

# Ending Youth Homelessness

## Guidebook Series: *System Planning*



### *Ending Youth Homelessness: Overview of this Guidebook Series*

This series of three guidebooks is designed for Continuum of Care (CoC) leadership and stakeholders to use as a direct, hands-on action plan in efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness, as they have been directed to ensure there is an effective and efficient system of care for all persons and households experiencing homelessness. The Guidebooks include suggested strategies, identification of promising practices, and considerations for CoCs and their partners that can be implemented immediately.

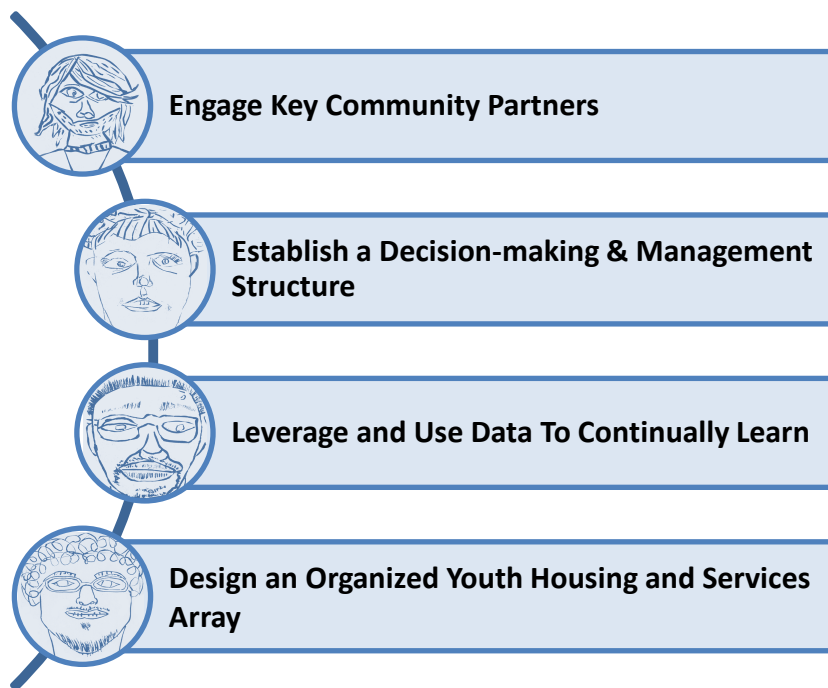
The guidebook topics include:

- **System Planning** - strategies for developing a youth homelessness system and leadership.
- **Mainstream System Collaboration** - strategies for engaging mainstream sectors such as child welfare, education, workforce, justice, housing, health, early childhood education, community organizations and mainstream benefits.
- **Promising Program Models** - promising strategies for youth-specific program models.



## OVERVIEW OF THIS GUIDEBOOK

To achieve the best results for all young people within a community, partners need to respond to youth homelessness with an integrated, cohesive approach. Many community partners provide vital services to or interact with youth experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness, but the concept of a “coordinated community approach” recognizes that individual organizations are not equipped to solve the community-level challenge of youth homelessness by themselves. Thus, the approach (i.e., structures, protocols, and procedures) must connect community partners and resources via an intentional strategy or “coordinated community plan.” This Guidebook reviews the key elements of such a plan so that communities can begin their work. The intent of this approach is not to create a system for youth that is wholly separate from the adult and family homelessness systems, but to integrate these systems with the understanding that, youth may interact with resources designed for each population.



This Guidebook focuses on:

- **Engaging key community partners** by first identifying them and sharing goals, defining the system vision, and identifying ways to collaborate.
- **Establishing a decision-making and management structure** with connections to CoC Governance, a Youth Advisory Board, and a strong lead organization.
- **Leveraging data across systems** by building an integrated data structure and benchmarking progress to continually improve system design.
- **Designing an organized youth housing and services array** that builds from comprehensive system mapping, needs analysis, the identification and definition of program models, and the development of a youth-inclusive coordinated entry process.

# OVERVIEW OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

With the launch of [Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness](#), the Federal Administration established goals to prevent and end homelessness, including ending youth homelessness by 2020. Communities across the country have made incredible progress toward reaching this goal and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and Federal Partners have increased efforts to focus and align available federal resources to help prevent and end youth homelessness.

## What does ‘youth’ mean?

While revolving around a flexible subpopulation, by using the word “youth” these guidebooks address youth experiencing homelessness up to age 24 who are unaccompanied by a parent, guardian, or spouse, or who are with their own children.

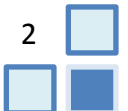
Youth homelessness is unique because young people are still developing. They are experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed for any number of reasons —abuse, family conflict, sexual identity, pregnancy or family poverty. They may be aging out of foster care. They may have become disconnected from family, school or work. They may be struggling with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Youth who experience homelessness are especially vulnerable to criminal victimization, sexual exploitation, labor and sex trafficking or traumatic stress. As communities are creating systems of support for precariously housed youth and those experiencing homelessness they must take all of these different life experiences into account.



When creating a network of services and housing for youth there are key guiding principles that should be incorporated. You may recognize some of these key guiding principles from the work that is being done in the adult and family systems. Interventions that support youth should adopt the following principles:

- Immediate accessibility
- Individualized, flexible, and choice-based
- Developmentally appropriate for youth
- Culturally competent
- Trauma-informed
- Based on the Housing First approach
- Employ Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles
- Emphasize family reunification and resiliency strategies



## ENGAGE KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The Continuum of Care (CoC) and its governing structure should be integrally involved in designing a coordinated community response to youth homelessness. Equally critical are Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs, funded by the Department of Health and Human Services and governed by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, and other community partners that regularly interact with youth experiencing homelessness or those at-risk of homelessness. Ultimately, the community will need to identify and engage key partners, effectively leverage resources available to each partner, and determine how to involve each in decision-making about youth homelessness. This section discusses strategies for identifying key partners and collaboratively defining the vision for a community's youth homeless system.

