

Rapid Re-housing:

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT TOOLKIT



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

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The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a leading national voice on the issue of homelessness that accomplishes its mission through research and education, policy analysis and advocacy, and capacity building.

The Melville Charitable Trust is the largest foundation in the U.S. that is exclusively devoted to supporting solutions to prevent and end homelessness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rapid re-housing is an intervention designed to help individuals and families to quickly exit homelessness, return to housing in the community, and not become homeless again in the near term. The core components of a rapid re-housing program are housing identification, move-in and rent assistance, and rapid re-housing case management and services. These core components represent the minimum that a program must be providing to households to be considered a rapid re-housing program, but do not provide guidance for what constitutes an effective rapid re-housing program.

This document provides details on using the performance benchmarks detailed in the Rapid Re-Housing Performance Benchmarks and Program Standards to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of rapid re-housing practice, both in individual programs and across a system. It is intended to be used as a tool to help current and potential rapid re-housing providers, funders, and other stakeholders understand how effectively programs are operating on their own and in comparison to others. The knowledge gained from evaluation can enable more efficient and effective service provision, ultimately helping programs and systems serve a greater number of households successfully.

1 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

Funders, state leaders, and coalitions can use these outcome metrics to evaluate applications for competitive rapid-rehousing resources, to review program performance, and to develop performance improvement plans.

Providers can use these outcome metrics to evaluate and improve their own rapid re-housing practice over time. The performance outcome standards in this document can serve as program goals and areas for focus and improvement.

Continuums of Care (CoCs) can use these outcome metrics to evaluate the performance of rapid re-housing programs across a system for the purposes of tiering and reallocation, as well as to target technical assistance and performance improvement efforts.

2 DATA REQUIRED TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

In order to evaluate program performance against the outcome measures, administrative program data is necessary. Rapid re-housing providers should fully participate in their community's Homelessness Management Information System (HMIS) whenever possible, and as such should obtain the data needed from that

system. At a minimum, programs will need the following data points to measure the benchmarks:

- Program entry dates for households served;
- Residential move-in dates for households served;
- Exit destinations for households served; and
- Entries into programs or coordinated entry within the homeless system for households served post-exit from program.

High-quality data is critical in any program evaluation, and it is important to know the quality of the data being analyzed as this helps assess the accuracy of calculated outcome metrics. If data from a community's HMIS is unreliable, missing, or incorrect, outcome metrics may fail to be truly indicative of program performance. In communities without a high-quality HMIS with significant coverage, a program may want to implement alternative methods for evaluating performance for some of the benchmarks listed below. Similarly, a rapid re-housing provider who is also a victim service provider mandated not to participate in HMIS will need to use an alternative, equivalent method that collects all of the necessary data points.

Programs that do not have participants who exited from the program at least a year ago will not have sufficient data to meet all of the performance benchmarks, particularly when calculating returns to homelessness. Additionally, in the first several months of operations, providers may need time to bring operations to scale and reach full capacity.

Understanding Program Evaluation

At its core, program evaluation is a process by which programs and systems can determine whether current activities are having the intended impact(s) on participants. This information then can — and should — be used to guide efforts to improve processes and results.

Logic models, which lay out the core components of the program (inputs and activities) and the intended results (outputs and outcomes), are a valuable factor in understanding a program, and they can serve to supplement performance improvement plans based on evaluations. They provide an understanding of how programs function, examining both the underlying assumptions on which the program is based and the processes that programs undergo in order to achieve results. Logic models are critical in understanding which program elements may need evaluation and/or improvement plans. Below is a basic sample logic model for a rapid re-housing program, including the benchmarks that are the focus of this document.

INPUTS: Resources needed to accomplish program goals	ACTIVITIES: Services necessary to accomplish program goals	OUTPUTS: How to measure activities performed	OUTCOMES: Client-level targets for activities performed
Housing specialists Case managers Short-term rent subsidies Landlord partners Participants	Housing identification Move-in and rental assistance Rapid re-housing and case management services	The number of landlords with which a program has relationships The number of lease applications submitted The amount paid in rent assistance The number of case management meetings with participants.	Participants spend a short amount of time homeless Participants become permanently housed Participants do not return to homelessness

II. PERFORMANCE BENCHMARKS FOR EVALUATION

Ultimately the effectiveness of a rapid re-housing program is determined by its ability to accomplish the model's three primary goals:

- Reduce the length of time program participants spend homeless,
- Increase households exiting to permanent housing, and
- Limit returns to homelessness within a year of program exit.

