assistance and training in best practice models including motivational interviewing, harm reduction and housing first. CAH has a policy that lower scoring programs must develop a "Performance Improvement Plan" and submit a quarterly progress report. The programs receive individualized technical assistance to address their weaknesses and improve their strengths.
Balance of State or State-wide CoC	**Ongoing and regular data analysis and direct technical assistance provided by lead agency staff can drive performance.** **West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness** conducts regular and ongoing analysis of provider performance through a cross analysis of HMIS data and client files. With staff active throughout	**Facilitates program development with existing or new program providers and serves as a conduit of information on best practices.** **Washington State CoC,** the Department of Commerce and the Gates Foundation promote best practices through technical assistance efforts and funding incentives. A quarter of State funds

	the state, providing ongoing and direct technical assistance is possible and can help drive performance.	for homeless efforts are awarded on a performance basis. Communities also receive funding bonuses if they house someone exiting a public institution.
UFA	**As a single funding entity for the CoC, UFAs can drive system-wide performance towards best practices.** **Long Beach, CA** UFA uses data to assess project performance and is able to reallocate funds to the highest performing projects, including RRH. **Columbus, OH** UFA conducts in-depth performance, programmatic, administrative and fiscal monitoring of all of its programs. Based on this review, it can identify programs that are underperforming as well as high performers. System-level reporting is conducted on a quarterly basis; results are distributed to the providers and posted on as website and are used to inform the CoC and CoC Board about performance.	**Driving change through performance based contracting requirements.** **Long Beach, CA** UFA has an RFP process that mirrors HUD performance standards but includes additional local requirements above and beyond HUD requirements, thus driving performance improvements. For example, through performance-based contracting and its RFP process, the UFA is driving its transitional housing to lower barriers and reduce length of stay to 12 months or less, as compared to HUD's requirement of 24 month or less. **Columbus, OH** UFA uses performance based contracting for all of its RRH projects, evaluating the number of households served and other outcomes.