### A. Determine Key Community Partners

Consider the many different groups of young people experiencing homelessness within the community, such as:

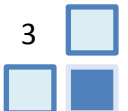
- Youth with histories of child welfare involvement
- Youth with histories of juvenile justice involvement
- Youth who have been kicked out of their families' homes
- Youth who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ)
- Youth who are pregnant and parenting
- Youth of color, including tribal youth
- Youth who are doubled-up or couch-surfing
- Youth who are victims of human trafficking and exploitation
- Youth staying in unsafe relationships to meet basic needs
- Youth with mental health or substance use challenges
- Youth under 18 years of age

Systematically think through partners within the community who might be able to help identify youth who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, partners already

working with them, and those with untapped resources that could be leveraged to help young people avoid or end their homelessness. Communities can use their data to highlight which organizations and subpopulations are key. The coordinated community response must be designed within the context of mainstream systems, such as child welfare, education, workforce, justice, housing, healthcare, early childhood education, community organizations and mainstream benefits.



See  
Mainstream System  
Collaboration  
Guidebook



## B. Define a Vision

After stakeholders identify necessary partners, they should learn about each other's purpose, current interactions with youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness, and the resources each controls. This "getting to know you" process can be an effective way to identify shared interests, build relationships and trust, shape awareness of potential organizational contributions, and begin to identify the gaps that need to be met by the youth homelessness system. Suggested questions for initial discussions are provided in Tool 1 of this Guidebook.

Once key stakeholders understand each partner's interests, they can more easily articulate the community's shared vision for a system that effectively prevents and ends homelessness for youth. The shared vision should outline the role of homelessness programs relative to existing mainstream system programs.

When articulating a vision, partners should ensure that the system:

- Addresses the individual needs of the youth who present for prevention or homeless assistance
- Provides immediate access to safe, secure and stable housing with no pre-conditions
- Reflects youth input and provides for youth choice
- Has a positive youth development focus
- Provides trauma-informed care

- Has a strong focus on family engagement
- Leverages mainstream resources and engages mainstream system partners

The resulting vision will set the stage for the design of the youth homelessness system. The shared vision and all aspects of youth homelessness system design will and should evolve over time, guided by an intentional continuous improvement process. Recognize that securing each partner's long-term commitment to end youth homelessness is the most vital part of the initial vision that is adopted.

For more specific ideas on important ways mainstream partners can collaborate on system planning, as well as in service delivery, see Tool 2 in this Guidebook.

### Vision DC's Youth Homeless Strategy (2013):

Collectively, we share a commitment to end youth homelessness by enhancing upstream prevention efforts and downstream intervention efforts. This strategy develops a robust continuum of care for youth and young families that begins with data coordination and analysis through a coordinated intake system, invests in prevention by allocating funds for family reunification projects to prevent homelessness, addresses immediate needs by scaling up emergency and transitional housing, and invests long-term in supports for high-risk youth through lower-cost, community-driven housing options.

# ESTABLISH A DECISION-MAKING AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Community partners must establish a strong decision-making and management structure to adopt the shared vision and implement an organized housing and service array and mainstream system that prevents and ends youth homelessness. This section of the Guidebook discusses how to define the management structure, how to include youth, and how to select a lead organization.

## A. Define a Decision-making Structure

In your community, a number of partners may already be targeting some or all of their individual resources towards ending youth homelessness. The process of defining a formalized, strong, clear and collaborative decision-making structure should bring together all of these partners, as well as youth voices.

Community partners need to:

- **Analyze the CoC governance structure** and the **current level of CoC involvement** of youth and the community partners you have identified
- **Refine** the CoC governance structure or **plan a new** separate structure
- If a new structure is created, **revise** the CoC's governance charter to include explicit connections to the new structure

Fundamentally, the CoC should determine how decisions will be made for the youth system. See Tool 3 for specific ideas on defining the youth system decision-making structure.

## B. Develop a Youth Advisory Board

Involving youth in all aspects of homelessness system planning will ensure that the design of the system is informed by their

lived experiences and will demonstrate that the community values the expressed needs, self-awareness, community knowledge, and unique ideas of youth. Creating a youth advisory board (whose leadership and membership are only youth) is one important way in which a community can leverage youth input in a meaningful and ongoing way. Further, participation in a youth advisory board will empower youth, provide opportunities for positive youth development, youth choice, confidence-building, and leadership.

To develop a youth advisory board, community partners and youth need to think through:

- Meaningful involvement and roles for youth, including opportunities to develop leadership and advocacy skills
- Compositions and models that work well for the local community (e.g. number of youth involved, youth representing different program areas, best times and places for meetings, etc.)
- Mechanics for involving youth (e.g. stipends, transportation, childcare to support parenting youth, community service hours, professional development opportunities, etc.)

See  
Tools!





- Addressing skepticism among community partners about the value of youth contributions or youths' ability to fully participate in all aspects of the process

The youth advisory board is not the only way to involve youth and representation should occur in all aspects of system planning and development. See Tool 4 for a checklist of questions to assess your approach to youth involvement.

See  
Tools!

### C. Select a Lead Organization

The community will need to select and assign responsibilities to a strong organization to coordinate planning and keep partners organized and focused on setting the vision and designing a cohesive system for youth. This lead organization could be any partner who is willing and able to take the role of the manager and organizer, provided that they have the qualifications identified below. For instance, the lead organization could be the CoC's collaborative applicant, an RHY Program grantee, or another youth-serving organization.

To serve as the lead youth homeless system organizer, the organization should have the following attributes:

- Be a **neutral partner** with the credibility and relationships to bring together and coordinate key partners
- Have a **formal relationship** with the youth homeless system decision-making structure and the CoC's governing structure
- Have the capacity to effectively **staff** the youth system development process, either directly or by engaging other organizations with appropriate qualifications

- Be able to **identify and engage youth** in all aspects of planning the youth homeless system
- Have the capacity to **apply for and manage grants**, such as RHY Youth Program grants and the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)

#### Applicant for YHDP

Only a Continuum of Care collaborative applicant may submit the YHDP application on their community's behalf. If the community is selected, the CoC collaborative applicant is also responsible for meeting all YHDP requirements. However, HUD **does not** require the CoC collaborative applicant to be the lead organization for local system planning or implementation.