Benchmarks for performance on the above outcomes are detailed below. When examining a program's ability to meet the benchmarks, it is important to remember that rapid re-housing is a Housing First intervention, meaning, among other things, that programs should not be screening out households based on criteria that are assumed to predict successful outcomes, such as lack of income or employment, criminal history, mental health history, medical history, or evidence of "motivation." The benchmarks detailed below are based on performance data of programs that do not screen households out on the basis of the above barriers. Programs assisting individuals and families with high housing barriers are able to achieve these outcomes.

It is recommended that programs and systems evaluate and track outcomes on at least a quarterly basis. More frequent tracking may be useful but burdensome; less frequent tracking may not allow programs to monitor trends and make improvements as quickly as necessary.

1 REDUCE THE LENGTH OF TIME PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SPEND HOMELESS

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True to its name, rapid re-housing is intended to be rapid. As such, effective rapid re-housing programs constantly work to reduce the amount of time that individuals and families spend homelessness by quickly assisting households in identifying and accessing housing options. Rapid re-housing programs may not be able to influence the speed with which households are referred to them. Therefore the period during which rapid re-housing programs can influence how long the household is homeless is from the point at which they engage with a household to the point at which the household is housed.

Performance Benchmark

Households served by a rapid re-housing program move into permanent housing in an average of 30 days or fewer from program entry.

Necessary Data

To calculate this measure, programs need **program entry dates and residential move-in dates for households served**. Program entry is considered the date on which the client began receiving services from the program. This measure is calculated only for those households that move into a permanent housing destination: it does not include those who have not yet moved in, or move into a non-permanent housing destination such as transitional housing, bridge housing, or motel programs.

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that **should not** be categorized as "temporary"). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment facility.

2 INCREASE EXITS OF HOUSEHOLDS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

3 LIMIT RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS

Alternative data points

The previously mentioned data points are considered required data elements by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Some communities may have other data points that may be appropriate to use in instances where a program is looking for more rigorous evaluation or when data quality of one of the above data points is poor.

Program Entry Date alternatives:

- In a community that has an advanced coordinated entry system that has data on referral dates, the date of a complete and eligible referral to a rapid re-housing program would be a more accurate data point for when a program first engaged with a household as opposed to program entry date which may occur significantly after a program is engaged with a household.
- For a rapid re-housing program that also operates a shelter from which participants are rapidly re-housed, the program may want to use shelter entry date as the date from which to measure this benchmark. This would be a more rigorous measure than from date of rapid re-housing program entry as the program also controls the amount of time from shelter entry to rapid re-housing engagement.

Residential Move-In Date alternative:

- For households that are rapidly re-housed from a sheltered location, shelter exit date can be used as a proxy for residential move-in date in instances when the quality of the data on residential move-in date is poor.

Calculating Performance

This benchmark requires a calculation of the **average** number of days from program entry to housing for all households housed. To calculate the average, add together the number of days that each household that was housed spent homeless after enrollment (for guidance on determining the number of days, see previous sections). Then, divide this sum by the total number of households.

Ideally, a program would measure this for all of the households that moved into housing over the course of a full year. In instances where a program is working on performance improvement, a program may want to calculate this average for shorter periods, such as quarterly to review progress.

$$\text{Average} = \frac{\text{Sum of number of days from program entry to move in date for all household}}{\text{Total number of households}}$$

For example, a program with five households that were homeless 30 days, 96 days, 43 days, 22 days, and 17 days after they entered that program and before being housed would calculate the average using the following equation:

$$\text{Average} = \frac{30+96+43+22+17}{5} = 41.6 \text{ days}$$

In this example, the program average for length of time homeless is 41.6 days. Programs interested in improving performance on this metric should refer to the Planning for Improvement portion of this document.

