

Chicago Continuum of Care Implementation Structure Community Guide 2021

Draft for CoC Public Comment
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Introduction

Homelessness is a multifaceted problem that stems from a lack of social protection and the failure of many systems. Homelessness cannot be solved by individual people or agencies alone. Rather, ending homelessness requires collective community action. In Chicago, the [Continuum of Care](#)¹ (CoC) leads our efforts to prevent and end homelessness. The work of the CoC is governed by a [charter](#) and an elected [Board of Directors](#).

In 2019, the Continuum of Care adopted the Implementation Structure (IS), formerly known as the Action Agenda, to enact the strategic vision of the CoC. The IS fosters collaboration and communication while allowing the community to engage in targeted decision-making. It spurs action, innovation, and implementation, making the continuum more responsive than a long-term strategic plan. The IS supports regular review of data to track progress toward preventing and ending homelessness and responding to the community's immediate needs.

The IS is designed to:

- Improve efficiency by creating a work structure that aligns with the actions needed to prevent and end homelessness;
- Foster collaboration and communication throughout the CoC by working together toward clearly established goals and benchmarks; and
- Promote proactivity and responsiveness by identifying resources to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness and harnessing the political will to secure those resources.

Who Manages the CoC Implementation Structure?

The day to day work of the CoC IS is managed by two lead project managers from All Chicago. The lead project managers encourage connection between the lead agencies, the Lines of Action, and with other systems. They also ensure that the leadership of people with lived expertise is embedded throughout the CoC IS.

How is the CoC Implementation Structure Organized?

The CoC IS is comprised of work done on behalf of and in partnership with the CoC. This includes the work of the community's lead agencies, the CoC's strategic initiatives reflected in the Lines of Action, and the stakeholder partnerships reflected in affinity groups. The entire CoC IS is guided by the leadership of people with lived experience.

A brief overview of each aspect of the IS is outlined below.

People with Lived Experience

People with lived experience help direct and drive the work of the CoC IS. They meet in cohort groups, through the Lived Experience Commission (LEC) and Youth Action Board (YAB), and play integral roles in all other aspects of the CoC IS. Both the LEC and YAB have established decision making structures and membership responsibilities. They have representatives who serve on the CoC Board. They are also supported in their work by All Chicago staff.

¹ The Continuum of Care, or CoC, is a membership organization comprised of more than 100 organizations and individuals that strategizes and plans a coordinated, comprehensive approach to providing housing and services for people experiencing homelessness.

Lead Agency Work

Lead agencies carry out official duties on behalf of the CoC to support Chicago's relationship with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. This work is governed by Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the CoC Board of Directors. The MOUs outline the roles, responsibilities, and accountability structures for each lead agency, and are approved by the full CoC membership. A separate MOU covers each of the following areas: Collaborative Applicant (led by All Chicago), Coordinated Entry (led by CSH), and HMIS (led by All Chicago).

Lead agencies are selected and affirmed by the CoC to lead and drive the work outlined in the MOUs that speed progress in preventing and ending homelessness. Most lead agency responsibilities are completed by the designated lead agency or subcontracted partners. The lead agency may hold input sessions to help inform implementation decisions, but the lead agency is ultimately responsible for determining the course of action.

The System Operations and Performance Committee (SOPC) is a CoC Board Committee charged with responsibility for the MOUs with the Lead Agencies, including the MOU itself, and oversight and accountability for MOUs. Being that this is a large undertaking, SOPC designates a group within the CoC for each Lead Agency to conduct the oversight and accountability role. The lead agencies submit standard reports to the designated CoC group twice annually.

Lines of Action

A Line of Action (LOA) is organized to advance the CoC's strategic direction and priority areas. LOAs centralize and coordinate collective work to solve complex problems. They are focused on issues that require coordinated stakeholder involvement, address complex problems, and require a significant amount of system change. LOAs may also be established in response to large amounts of new resources or focused attention which requires a coordinated response. Broad community input and leadership is essential to the success of LOAs.

LOAs are accountable to the CoC Board Executive Committee, which brings items to the full CoC Board as it determines necessary. Each LOA is staffed by one to two project managers and led by a Leadership Team that shapes the work plan and establishes ad hoc workgroups to support implementation. Leadership Teams reflect stakeholder perspectives and help the LOA project managers determine the best path for accomplishing strategic objectives. Leadership Teams determine appropriate representation and help recruit ad hoc workgroup members. While LOA Leadership Team meetings and ad hoc workgroups are open to anyone in the community, only designated members participate in shared decision making for the LOA.