The lead organization might also need the capacity to:

- Contract with and monitor grant sub-recipients
- Execute necessary data sharing agreements, and synthesize and regularly share administrative data on youth
- Facilitate or coordinate meetings, negotiations, or trainings
- Manage communication among partners
- Define program standards and performance measures and monitor programs for fidelity to them
- Manage the coordinated entry process for youth
- Manage youth-specific activities planned as part of the CoC's annual Point-in-Time youth count, and conduct additional counts and assessments, as needed



## LEVERAGE EXISTING DATA TO INFORM SYSTEM PLANNING

Community partners must cultivate data and information management strategies in order to understand the magnitude, nature, and fluctuations of youth homelessness, the overall performance of the youth homelessness system, and support data-driven planning and resource allocation decisions. This section covers some considerations when establishing data and information management infrastructure and defining protocols for using available data.

### A. Analyze and Improve the Current Data Infrastructure

The first step to analyzing and improving the current data infrastructure is to identify all of the current **data sources** that are available. The list below gives examples of data sources that are available in each community. Tool 5 guides assessing the feasibility of using other data sources for this purpose.

- Annual Point-in-Time counts
- HMIS on youth served within the community's homeless system, including RHY programs
- The community's coordinated entry process
- School districts related to Education for Homeless Children and Youth services
- Other partners, including child welfare, employment, and juvenile justice agencies

Community stakeholders may find it helpful to share detailed data among partners or even to integrate sources into a single dataset. See Tool 6 for questions to consider when developing a comprehensive information system that leverages current HMIS and mainstream data systems.

#### Data Sharing Practices

Generally aggregate (summary) data can be shared openly, but they may not be sufficient to guide local decision-making in a meaningful way. If any client-level data are shared, partners should ensure that there are appropriate written data protocols and mechanisms in place. Data sharing protocols may differ for youth under 18 and for youth 18 years of age and older, since some laws require parental or guardian consent to share personally identifiable information for youth under 18. Be sure to follow the advice and guidance of legal counsel in designing appropriate data sharing practices.

The decision-making structure should consider how to best **manage data** collection, analysis and reporting efforts. For instance, some data management functions could be delegated to the lead organization, the HMIS lead, or a data committee. Regardless of where data efforts are housed, responsibilities should be clear, as should the relationships of data management to other system functions and decisions.





The community should develop a plan to **improve data** in order to reasonably fill data gaps and increase use of available data for youth homeless system planning purposes. For example, coordinate with the HMIS lead or data committee to create standards for data collection, quality, and monitoring.

## B. Create Benchmarks to Assess Progress

With a functional and effective data collection process in place, community partners will be able to see how their work is moving toward their shared vision. Based on its adopted vision, the community should:

- Establish **written, data-informed benchmarks** to measure progress
- Determine **how to best compile, pull, vet, and understand** the data collected
- Set a **timeline** for how often to examine data on benchmarks
- Figure out **who is responsible** for reviewing and analyzing progress on benchmarks (committee or the entire decision-making structure)

Tool 7 provides sample examples of community goals and corresponding benchmarks.

### Federal Criteria and Benchmarks

The federal government is developing criteria and benchmarks to measure community and national progress towards ending youth homelessness. Once federal criteria and benchmarks are released, communities may want to define local benchmarks within that context.

## C. Embrace Continuous Improvement

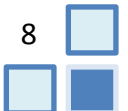
When data drives decisions, it is being continuously used to enhance the performance of projects and the whole system. Equipped with more robust data, the community can improve:

- Understanding of system performance
- Capacity to assess the effectiveness of existing models
- Identification of strategies to improve the community's response to youth homelessness
- Coordinated entry processes
- Program-level service delivery
- Allocation of resources, or other system components
- Prioritization of unmet needs
- Intentionally timed system improvements.

Partners should also consider data-driven strategies to inform the broader public about the impact of youth homelessness and how communication efforts can increase community support and political will to prevent and end youth homelessness. Partners could specify the types of reports they want to create to share progress on goals to the public.



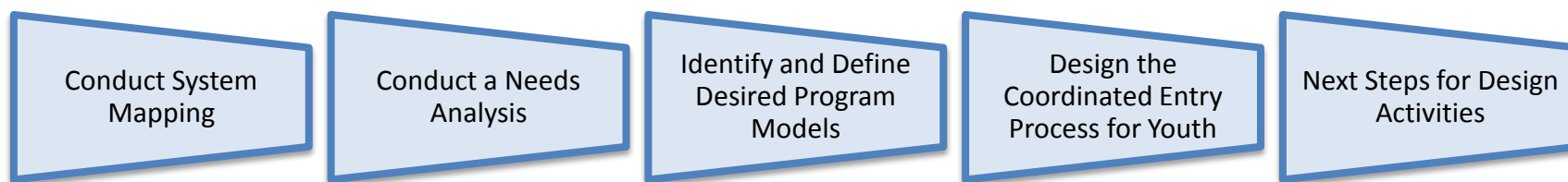
See  
Tools!



## DESIGN AN ORGANIZED YOUTH HOUSING AND SERVICES ARRAY

Within a youth homelessness system, there is an organized array of housing and services that are responsive to youth's needs and ultimately prevent or end their homeless experience. Communities not only design the housing and service program models that fit the community's needs best, but also design how those programs operate in relation to one another. The decision-making structure and lead organization will need to plan a phased approach to completing this design process with clear roles, responsibilities, and deadlines for each step. The lead organization will also need to develop a communication strategy that supports the planning process, so partners understand what decisions are under consideration, how to provide input, and where they can be most useful. Finding ways to take early action while designing the array of housing and services is important in building momentum and keeping partners engaged. An example of a rapid cycle "learn as you go" method is described in Tool 8.