Additional Performance Measures

Calculating the average length of time homeless is a useful way to gain insight into how a program is functioning. Averages, however, are vulnerable to outliers: particularly in a small program, one or two outliers that significantly vary from the norm could cause a large change to the average. For this reason, it is also valuable to look at two other statistical measures on this benchmark, median and mode.

Median is the middle number in a series. Medians are less susceptible to extreme influence by outliers than averages, because they are calculated based on relative position and not by value. As such, while an average provides information on a program's overall performance, a median may more accurately reflect a program's typical performance.

To calculate a median, place every number in a data set in order from smallest to largest, and locate the number in the middle. Take, for example, a program with five households with the following lengths of time homeless: 7, 18, 29, 37, 108. In this program, the median is 29 days. But what if the program had six households, and therefore no real "middle" number? The lengths of time homeless might look like this: 7, 18, 24, 29, 37, 108. In this case, both 24 and 29 are the middle numbers. To calculate the median, therefore, you would take the average of only those two numbers, which gives you a median of 26.5 days.

Mode is the number that occurs most frequently within a given data set and similarly may provide information on a program's typical performance. For this benchmark, the mode would give insight into what length of time households most often spend from program entry to moving in.

To understand how to calculate mode, take the example of a program with 10 households, which have the following number of days homeless: 6, 14, 23, 23, 23, 35, 48, 57, 59, 92. In this example, 23 is the number that occurs most frequently. The mode for length of time homeless in this situation would be 23 days.

None of these measures — average, median, or mode — are perfect on their own, as each has unique benefits and drawbacks. Ideally, these three values should be analyzed together to paint a clearer picture of how long participants tend to stay homeless.

Note: Most spreadsheet programs, such as Excel, have built-in functions to calculate all three measures.

1

**REDUCE THE LENGTH
OF TIME PROGRAM
PARTICIPANTS
SPEND HOMELESS**

2

**INCREASE EXITS OF
HOUSEHOLDS TO
PERMANENT HOUSING**

3

**LIMIT RETURNS TO
HOMELESSNESS**

2 INCREASE EXITS OF HOUSEHOLDS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

The second goal of a rapid re-housing program is to exit households to permanent housing.

Performance Benchmark

At least 80 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program exit to permanent housing.

Necessary Data

For all households receiving rapid re-housing assistance, a program must obtain information about the type of housing destination upon program exit and the date of exit. For programs utilizing HMIS, this information should be captured as the rapid re-housing program exit date and destination at exit.

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that **should not** be categorized as “temporary”). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment facility.

Calculating Performance

This outcome requires a calculation of the **percentage** of households who exit the rapid re-housing program to permanent housing. To calculate this percentage, take the number of households who exited to a permanent housing location and divide by all of the households who exited the rapid re-housing program regardless of destination over the same period of time. Then, multiply this number by 100. This figure should be calculated for households exiting the rapid re-housing program over the preceding 12 month period.

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households exited to permanent housing during a time period}}{\text{Total number of households that exited program during that same time period}} \right) 100$$

For example, a program that served 10 households over the course of a year, with nine of those households exiting to permanent housing, would calculate the percentage using the following equation:

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{9}{10} \right) 100$$

In this example, the program had 90 percent of households exit to permanent housing over the course of a year. Programs interested in improving performance on this metric may wish to measure this at shorter intervals and should refer to the Planning for Improvement portion of this document for more information.

1 REDUCE THE LENGTH OF TIME PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS SPEND HOMELESS

2 INCREASE EXITS OF HOUSEHOLDS TO PERMANENT HOUSING

3 LIMIT RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS

3 LIMIT RETURNS TO HOMELESSNESS

Rapid re-housing programs are intended to help individuals and families exit homelessness, and programs should work to limit the number of households that return to homelessness shortly after exiting from the program.

Performance Benchmark

At least 85 percent of households that exit a rapid re-housing program to permanent housing should not become homeless again within a year.

Necessary Data

To calculate this measure, a program will need to make use of HMIS data from homeless programs across the entire community. This will allow it to determine whether people who successfully exit from the rapid re-housing program to permanent housing returned to homelessness (meaning an unsheltered location, emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a Safe Haven) within 12 months of exiting. In communities with open HMIS, a program can calculate this measure itself. In communities with closed HMIS, a program may need to request that the HMIS lead agency assist them in the calculation.

