



**General Meeting Minutes**  
October 10, 2024, 10am-12pm  
Harrisonburg, Virginia

**Agenda**

1. NOFO Update
2. Strategic planning (2025)
  - a. What can our CoC do to increase and support street outreach, and ensure service accessibility?
  - b. How does the lack of shelter and affordable housing affect both client trust and length of time experiencing homelessness?
  - c. Who is advising our CoC on pursuing racial equity?
  - d. How can we increase ongoing support for those who are new to being housed and prevent the return to homelessness?
3. Announcements

**Minutes**

**1. NOFO update**

Kaitlin Heatwole (HMIS Admin) provided an overview of the CoC's collaborative application process to HUD's CoC Program Competition (also known as the NOFO).

- The CoC received 3 applications (2 renewals and 1 new application).
- The ad hoc rank and review committee is conducting that process this week
- The ranking will go to the Executive Committee next week for review, approval, and publication.
- The collaborative application will be posted on the website prior to submission in late October.
- CoC staff is seeking input from members so that the application fully reflects the good work that is already happening
- The CoC Planning and HMIS applications received in-kind match commitments from a wide range of CoC agencies, including Mercy House, Harrisonburg Redevelopment and Housing Authority, Strength in Peers, Open Doors, Winchester Rescue Mission, and WATTS. Thank you!

**2. Strategic planning 2025**

**2.1. What can our CoC do to increase and support street outreach and ensure service accessibility?**

- Identify and dedicate additional resources to street outreach so that expanded capacity can adequately address need
  - Street outreach is a demanding crisis intervention role that needs substantial funding, training, resources, staff, and recognition to build trust – needs a sea change of mentality and concrete resources in order to be successful
  - Not enough funding and too heavy of workloads means street outreach has high turnover, resulting in low trust and decreased effectiveness.
- Coordinate with law enforcement, park services, and local governments to develop alternative paths of interaction that avoid criminalization and connect people to services
  - Law enforcement and public authorities have limited tools and are legally required to investigate/follow up in some situations (i.e. notified of trespassing by landowner)
  - there is curiosity and an openness to coordinate (Winchester, Frederick, Page)

- When unsheltered people are hiding from law enforcement, they are also harder for street outreach to find and connect them to services (especially in rural areas)
- Community Paramedics and crisis response teams have been successful
- Strength in Peers will send teams to encampments in Harrisonburg/Rockingham
- Expand services that Street Outreach is connecting people to, and streamline system referrals
  - Improve interface of street outreach with built for zero case conferencing and coordinated entry referrals
  - Shelters are at capacity and are unable to offer additional support to unsheltered populations – no alternatives
  - Embed street outreach in existing programs, including meeting people where they're at (i.e. Centralized Housing Intake setting up at Page One and at the Navigation Center)

**2.2. how does lack of shelter beds and affordable housing affect client trust and length of time experiencing homelessness?**

- Limitation of service availability discourages engagement in the system (learned helplessness)
- Staying engaged with clients through long wait times is challenging; RRH has a high drop-off rate, people who maintain contact are more successful
- Absence of low barrier shelters results in higher rates of unsheltered homelessness, which makes engagement and connection to the services that do exist harder
- How can we invite and connect with local governments to coordinate with CoC services and communicate the issue to them?
- Need for building trust and collaboration: client trusting agencies, agencies trusting each other, agencies trusting governing bodies

**2.3. Who is advising our CoC on pursuing racial equity?**

- CoC does regular analysis of racial disparity – look at who we're serving compared to what the homeless community is, and compare that to the local population of residents
  - Mercy House (Shannon) identified gap between Latinx population and service access, affirmatively worked with local community leaders to enhance connections
  - First Step (Candy) has developed a DEI plan, recruited staff from larger pool to enhance diversity (including linguistic capacity) and is working on diversity of board. They provide an annual training on racial equity and utilize a language line.
- Agencies that we are and could connect with:
  - HRHA works with the Northeast Neighborhood in Harrisonburg
  - HOME (Richmond) is a resource for fair housing
  - Connect with churches and community groups, including individuals in Kurdish community, mosque, Congolese community, churches, etc.
  - Represent the CoC and homeless services at events, black heritage and pride festivals, migrant education opportunities, Strength in Peers
  - Local chapters of NAACP
  - Shenandoah LGBTQ Center – working specifically with LGBTQ youth

**2.4. Ongoing support for housing to prevent returns**

- Housing first, not housing only -- offer ongoing support and services to retain housing
  - Support group changes when someone is housed; they experience isolation of missing their communities; introduce neighbors so they aren't alone and can build friendships around them

- Face different challenges that are unfamiliar (i.e. paying bills, maintenance, etc) – the dream has become a reality
- Use of money is totally different, long term vs short term planning
- Work with medical case manager for ongoing support about client needs and facilitate case coordination
- Wellness checks – hanging pictures, putting food in fridge, turning lights on/off, budget counseling
- Sometimes people do not want supportive services, and treatment is not a requirement
  - HRCSB PSH: clients have to engage with Housing Specialist and case management is choice. Housing Specialists build trust during the housing search process.

### **3. Announcements**

- October is Domestic Violence awareness month: First Step is having drop-in event at their location tomorrow (Oct 11) from 10am-12pm
- Open Doors is seeking a System Administrator to fulfill HMIS data and financial duties
- There will be a special summit event on March 20, 2025 to review the CoC Charter

The next CoC meeting will take place on January 9, 2025 in Winchester

Minutes submitted by Kaitlin Heatwole