This section of the Guidebook summarizes key activities that will be involved in designing an organized housing and services array that effectively assists youth who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness:



### A. Conduct System Mapping

System mapping consists of identifying each of the available resources for youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness within your community, including the pathways they use to access those resources and travel between them. It is an integral part of planning because few communities will build a youth homelessness system from scratch. If a full array of projects for youth already exists, then design efforts may focus on integrating existing projects into a cohesive strategy

of access that integrates with and leverages adult and family projects. If there are few youth-specific projects, new projects for youth may need to be developed. In either case, existing projects may need to adapt their practices or staffing to align with new expectations. A system mapping process includes:

- Examining the community's **Housing Inventory Count**
- Identifying the **types of beds** at each project and the **youth populations** they target



- Understanding what **prevention, outreach, and early diversion resources provided by mainstream partners** are available
- Looking at **funders** of the available options
- Strategically thinking about the range of **supportive services** within the community that could be leveraged.
- Identifying where youth experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are **currently presenting for help** or other places they could be found.

See  
Tools!

See Tool 9 for help thinking through these questions.

#### Involving Youth in System Mapping

A Youth Advisory Board can help identify existing resources which they find helpful and barriers to accessing resources. Advisory groups from a variety of entities, including education, juvenile justice, workforce development, adolescent healthcare services, and child welfare, can all be of great support.

## B. Conduct a Needs Analysis

With an understanding of the resources currently available in a community, community partners then have to consider how resources relate to the anticipated demand for services. By using gathered data, determine the overall number of youth who experience homelessness each year, their needs, characteristics, and their current level of participation in available projects. Using this information, the community can identify similar needs and service patterns of different cohorts

or groups of youth, thus informing what amounts and types of assistance will help them end their homelessness experience.

Another part of the needs analysis is identifying gaps. Using the system map and the data gathered about the needs of the youth population, the community can identify where resources are lacking, non-existent, or misdirected.

#### Involving Youth in Counts

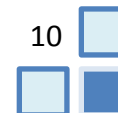
Counting the number of youth who are homeless is challenging, but there are new efforts underway every day. [Strategies for counting](#) are included in the resource list at the end of the Guidebook. Many communities are also finding value in having other youth, both formerly homeless and not, assist in this effort. They can offer insight on where to look for youth in need of services and how to conduct surveys effectively with youth.

See  
Tools!

See Tool 10 for help thinking through questions to explore in a needs analysis and for an approach to identifying cohorts of youth and their needs.

## C. Identify and Define Program Models

Communities have access to a variety of program models that leverage particular housing types and services supported by a range of funding sources and operating agencies. The community should identify desired program models based on need, and not on funding or operating constraints. For each identified program model, the community should define:



- Key features or expectations of each program type
- Target populations
- Cost per unit (or person) estimates
- Timeframe that services are provided within
- Expected outcomes
- How each program model is expected to support the community's overall response

It is important that communities consider whether certain groups of youth should be prioritized for certain program models, in order to ensure that they target the most intensive and costly models to the most vulnerable youth who would not otherwise be able to achieve a positive outcome.

#### Program Model Planning Resources

During this process, communities should consider the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness's framework for [a coordinated community response](#). The Guidebook *Ending Youth Homelessness: Promising Program Models* has information on emerging models for primary prevention, mobile outreach, drop-in centers, family engagement, youth shelter and emergency services, host homes, transitional housing and transitional living, rapid re-housing, and non-time-limited supportive housing.

See  
Promising Program  
Models  
Guidebook

### D. Design accessible, youth-appropriate coordinated entry processes

While the program models define each type of housing and services, in order to use these programs as they are intended, coordinated entry should work with youth individually to

assess their needs and refer them to the program that best meets their actual preferences, circumstances, and needs. Coordinated entry design is a complex process that relies on extensive discussion and facilitated decision-making. This Guidebook gives a general overview of coordinated entry and communities will likely need additional information in order to develop coordinated entry processes for youth.

The coordinated entry process for youth should be designed in relation to the CoC's current process for adults, to ensure that youth over 18 are able to access the larger stock of inventory of housing and services available for adults, as long as resources are still developmentally appropriate and targeted to their needs and strengths.

A community's coordinated entry process for youth should include:

- **Comprehensive outreach and access points** that collectively identify young people who are unsheltered and sheltered (including those in the adult system), doubled-up or couch-surfing, or otherwise at-risk of homelessness
- **Agreement on how to prioritize youth**, including minors, for resources within the youth, adult, and family systems
- **Common assessment tools** that triage a youth's immediate housing needs and connect youth with developmentally-appropriate service providers, family, respite settings, and access to other resources
- **Protocols on determining preferred options** among available developmentally-appropriate resources, including those the youth may have priority access to obtain



- **Provider agreement on communicating and filling program vacancies**, and how they will respond to referrals from coordinated entry
- **Protocols for additional assessment of youth's needs** (such as a clinical assessment) including timelines and entities responsible, and how additional referrals are assessed during or following program participation
- **Protocols for recording data** and defining how the data can be used, including privacy and security protocols, and in conjunction with the HMIS Lead and CoC data community

Written standards need to be adopted to clearly document the decisions made and protocols underlying the community's coordinated entry processes.

#### **Involving Youth in Coordinated Entry**

Youth should be integrally involved in designing the coordinated entry processes. They can help map existing points of access and locations current outreach efforts may be lacking. They can illuminate barriers to access. They can help determine how to support youth choice in assessment and referral processes.

### **E. Next Steps for Design Activities**

System mapping, needs analysis, program building blocks and coordinated entry processes are all aspects of designing an organized array of housing and services that specifically address youth who are experiencing or at-risk of

homelessness; however, communities will need several more steps in order to complete their planning strategies.