Programs without participants who exited at least one year ago will not be able to meet this benchmark. Additionally, to calculate this measure, programs must have access to homeless system data for all other programs in the community (open data system) or the ability to access an HMIS report from their community's HMIS lead agency. For a program in a community without open or adequate HMIS coverage (at least 80 percent of programs entering data), and for a rapid re-housing provider that is also a domestic violence provider, this measure can be calculated using an alternative, equivalent method to document the program's ability to meet the standards such as follow up with a representative sample of households that exit to permanent housing.

Permanent housing may include private, unsubsidized housing; subsidized housing; permanent supportive housing; or housing shared with friends or family in a sustainable living situation (one that **should not** be categorized as "temporary"). Permanent housing does not include shelter, a transitional housing program, jail or prison, or a treatment facility; households who exited the program to any other destination other than permanent housing should not be included in calculating this measure.

This measure of returns to homelessness tracks the percentage of households who do not experience a subsequent episode of homelessness within a year of program exit. If a household receives some type of emergency or permanent housing assistance, but does not experience another episode of homeless, then it should be considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this performance benchmark. And, if a household moves from one permanent housing situation to another permanent housing situation or a doubled up situation without another episode of homelessness in-between moves, it is also considered a household that did not return to homelessness for the purpose of this measure.

Calculating Performance

This outcome requires a calculation of the **percentage** of households who remain housed 12 months after program exit to permanent housing¹. To calculate a percentage, take the number of households that exited to permanent housing who exited to permanent housing (PH) minus the total number of households who returned to homelessness within one year and divide by the total number of households who exited to permanent housing. Then, multiply this number by 100.

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households exited to permanent housing} - \text{Total number of households who returned to homelessness within one year}}{\text{Total number of households exited to PH}} \right) 100$$

A way to do this in HMIS is to calculate it based on the number of households known to have returned to homelessness within one year of their exit date. For example, a program may have had 10 households exit to permanent housing the course of a year, and HMIS indicates 3 households returned to the homeless system within one year of their program exit with permanent housing. Subtract the number that returned from the total exits with permanent housing.

$$\text{Percent} = \left(\frac{10-3}{10} \right) 100 = 70\%$$

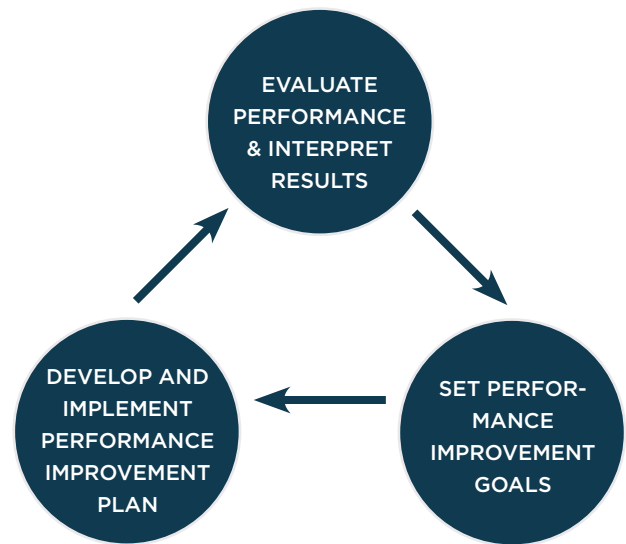
In this example, the program had 30 percent of households who returned to homelessness one year after program exit; presumably, the remaining 70 percent of households did not return to homelessness during this time period. Programs interested in improving performance on this metric should refer to the Planning for Improvement portion of this document.

¹This measure must be calculated by the examining the calendar year after the exit date of each individual household

III. PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Data is valuable only if it is acted upon. Thus, program evaluation is important — but it is not enough. Programs and systems should use the information gained from evaluation to refine and improve rapid re-housing activities.

Performance improvement is a cycle involving evaluation, setting goals, and the implementation of a plan. After using benchmarks to determine program effectiveness, programs and systems can use the resultant information to create a performance improvement plan. Once the plan is implemented, the cycle of evaluation and improvement begins anew.



