

# Chicago Continuum of Care Implementation Structure Community Guide 2021

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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](#)<sup>1</sup> (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. This work entails activities such as:

- Ensuring each Line of Action has a [leadership team](#) that oversees the strategic direction and activity prioritization of the Lines of Action; that work plans are clear, public, and updated regularly; and providing guidance to project managers to ensure topics are integrated with other CoC IS activities and aimed toward system goals.
- Ensuring broad community engagement within each Line of Action and the CoC IS overall.
- Meeting with stakeholders to address concerns or identify opportunities to expand our efforts to prevent and end homelessness.
- Managing the flow of key CoC activities, including helping to identify when changes to the CoC Implementation Structure are needed, or when a CoC Board Policy decision is required.

## 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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

### 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.

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.

A separate MOU covers each of the following areas:

- Collaborative Applicant (led by All Chicago), working with the Collaborative Applicant Subcommittee;
- Coordinated Entry (led by CSH), working with the Coordinated Entry Leadership Group; and
- HMIS (led by All Chicago), working with the HMIS Evaluation Committee.

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. For example, All Chicago maintains opportunities for input and participation related to HUD project monitoring (via the Collaborative Applicant Committee and Monitoring Workgroup), HUD project evaluation (via the Collaborative Applicant Committee and Evaluation Tool Committee), and HUD project ranking (via the CoC Board and the Project Prioritization Workgroup). All Chicago agrees with the commenter that these decisions need to be transparent and include well-informed stakeholders.

### 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/or
- 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 decision-making processes and membership responsibilities to support the group's work. The CoC IS Lead Project Managers will hold strategy sessions twice a year that invite Affinity Group leaders, Lead Agency Project Managers, and LOA Project Managers to discuss progress toward system goals and upcoming opportunities. These biennial meetings will assess current Lines of Actions, workplans, and transitions for LOAs and Affinity Groups.

Affinity Groups are not staffed by All Chicago, allowing community members to coordinate all aspects of the group. All Chicago can list affinity group meetings on the [CoC Events Calendar](#) and distribute communications through the [CoC Newsletter](#). Affinity Group leads are encouraged to use the [CoC Slack channels](#) to share information.

#### **Affinity Group Accountability**

Affinity Groups are broadly accountable to the CoC and the CoC Implementation Structure and should focus on actions that contribute to the system-level work of the entire CoC, not just the interests of the group. No single entity is designed to hold Affinity Groups accountable, but CoC IS Lead Project Managers and anyone in the CoC IS can raise the issue of accountability to the CoC Executive Committee if needed.

### **Affinity Group Criteria**

To be considered part of the CoC Implementation Structure, Affinity Groups must [register with the CoC Lead Agency \(All Chicago\)](#). Affinity Groups should appoint one person to register the group. To be invited to the biennial strategy sessions, CoC Affinity Groups must be registered and held at least one meeting in the month prior to the session. Affinity Groups must:

- Have designated lead(s) of the group that serves as the primary Point of Contact for other CoC members looking to join;
- Accept CoC members (Affinity Groups may stipulate guidelines for membership);
- Have an establish purpose or goals with activities that are clearly tied to the CoC System Goals;
- And convene at east every other month.

### **Affinity Group Registration**

Affinity Groups Registration and approval is reviewed and approved as part of the CoC IS by the CoC Implementation Structure Lead Project Managers and CoC Board Chair. If additional guidance is needed about the Affinity Group joining the CoC IS, the request will be brought to the Executive Committee of the Board. If needed, Affinity Group candidates can request to meet directly with the Executive Committee. Interested parties should [apply through the online survey](#).

### **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

The CoC IS Lead Project Managers will hold biennial (twice per year) strategy sessions that invite Affinity Group leaders, Lead Agency project managers, and Lines of Action project managers together to discuss progress toward system goals, and opportunities on the horizon. At the fall meeting, we will assess the

current Lines of Action, and the workplans for both Affinity Groups and Lines of Action, and work toward consensus for when something needs to become a Line of Action or removed as a Line of Action. If consensus cannot be reached, the CoC IS Lead Project Managers will take the discussion to the Executive Committee to weigh in.

Guidance for the criteria that determine a Line of Action can include:

- a. The community and/or CoC Board has identified a need around a particular topic; there is enough community mobilization around a pressing issue, that can be solved with a lot of intentional work by the community.
- b. Without creating a Line of Action, the community is at risk of not tackling the issue.
- c. The topic is something that can be addressed through a time-limited work plan.
- d. There is an All Chicago or partner agency member that can dedicate 40% FTE to Line activities.
- e. Without a Line of Action, necessary partners might not interact or come to the table
- f. The work intentionally advances the CoC's strategic priorities.
- g. New resources may be coming for activities in the Line of Action.

If it is identified that Lines of Action should change, that change will be proposed to the Executive Committee of the Board by the CoC IS Lead Project Managers.

At any time, a member of the CoC can submit a request in writing to the CoC IS Lead Project Managers and the CoC Board Executive Committee to propose a new Line of Action for consideration.

## CoC Membership Roles

### Staying Informed about 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.

All Chicago and the CoC IS Lead Project Managers will broadly communicate opportunities for engaging in the Lines of Action. To the extent that Affinity Groups provide information about engagement opportunities to All Chicago, All Chicago will also share those with the CoC.

CoC members with other ideas about communication avenues should email [cocprograms@allchicago.org](mailto:cocprograms@allchicago.org).

### Engaging with the CoC IS

CoC Members are encouraged to go beyond staying informed by actively engaging with the CoC IS. As the CoC IS is built on the foundation of a Collective Impact model, deep stakeholder engagement is critical to help the CoC achieve its system goals. Engagement includes both staying informed, but also actively involving members of your organization in the CoC IS. Opportunities for doing this will be broadcast via our newsletter, Slack and posted on the CoC's website. These opportunities for engagement include:

- Joining a CoC Implementation Structure Leadership Group or Work Group;
- Joining a CoC Board Committee;
- Join an Affinity Group;
- Attend CoC Board Meetings; and
- Attending CoC webinars and All CoC Meetings.

**Additionally, each agency should take stock to ensure that inter-agency communication is happening about the CoC IS, Affinity Groups and Board.**

Sharing feedback is another way CoC Members can shape the direction of the CoC. Throughout the year, there are both formal and informal ways feedback is collected and these opportunities will be broadcast via our newsletter, Slack and posted on the CoC's website. At any time, CoC Members can email [cocprograms@allchicago.org](mailto:cocprograms@allchicago.org) with any questions, concerns or ideas.

### 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.