System modeling projects the number and types of youth expected to present for assistance and estimates the amount of housing and service resources organized into defined pathways or combinations of assistance that are needed to serve them. System modeling shows how programs will operate together as a cohesive, comprehensive response. See Tool 9 and Tool 11 for a summary of activities that communities will need to undertake in order to model the needed youth homeless housing and service inventory.

Once the community has completed the system modeling process, the community can plan what further resources are required to fill the gap in the housing and services array. Existing homelessness and mainstream funding as well as new funding should be leveraged to support the arrangement of housing and service programs as it is designed, and from there, priorities can be established for building out further. The resource allocation process must be defined in concert with the vision and priorities of the community.

With ongoing partner engagement, a clear governance and decision-making structure, leveraged data, and an organized array of youth housing and services, communities will build a strong coordinated community response that prevents and ends youth homelessness.



# TOOLS FOR ENGAGING KEY COMMUNITY PARTNERS

## **Tool 1: Questions for Learning about Community Partners' Interests and Strengths in order to Help Define Shared Goals & Distinct Roles**

- ☐ What is each partner's primary goal and purpose? What role would it like to see for its organization/system relative to preventing and ending youth homelessness?
- ☐ What is the nature of the partner's interaction with young people? How do they interact with families of youth?
- ☐ What are the types of housing and services they provide to youth or their families? How long do these services generally last?
- ☐ What housing resources and supportive services do they have currently available?
- ☐ What is the policy context in which each operates?
- ☐ Are youth involved in development or operation of their programs and policies? If so, how? Might these young people be interested and well-suited to get involved in youth homeless system planning?
- ☐ What are their eligibility requirements and priorities?
- ☐ Have they negotiated agreements with other partners about triage protocols?
- ☐ Do they have data about the population they serve (or interact with), their characteristics, their needs, or their outcomes?
- ☐ Is there a shared data infrastructure, through which data about youth they serve are recorded?
- ☐ From their perspective, which service or housing interventions have been the most successful in preventing or ending homelessness? In achieving other outcomes?
- ☐ How do partners ensure approaches are developmentally appropriate for youth?
- ☐ Does the partner/system employ best practices for working with youth (e.g. Housing First, trauma-informed care, positive youth development, youth choice, etc.)? Are there practices they need to learn? Could they train other providers on these practices?





## Tool 2: Potential Areas for Collaboration with Mainstream Partners

For each partner, review the options and contemplate which might be appropriate to explore. The options may differ depending on the individuals representing the partner in youth homeless system planning discussions. Intentional roles for each partner will provide concrete ideas for engaging decision-makers in order to secure a higher-level of involvement or commitment in supporting development of an effective youth homeless system. These general roles could include:

- ☐ Participating on the youth system governing board or formal committees
- ☐ Planning the youth homeless system design, array of program models and projected inventory
- ☐ Defining program standards that assure all youth programs are delivered with fidelity to system principles (e.g., Housing First orientation, positive youth development, trauma-informed service delivery, youth informed)
- ☐ Training other community partners on program standards and best practices
- ☐ Defining protocols to identify young people at-risk of or experiencing homelessness, embedded in all systems that interact with young people
- ☐ Designing a coordinated entry process for young people experiencing a housing crisis that assesses their needs, identifies and offers potential resources (among those available) to address their needs, and facilitates their access to selected intervention.
- ☐ Creating streamlined mechanisms for referrals
- ☐ Providing integrated case conferencing between providers from different service systems to talk about specific client goals and needs and how each agency can assist over time
- ☐ Developing service delivery collaborations that leverage each system's expertise and resources
- ☐ Setting funding priorities and participating in the resource allocation process
- ☐ Identifying public policies that contribute to youth homelessness and develop legislative, regulatory, or policy fixes
- ☐ Monitoring system data, examining system performance, and informing continuous improvement



Below are examples of ways youth homeless systems can collaborate with mainstream partners, both as part of system planning and as service delivery partners.

- The CoC could convene partners, identify and engage youth who can serve on a youth advisory board, and support the development and implementation of the youth homeless system.
- City and county agencies could seek opportunities for policy reform and potential new ways of funding services to better meet the needs of youth.
- The HMIS lead could merge data from mainstream partners and regularly report performance metrics on overall progress within geographic area to end youth homelessness
- Emergency responders (law enforcement, emergency room triage, PATH outreach teams) could partner with the CoC and homeless service providers to design and manage the coordinated entry process, and will actively screen young people for homelessness and unsafe living situations and refer to the coordinated entry processes when appropriate.
- Schools and colleges could identify and refer students who are couch-surfing to the coordinated entry access points to help students find immediate, safe housing or access family engagement services.
- Mental health centers could provide assessments and treatment through a streamlined referral process, and will help train homeless service providers on trauma-informed care.
- Counseling programs could provide family engagement services throughout the system, with in-reach into residential homeless programs, to ensure continuity of care for young people and to reduce duplication of effort.
- Homeless providers could provide developmentally-appropriate crisis response housing and bridge rental assistance to expedite and increase access to permanent housing. They could also work with mainstream partners to define and operationalize Housing First practices throughout the system with clear access points to mainstream services.
- The public housing authority could designate resources for young people prioritized for long-term subsidies and will work with the homeless system to define the protocol for accessing subsidies through coordinated entry.