- 1 **EVALUATE PERFORMANCE & INTERPRET RESULTS**
- 2 **SET PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT GOALS**
- 3 **DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**
- 4 **REVIEW AND REVISE GOALS**
- 5 **REFINE PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES IF NEEDED**

1 EVALUATE PERFORMANCE AND INTERPRET RESULTS

The benchmarks outlined for each of the three outcome measures provide a standard to which programs can evaluate and compare their results.

Though these benchmarks provide recommended targets to which programs may choose to compare their outcomes, programs and systems may choose to set their own benchmarks and goals. A community may not have any programs that meet the benchmarks. Funders, systems, or programs may want to set alternate performance goals for the purposes of comparison between programs or performance improvement while programs work to achieve these benchmarks. Or, a program that already meets the benchmarks may want to set goals that exceed them. A program's initial evaluation outcomes can provide a baseline from which to evaluate performance improvement, with programs and systems continually working to achieve better outcomes in comparison to the baseline.

The table on the next page summarizes the national benchmarks and calculations for each outcome metric, as described in the sections above, additional evaluation opportunities, and activities to evaluate for improvement.

Reminder

When evaluating performance and working on performance improvement, it is important to remember that rapid re-housing is a Housing First intervention. This means, among other things, that programs should not be screening out households based on criteria that are assumed to predict successful outcomes, such as income, employment, criminal history, mental health history, medical history, or evidence of “motivation.”

The benchmarks detailed in this document are based on performance data of programs that do not screen households out on the

basis of these factors. Programs assisting individuals and families with high housing barriers are able to achieve these outcomes.

Programs that are screening out households on the basis of these factors may be rapidly re-housing people that could have exited homelessness without any assistance at all. When examining performance, funders, system administrators, and programs should examine the screening procedures of a program and also examine data on the population being served to ensure that resources are being targeted as effectively as possible.

OUTCOME	BENCHMARK	CALCULATION	ACTIVITIES TO EXAMINE FOR IMPROVEMENT	ADDITIONAL EVALUATION OPPORTUNITIES
Length of time homeless	Average of 30 days or less between program entry and exit to permanent housing	$\text{Average} = \frac{\text{Sum of number of days from program entry to move in date for all household}}{\text{Total number of households}}$	Activities that contribute to good performance on this outcome include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting landlords to have access to units • Finding units that are in the communities and neighborhoods that program participants want to live in • Negotiating with landlords to help program participants access housing 	Determine median and mode to use in comparison to the average. Graph length of time from program entry to move-in date against a variety of other measures (income, criminal history, size of household, etc.) on a scatter plot to determine opportunities for improvement in program implementation. Or, if your community has assessment data examine whether the depth of need of the household is influencing the length of time it takes for housing. Examine data over multiple years to see if they are affected by the time of year they are collected. Examine characteristics of households to see if elements like household size, homeless history, gender, race, age, chronic homeless status, eviction history, legal history, credit scores, etc. are influencing the length of time it takes to house them.