Affinity Groups

Affinity groups typically form around shared concern for a specific population, around organizations doing similar work, or around connections with other systems. Affinity groups work together to address shared needs and concerns within the CoC and help identify burgeoning needs in the community. Their work may include:

- Addressing priority areas or engaging stakeholders;
- Piloting system refinements; and

- Identifying shared questions or concerns to raise within the CoC, highlighting the need for population specific housing models or supportive services.

Affinity groups work in partnership with the CoC to accomplish the system goals of preventing and ending homelessness in Chicago. They are staffed by community members or stakeholders. Each affinity group has a designated All Chicago staff liaison to answer questions and ensuring the groups visibility within and across the CoC IS. Affinity groups may also have regular meetings with the IS lead project managers. While the All Chicago liaison consistently participates in affinity group meetings, they do not coordinate or run the groups.

Affinity groups establish the structures and norms for the group, decision-making processes, and membership responsibilities to support the group’s work.

The list of active affinity groups and information on how to join will be maintained on the CoC website [here](#). A draft list of affinity groups is included as **Error! Reference source not found.**

Distinguishing between Affinity Groups and Lines of Action

A specific topic is not definitionally an affinity group or LOA. Topics can influence all aspects of the CoC to correspond to the urgency and priority of the issue. LOAs help the community enact large-scale system change and require substantial community input and collaboration to succeed. LOAs may develop out of the work of an affinity group or may transition to become the work of an affinity group for subsequent maintenance.

Collaboration Within and Across the CoC IS

The CoC IS lead project managers ensure that information flows across and within the CoC IS. This is accomplished in a variety of ways.

Monthly

- LOA project managers meet with the lead project managers to discuss progress toward shared goals, identify opportunities for refinement and alignment across the LOAs, and to ensure continued connection with the CoC system goals.
- Lead agency staff meet with lead project managers to discuss progress and troubleshoot barriers.
- All Chicago Affinity Group liaisons meet with the lead project managers to coordinate the work of the affinity groups with other CoC IS activities.

Quarterly

- LOA project managers, relevant lead agency staff, and affinity group liaisons meet with the CoC IS lead project managers for a strategy session. This guarantees the CoC IS efforts remain in tandem and offers an opportunity to identify topics that may need to influence workplans or become LOAs in the future.

How can CoC members stay informed and engaged in the CoC IS?

All Chicago, as part of its role as Collaborative Applicant, supports several communications to support members of the CoC and inform on CoC IS efforts. These include:

- Maintaining a CoC website and events calendar;
- Publishing CoC IS news via e-newsletters on a regular basis; and
- Maintaining a Slack.com channel to promote interaction and information sharing for everyone in the CoC.

The CoC IS relies on participation from members throughout the continuum. CoC members are encouraged to follow committee activities. Meeting dates and times can be found on the [CoC Calendar](#), and meeting notes are posted in the [CoC's Slack.com channel](#). Voting occasionally may be limited to Leadership Teams, but all meetings are open to all CoC members. For adhoc workgroups or other one-time meetings, information will be shared through Slack and the CoC website.

Scheduling regular meetings of all staff at your agency to promote cross-team communication throughout the CoC IS can better connect direct service with the larger system goals of preventing and ending homelessness. Agencies are strongly encouraged to discuss their contributions to community conversations and the CoC IS overall.

On a quarterly basis, All Chicago hosts a CoC IS webinar to learn and share information about the CoC IS progress. This webinar will overlap with the biannual CoC Membership meetings when possible to support community participation.

CoC members with other ideas about communication avenues should email cocprograms@allchicago.org.

What are the Lines of Action in 2021?

The following topics were determined by community input through focus groups and a survey, CoC Board conversations, and support from the current CoC IS project managers. These topics reflect the community's current strategic priorities. They will likely be in place for the next few years. While there are currently five LOAs planned, through their work, a sixth LOA may be identified. In each LOA, we will center the needs of the subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness, and honor the fact that people are complex and rarely fit into just one group. This allows a more integrated approach to subpopulations, with multiple LOAs working together to provide support instead of single LOAs dedicated to specific groups of people.