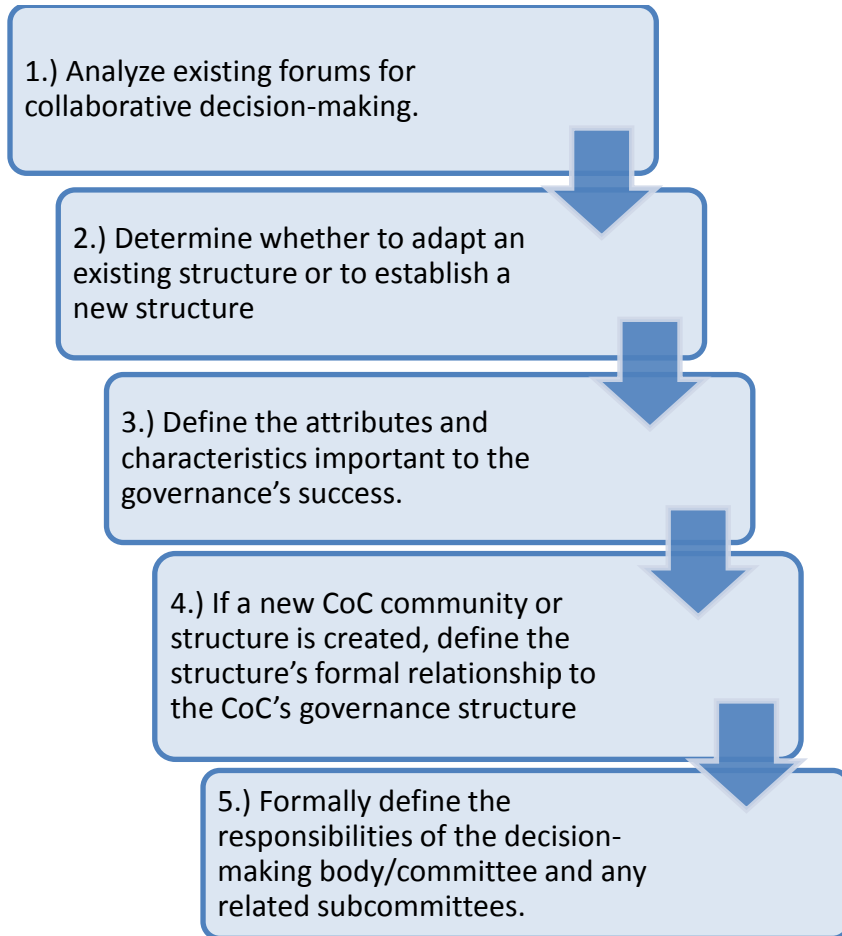
Some types of collaboration will require formal written agreements (e.g., a memorandum of understanding) or roles may be specified within a formal governance charter for the CoC or youth homeless system decision-making structure, but other activities may occur informally or on an as needed basis.



# TOOLS FOR ESTABLISHING A DECISION-MAKING & MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

## Tool 3: Steps to Define a Decision-making Structure

To define your decision-making structure, think through these five steps first:



**Through the process, stop to ask:** Have we thought innovatively and inclusively about how the perspective of young people can be considered during decision-making and how to best include youth representation in the decision-making structure?

### Checklist of Questions a Community May Want to Ask:

- ☐ What convening is the best (in-person, digitally, etc.)?
- ☐ When, where and how often should meetings of the decision-making structure be held to ensure full engagement of partners?
- ☐ How many members need to be present to decide?
- ☐ What is the process in the event of a tie vote?
- ☐ Which organization will lead the group? Will this ever rotate between members?
- ☐ Can one member fill multiple roles for the group?
- ☐ Will there be subcommittees? What topics will these subcommittees address?
- ☐ How will this structure fit into other community structures already in place?
- ☐ What methods will there be for ongoing evaluation of the structure's success?
- ☐ Have we looked at our local efforts to end Veteran and chronic homelessness are organized for ideas on models and lessons learned?



## **Tool 4: Assessing Effectiveness of the Youth Advisory Board and Other Activities to Involve Youth**

**Youth should be involved at all levels of youth homeless system planning. Use this checklist to see if your community is effectively engaging youth, either through the Youth Advisory Board or through other efforts to involve youth. Does your community:**

- ☐ Have a youth advisory board with defined roles and meaningful objectives, as well as a clearly defined relationship to the youth homeless system decision-making structure?
- ☐ Define other opportunities for youth involvement and feedback, so that youth who are not formal members of the youth advisory board still have opportunities to share their perspectives and shape system decisions?
- ☐ Involve more than one youth in youth homeless system decision-making processes so the youth input is not compartmentalized or easily dismissed?
- ☐ Establish clear communication channels between youth and adult participants?
- ☐ Identify a community staff person to ensure coordination and administrative support for the youth advisory board?
- ☐ Ensure a diverse range of youth populations are represented, including LGBTQ youth, parenting youth, transition-aged youth, etc.?
- ☐ Have clear incentives for participating youth to compensate them for their time?
- ☐ Hold meetings at times and places that are convenient and respectful to the needs of the youths?



# TOOLS TO BUILD INFORMATION SYSTEMS THAT LEVERAGE HMIS AND MAINSTREAM DATA

## Tool 5: Assessing Opportunities to Leverage Mainstream Data Sources

**Checklist of Information Partners should Document about each Data Source:**

- ☐ Purpose for which the data are collected
- ☐ Youth populations (or program types) represented by the data, the accuracy and completeness of the data
- ☐ Agency that manages the data
- ☐ Privacy rules or notices that govern the use or disclosure of data and other privacy considerations
- ☐ Type of release of information (ROI) or disclosure approval process that may be required as a part of different privacy protections
- ☐ Extent to which the data can be merged with other sources to provide a more complete picture of youth homelessness
- ☐ Relative value of the data for local planning purposes

## Tool 6: Analyzing and Improving the Current Data Infrastructure

**Checklist of Questions a Community May Want to Ask:**

- ☐ How are we involving youth in the data collection or interpretation process? How can we do more?
- ☐ Are there system functions that would be enhanced by periodic or real-time information sharing?
- ☐ How are we ensuring privacy of data, both in real-time service delivery and when using data for planning?
- ☐ Are we currently able to see in real-time the movement of a particular youth through the system?
- ☐ Do current data adequately measure system performance, relative to defined federal goals and system-level measures and in areas that local partners have identified?
- ☐ How are we using our data? Are there system planning decisions that we are currently making without sufficient data? Can we better use existing data to support these decisions?
- ☐ Where are our gaps in information?
- ☐ Are there other partners who may be collecting additional data that could be helpful to our system? How do we engage them? Do we have data that might help their decision-making or provide them with a greater understanding of youth they serve?
- ☐ How can we collect information to fill in the gaps? What qualitative data do we have?