OUTCOME	BENCHMARK	CALCULATION	ACTIVITIES TO EXAMINE FOR IMPROVEMENT	ADDITIONAL EVALUATION OPPORTUNITIES
Exits to permanent housing	At least 80 percent of households exit to permanent housing	$\% = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households exited to permanent housing during a time period}}{\text{Total number of households that exited program during that same time period}} \right) 100$	<p>A rapid re-housing program can impact permanent housing success through a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate housing placement • Effective financial assistance • Effective case management and services connections 	<p>Examine results for households grouped by landlord to determine which landlords tend to result in more successful placements.</p> <p>Map placements by neighborhood to determine housing locations that tend to be more successful.</p> <p>Examine the amounts and duration of financial assistance on permanent housing exits and to identify opportunities for greater efficiency.</p> <p>Review the relative impact of individual case managers on household success.</p> <p>Examine the percentage of households that follow up with and take advantage of community based services to which they are referred to determine which community-based services are more successful in engaging households.</p> <p>Examine data over multiple years to check for the impact time of the year may have on the number of people exiting to permanent housing.</p> <p>Examine characteristics of households to see if size, homelessness history, gender, race, age, chronic homeless status, eviction history, legal history, credit scores, etc. affect exits to permanent housing. Data from a community's assessment tool may also be used in this analysis.</p>
Returns to homelessness	At least 85 percent of households do not return homelessness one year after program exit	$\% = \left(\frac{\text{Total number of households exited to permanent housing} - \text{Total number of households who returned to homelessness within one year}}{\text{Total number of households exited to PH}} \right) 100$	<p>The primary opportunities for a rapid re-housing program to impact the success of a household in remaining housed are through the combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Securing appropriate housing • Effective case management and services, including referrals to mainstream and community services 	<p>Examine groups by landlord to determine which landlords tend to result in more successful placements.</p> <p>Map placements by neighborhood to determine housing locations that tend to be more successful.</p> <p>Examine the percentage of families that follow up with and take advantage of community based services to which they are referred.</p> <p>Examine data over multiple years to check for the impact time of year may have on returns to homelessness (for example, does the end of the school year correspond with an uptick in families returning to homelessness from a rapid re-housing program).</p> <p>Examine characteristics of households to see if size, homelessness history, gender, race, age, chronic homeless status, eviction history, legal history, credit scores, etc. correspond to higher returns to homelessness. Data from a community's assessment tool may also be used in this analysis.</p>

1

EVALUATE PERFORMANCE & INTERPRET RESULTS

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2 EVALUATE PERFORMANCE AND INTERPRET RESULTS

Once specific areas for improvement are identified, programs can set SMART² goals. These goals are:

- **Specific:** Goals should not be overly general, but instead should explicitly state what will be accomplished, how it will be accomplished, and when it will be accomplished.
- **Measurable:** Programs should establish goals that can be measured, rather than vague “increase” or “decrease” goals. For example, a measurable goal would be a decrease of 5 days in the average length of time homelessness; it would not be a decrease in the number of days homeless.
- **Attainable:** While programs should maintain high standards, they should not set goals that are too extreme to be attained. For example, an attainable goal may be a 10 percent decrease in returns to homelessness over a course of a year; it would not be zero returns to homelessness over the course of a year.
- **Relevant:** Programs should focus on at least one of the three main rapid re-housing performance benchmarks for improvement, as these outcomes are the most relevant to rapid re-housing program success.
- **Timely:** Programs should establish a date in the near future by which this goal should reasonably be accomplished. Programs should aim to see improvement within six to 12 months of establishing a goal.

When all the elements of a SMART goal are taken together, these goal statements may look like the following:

- By December 1, the average length of stay homeless will decrease from 50 days to 45 days.
- The rate of exit to permanent housing will increase from 50 percent of all households to 60 percent of all households within the next nine months.
- In the next 6 months, the percentage of households who return to homelessness after exit to permanent housing will decrease from 20 percent to 15 percent.

Note: Programs with multiple areas for improvement should be judicious in prioritizing the areas in which they have the most room for improvement. For example, a program that has a length of time homeless of 47 days and a return to homelessness rate of 50 percent has the greatest need for improvement on returns to homelessness and may want to prioritize that for improvement.

²Doran, G.T. (1981). “There’s a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management’s goals and objectives.” *Management Review* 70 (11): 35-36.



3 DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Once these goal statements are established and agreed upon, specific tasks should be outlined that will help achieve the goal. These tasks break down a goal into smaller, more manageable steps.

For example, if a goal involves increasing the percentage of exits to permanent housing, the tasks may include:

- Housing identification staff are responsible for identifying and building relationships with five new landlords in the community in the next six months.
- Case managers are responsible for improving the supports and engaging more with program participants in the housing search process.
- Program director is responsible for scheduling trainings on the principles of rapid re-housing case management and motivational interviewing for all staff.

After tasks are established, program leadership should designate a specific person or people to take responsibility for specific tasks. This may be a combination of case managers, program administrators, or others, depending on the goal and tasks involved. Program leaders should establish regular meetings with employees to remain updated on progress of each of these tasks and of the larger goal.

