

Article from the National Alliance to End Homelessness

Written by Sharon McDonald August 30, 2021

2021 NOFO—What is HUD looking for?

In an [earlier blogpost](#), the Alliance urged localities to reflect on their own goals for their homeless service system. Communities should assess available system data to identify how they are progressing toward meeting those goals: strengths and weaknesses, and where there is need for improvement.

Such an analysis should influence how localities approach the new HUD Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Analyzing systems can help communities identify key priority areas for improvement to meet their own goals of helping people quickly exit homelessness safely and efficiently.

Ideally, local leaders will find that their local goals align with HUD's priorities, which are oriented toward improving how systems function to assist people experiencing homelessness.

Here are some examples of questions about your system that you should take into consideration to advance your own performance and adhere to HUD's specific policy priorities in the NOFO:

Priority #1: Ending homelessness for all persons.

- Is your system attending to the needs and outcomes of all people experiencing homelessness or just focused on one or two subpopulations?
- Are data being captured and examined to identify those with the highest needs and longest experiences of homelessness to ensure they are connected to housing and services that will help them exit homelessness?
- Is information being collected as to needs and outcomes of all subpopulations so performance can be regularly assessed, improvements made, and new partnerships crafted to meet people's needs?
- What steps can you do to improve your system's performance to end homelessness for all persons?

Priority #2: Use a Housing First approach.

- Is your system moving people quickly and effectively to permanent housing?
- Are some organizations funded in your system "Housing First" in name only and failing to adhere to its principles? What will you do to ensure that all funding organization are truly "housing first?"
- Do you have sufficient investment in landlord engagement and recruitment?
- What investments must be made and/or scaled up with new resources to improve performance?

Priority #3: Reduce unsheltered homelessness.

- Are there efforts in your locality to end unsheltered homelessness or just to manage it? Are people being identified, outreached, and assisted to find permanent housing options or are they simply being policed and monitored?
- Are unsheltered individuals being prioritized for Continuum of Care (CoC) funded projects as well as other external funding resources, including the Emergency Housing Vouchers?
- Are significant resources being deployed to assist them or largely to programs they will never benefit from?
- How can you use the NOFO and other new federal funding streams to reduce unsheltered homelessness? How can you demonstrate significant meaningful investment toward attaining this goal?

Priority #4: Improve system performance.

HUD acknowledges the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on system data quality and performance. While this will be taken into consideration this year, the NOFO cautions CoCs that system performance will become an increasingly important part of how their application is scored from 2022 and onward.

- How good is your locality's data? Are you using your system measures to make funding decisions?
- Are you analyzing your data at least quarterly to identify where your system and individual programs are achieving strong outcomes and where they are falling short? Are you ensuring this data is informing your ranking and prioritization process?
- Is your Coordinated Entry System facilitating and expediting access to assistance for all persons (and to a wide range of services) or has it become a speed bump to aid, creating delays?
- How can it be improved so people have greater trust in the process and more choice?
- What shifts can you make with new funds to improve system performance?

Priority #5: Partner with housing, health, and service agencies.

- Is your system invested in building the partnerships that bring more dollars, services, and staffing support that can reinforce and replenish a very tired (and heroic) homeless services workforce?
- Will HOME dollars and new Emergency Housing Vouchers being invested in a way that will end homelessness for those in your system that face the greatest challenges – older adults, people with extensive histories of homelessness, people with significant disabilities – that can also alleviate the excessive strain in your system?
- Are public health systems, supported with Medicaid and other health care funding, stepping up to help to support vulnerable people?

- Consider the investment in system navigation or other strategies to build alliances as something that can pay dividends for your system as a whole and alleviate the strain on the homeless service workforce and programs, not add to it.
- What commitments are you are you making to further integrate partners into the work of the system and into the work of individual programs to end homelessness?

Priority #6: Advance race equity.

- What action steps has your locality taken to use programmatic and system level data to identify and address racial disparities in access to interventions and system outcomes?
- Have steps been taken to identify what contributes to those disparities and what resulting actions were taken?
- What new strategies, partnerships, trainings, or points of intervention been adopted to improve program access and responsive service delivery across racial groups? What action steps will you commit to in the following year to advance racial equity?
- How will you ensure that projects ranked and prioritized in this NOFO are advancing racial equity in your community?
- Do system leaders reflect the racial composition of people experiencing homelessness in your region?

Priority #7: Involve People with Lived Experience.

- Are people currently experiencing homelessness and those with lived experience of homelessness involved in the planning and improvement of services?
- Are you leveraging their expertise to identify gaps in services, problematic policies, and developing a vision on how homelessness will be ended locally?
- Are there employment opportunities for people with lived experience of homelessness in your system that honors, and appropriately compensates for, their expertise?
- How will you ensure that funded projects involving people with lived experience in their organizations include organizational commitments to improve engagement of people with lived expertise?

Completing the NOFO in a Time of Stress

Responding to the NOFO is overwhelming and it comes at a time when homeless service system staff are tired and depleted. There is so much to do and there has been little respite over the last year and a half. Unfortunately, it doesn't even seem as if the end is in sight. Please take care of yourself, your loved ones and [your colleagues](#). Thank you for everything you do to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness every day.

When you can, carve out time to think strategically about the NOFO. How can you advance your system through the NOFO process to adhere to your own goals, and make progress toward achieving HUD's vision identifiable through the outlined priority areas? Think about where these investments are

critically needed in your community. These are hard choices to make, but they hopefully will ease the burden on you, your colleagues, your workforce – but more importantly, will enable more people exit homelessness and achieve safe permanent housing.