## Tool 7: Creating Community Benchmarks to Measure Progress

Based on its adopted vision and system design, the community should establish benchmarks to measure progress. Each goal should have an explicit means of measuring progress, and the community should establish a regular process to review results and assess whether system changes are needed to improve performance.

Illustrative Community Goals	Sample Corresponding Benchmarks
Our community has identified all youth experiencing homelessness.	Counts of unsheltered youth homelessness; confirmation of a comprehensive outreach system that can identify youth in sheltered, unsheltered, and doubled-up/couch-surfing situations
Our community can provide safe and appropriate shelter to any youth experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.	Length of time between the point a young person is identified as unsheltered and the point at which the youth moves into shelter, as well as corresponding information on system capacity at the time
Our community will help youth return home to their given or chosen families, as desired.	Proportion of youth who identify family reunification goals and achieve them
Our community is able to quickly move a youth experiencing homelessness into permanent housing.	Length of time youth are homeless before being placed into permanent housing
Our community will support youth to achieve educational and employment goals that will help them achieve long-term stability.	Proportion of youth who engaged in mainstream education and employment services





# TOOLS FOR DESIGNING AN ORGANIZED HOUSING AND SERVICES ARRAY

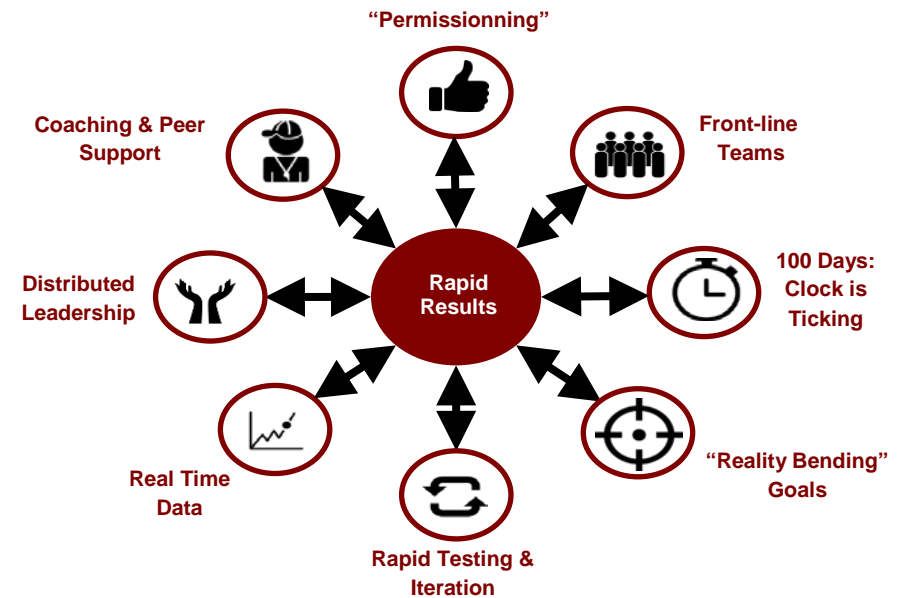
## Tool 8: Building Momentum and Accelerating the Learning

Communities may choose to get started on improving system performance right away, in a more “experiment and learn” fashion, while also pursuing more methodical planning and implementation process. Dozens of communities working on chronic and veteran homelessness were helped by “100-Day Challenge” (Rapid Results) choreography. This method is based on the observation that when dealing with complex problems, solutions tend to emerge through engaging people in rapid cycles of experimentation and learning. See diagram 1 for the key elements of the choreography. If designed and deployed properly, these 100-Day Challenges can create momentum, build confidence, and develop trust among the key community partners. Working on these Challenges often informs the system design process and creates urgency to fill predictable gaps in the youth homeless system.

This method requires fine-tuned instincts and experience navigating sensitive political systems. Rushing into this without proper preparation carries the risk of raising, and then dashing, expectations, thus eroding trust and confidence.

These 100-Day Challenges require active sponsorship from an individual or an agency with convening authority and credibility. Some examples of sponsors include a leader in city government, a local foundation or funders-collaborative that supports many of the local actors, or a strong and confident service provider that is viewed as an arbiter and a neutral convener by other providers. These leaders have to be ready to “let go”, to be comfortable not knowing all the answers, and able and willing to create space for others to lead.