It is also important to remember that, if staff is expected to improve program performance, there are certain conditions that are necessary:

- Leadership within the organization/community must be committed to the improvement goals and provide the coaching, time, and motivation to help realize the goals.
- Staff and leaders need to have the knowledge necessary to execute the intervention and achieve the improvement goal, as goals will not be improved upon only by working harder. As such, internal and external training and professional development opportunities may need to be considered.
- Data must be entered accurately and in a timely fashion. Data entry is part of the work and is a critical piece of successful performance evaluation and improvement.
- Local conditions and pressures will influence which goals are achievable and which goals are unrealistic. For example, in a rental market with lower vacancy rates and high rents it may be possible to slightly reduce the average of length of time homeless each quarter. However, expecting this measure to decrease drastically in a short time frame is not likely.

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4 REVIEW AND REVISE GOALS

Conducting an outcome evaluation and creating a performance improvement plan are important steps, but they are just the beginning. Programs should strive to create a culture of ongoing performance improvement. These processes must be repeated continually in order for programs to stay informed about the success of rapid re-housing for their participants and understand the impacts of any changes made to the program.

It is recommended that programs evaluate outcome metrics and performance improvement goals once every three months. These quarterly reviews will allow programs to stay abreast of any emerging trends, but are infrequent enough not to be too onerous. If outcome metrics are not trending in the right direction, or if performance improvement plan goals are not being met, adjustments can be made during these reviews. This may result in changes to goals, but may also result in changes to strategy and implementation to realize the goals.

5 DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Creating a performance improvement plan can be challenging and some experimentation may be needed to determine the right actions to take. The strategies below can help programs refine their performance improvement plans and ensure that they are acting as efficiently and as effectively as possible.

Rapid Cycle Evaluation

One method that programs can use to determine the effectiveness of their program improvement plan quickly is a rapid cycle evaluation. This type of evaluation involves changing the services provided for a group of program participants, while the services provided for a different group of program participants remain unchanged. This allows programs to see in real-time how well the changes made to services are working.

For example, a program with a low percentage of households exiting to permanent housing may believe that this number could be increased by improving relationships with landlords. Half of the case managers in the program then would work to strengthen relationships with landlords, focusing on placing households in permanent housing with these landlords. Other half would continue providing services as usual. If the clients who have case managers that are landlord-focused show greater success in exits to permanent housing, this intervention is successful. However, if there is no change in the new group the program would need to examine another possible intervention or change in service delivery.

Focus Groups

It can be easy to become mired in numbers and tasks when analyzing outcome data and developing improvement plans. The voices of the people actually served by rapid re-housing programs — the participants — can become lost. To ensure that performance improvement plans keep the best interests of participants in mind, and to complement the knowledge gained from analyzing outcome metrics, programs may want to conduct focus groups with participants.

Focus groups generally consist of a small group of participants (approximately eight to 10 people) and a moderator who facilitates discussion. The objective of focus groups is not come to a consensus, but rather to gain deep insight from participants about their individual experiences and viewpoints.

These groups can be particularly useful if programs are unsure how to begin improving outcome measures, or if the data analysis paints an unclear picture of participant results. Focus groups should be conducted with specific goals in mind, such as identifying key factors that result in returns to homelessness. A pre-formulated list of questions should be created to enable discussion. Questions should be open-ended and participants should be able to speak freely. Questions should focus both on the aspects of the program that can be improved and on the successful activities that a program should continue.

The moderator, if possible, should be an objective third-party who is not affiliated with the program so that participants can speak freely without fear of penalty from program staff. The moderator should take great lengths to ensure confidentiality within the focus groups, and any report prepared by the moderator should not attach specific names of participants to comments or themes. If multiple focus groups are conducted, the same moderator should be used in each group to ensure consistency in methodology.

Though focus groups are not generalizable to the experiences of all participants in a program, they can guide programs toward understanding broad themes and barriers that are common amongst participants. The results from focus groups can be used in conjunction with analysis of outcome metrics to present a clearer picture of areas for improvement.

Key Points to Remember

- Performance evaluation and improvement processes rely on high quality data. Outcomes calculated with poor quality data will be misleading.
- Setting SMART goals is essential to ensure that performance improvement efforts are accountable and measureable.
- Performance improvement is an ongoing process of continually evaluating benchmarks, setting goals and delegating tasks, implementing changes, and evaluating again.