- System analysis and resource development
- Homeless response system front door services
- Expedited Housing Initiative
- Racial equity
- Connecting to Other Sectors: Employment and Income

More detail about each LOA, its alignment with the system goals, and preliminary anticipated focus area can be found below. The website will be kept updated with information about current and ongoing work of the LOAs.

System Analysis and Resource Development

Ending homelessness requires a holistic understanding of the service system. Investment must be balanced between prevention, crisis services, and housing, while focusing on community priorities and

grappling with insufficient resources. This LOA will build from the prior Pipeline and System Funding LOAs.

The System Analysis LOA will likely focus on the following activities:

- Building from the Pipeline analysis to refresh the need for prevention resources, housing units, and service supports, including individuals who will never have a housing resource;
- Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the number of people experiencing homelessness over the coming years and the resulting need for emergency shelter, services, and housing;
- Gathering information on the current allocation of public and private funding to address homelessness and determine ways to optimize funding and identify gaps; and
- Identifying gaps in current funding and making a workplan which may include reallocation of funding or advocacy.

Homeless Response System Front Door Services

People encounter the homeless response system through the homeless prevention call center, street outreach teams, accessing shelter, and in many other ways. As individuals seek services, they should receive consistent support that leverages prevention funding, diversion supports, and crisis services that are focused on reducing how many people experience homelessness and how long that homelessness lasts. This LOA will build from the prior Crisis System Transition and Street Outreach LOAs.

The Front Door LOA will likely focus on the following activities:

- Launching diversion supports and prevention funding throughout the CoC;
- Connecting coordinated entry, prevention, and rental assistance services/funding to front-door points of access such as outreach, shelters, day centers, and 311;
- Optimizing and clarifying roles and responsibilities across outreach, shelter, housing navigation and housing liaison services;
- Refining the approach to outreach to address the needs of all populations and all areas of the city; and
- Working with the System Analysis LOA to understand services needs and gaps in emergency services.

Expedited Housing Initiative

People experiencing homelessness need quick, easy access to housing support that allows permanent exits from homelessness. The Expedited Housing Initiative (EHI) LOA will test innovations to speed progress into housing and identify opportunities to embed system change.

The EHI will focus on the following activities:

- Testing Accelerated Moving Events to house people connected to shelters, day centers, and outreach teams;
- Centralizing landlord outreach and engagement for the CoC;
- Working with the Employment and Income LOA to test the use of SOAR and Employment Navigators for the CoC;
- Implementing the modified prioritization and matching process to align with the temporary prioritization;
- Identifying and solving for housing barriers in the CoC; and

- Working with the Front Door LOA to clarify roles and responsibilities among the various parties working with people experiencing homelessness as they access housing.

Racial Equity

Homelessness disproportionately affects Black or African American people. While roughly 30 percent of Chicago's population is Black or African American, 70 percent of people experiencing homelessness are Black or African American. If we are going to prevent and end homelessness in Chicago, we must address the racial inequities that plague our city and country. Through the work of the LOA, we seek to address the systemic issues that helped create racial inequality in Chicago. Having a LOA focused on racial equity will ensure that the CoC prioritizes this issue.

The Racial Equity LOA will likely focus on the following activities:

- Connecting racial equity initiatives with the CoC IS activities;
- Working with the System Analysis LOA to identify gaps and advocate for additional resources to address inequities in preventing and ending homelessness;
- Collaborating with all LOAs to embed racial equity efforts within their work;
- Working with the System Analysis LOA to audit current funding distribution and identify opportunities to rebalance resources; and
- Working with the CoC Board to determine the CoC's approach to addressing racism.

Connecting to Other Sectors: Employment and Income

Sustainable exits from homelessness often hinge on peoples' ability to pay for some or all of their housing costs. Preventing and ending homelessness requires people to be connected to support and services that build lasting pathways for income and employment. This LOA will help to further connection between the Employment Task Force and the CoC.

The Employment and Income LOA will likely focus on the following activities:

- Working with the EHI LOA to test the use of SOAR and Employment Navigators within the CoC;
- Working with the Racial Equity LOA to embed learnings from the Pathways Forward Initiative into the CoC;
- Conducting data matches to understand the overlay between homeless services and workforce services; and
- Developing cross-training/system's level connections to cement the relationship between the homeless services and workforce services systems.