## Rapid Results Choreography

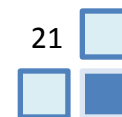
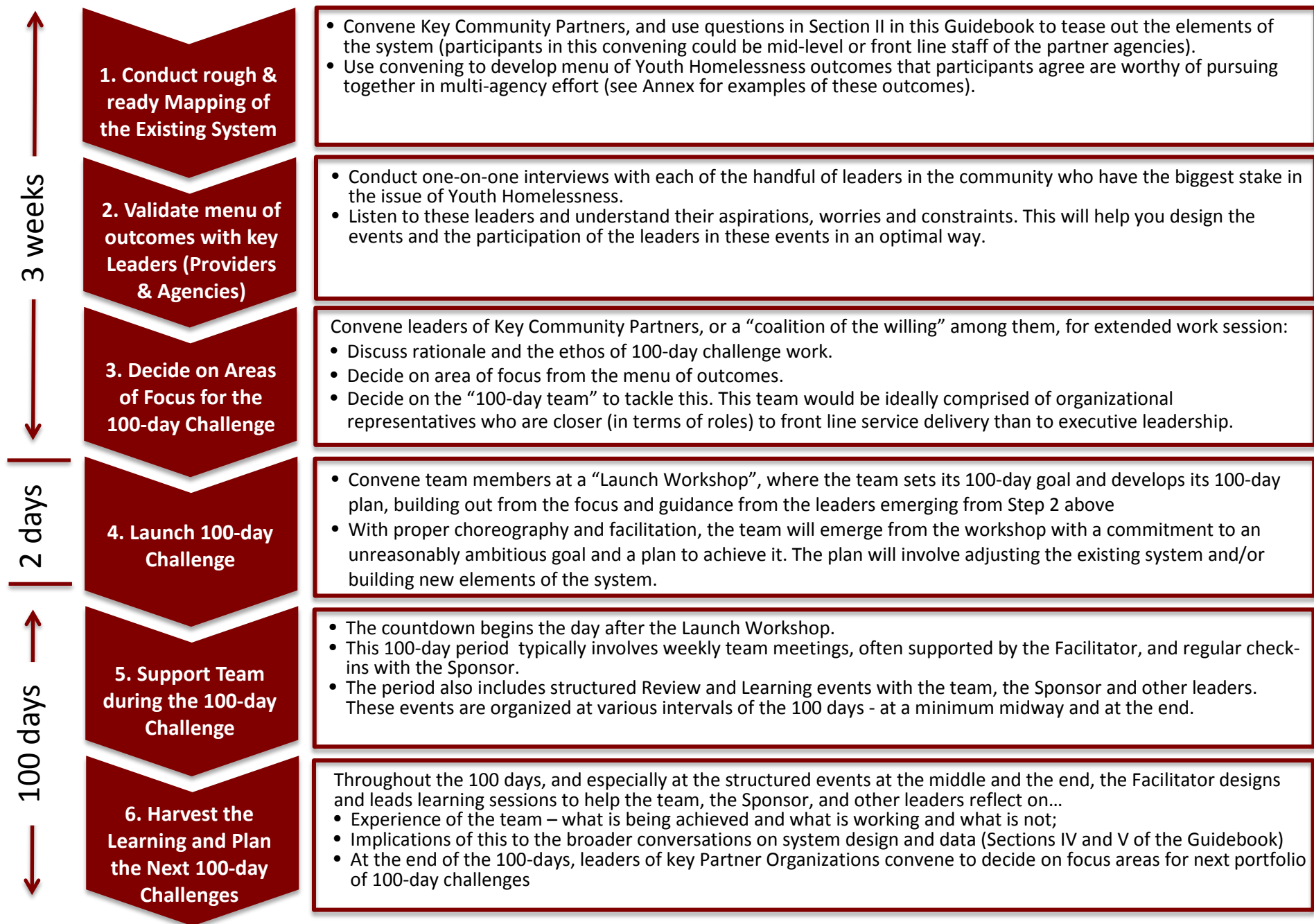


Successful design and execution of the 100-day Challenge also requires a skilled facilitator who can lead preparation, organization and facilitation. The Sponsor and the Facilitator need to work together closely at each step.

Naturally, as the Governance System is put in place, this becomes a natural locus for focusing future 100-day Challenges. And new designs of a youth homeless system can be fed into the process for the 100-day team to adjust, implement and refine.

Here are the steps to organize and support 100-Day Challenges in Youth Homelessness. These are not steps in a cookbook. They need to be applied with a great deal of care and attention to the local context.





## Tool 9: Considerations when Conducting System Mapping

Looking broadly at the resources within the area—

- ☐ How many and what types of beds are available at which types of facilities? What does the Housing Inventory Count tell us about which are youth-specific versus which are open to all types of homelessness? Which youth population groups (e.g., pregnant and parenting youth, LGBTQ youth, minors, former foster youth, justice involved youth, etc.) do current programs target?
- ☐ How do these programs compare with the attributes of the organized youth housing and services array agreed upon by system partners? For instance, to what extent do programs deliver assistance with a Housing First orientation? Are programs designed to meet the unique developmental needs of youth, including pregnant and parenting youth and their children?
- ☐ What types of prevention and early diversion resources are available, including those focused on family intervention and potential reunification?
- ☐ What supportive services are available, including those related to education, employment, and family engagement that may be unique for youth?
- ☐ Who funds the available shelter and service options?
- ☐ What collaborations exist (e.g., collaborations with the Public Housing Authority or child welfare agency) that could be leveraged to address youth homelessness?



## Tool 10: Considerations when Conducting a Needs Analysis and Designing Responses for Different Cohorts

- ☐ What is the estimated need in our community? What do our current PIT count and HMIS data tell us about youth currently accessing prevention or homeless programs? How can we estimate the number of youth currently experiencing or at-risk of homelessness who do not currently access services, perhaps because of capacity limitations, entry or eligibility barriers, or undesirable or inappropriate service models?
- ☐ Are there other data about other groups of youth who are not currently interacting with the homeless system?
- ☐ Where are there holes in our current system for youth? Is there unmet need that we need to consider in our estimates?
- ☐ Can we identify and estimate the size of different cohorts of youth based on the extent of their need?
- ☐ If we compare the results of our resource analysis in terms of eligibility requirements, how do current resources align with the characteristics and needs of youth expected to need these programs?
- ☐ What are the inflow and outflow estimates over a year? Over three months? Over a month? Over a week?

Cohorts may be facing very different circumstances, but may ultimately benefit from a similar response. While individual youth will be offered resources based on real-time availability, their individual preferences, and local prioritization criteria, at a system level the community needs a basis for deciding on the elements that should be present within their system and the relative inventory needed of each program component.

Potential cohorts	Housing and Service Needs	# or % of pop needing this	Potential assistance strategies
Youth with family (broadly defined) options but also with high-levels of family conflict	Family mediation or counseling; some may need a place to stay for a few days or a month to relieve the conflict		Targeted prevention assistance, such as family engagement services, perhaps supplemented by short-term crisis housing
Youth who are unsheltered with significant histories of homelessness and trauma	Engagement, intensive wrap-around services, time in safe, permanent housing to address trauma and stability, physical and behavioral health needs		Street outreach assistance followed by long-term housing support
Older youth facing a short-term housing crisis	Immediate place to stay, and help moving back into permanent housing, maybe with help connecting to workforce support		Short-term crisis housing followed by rapid re-housing support
Youth without family options and insufficient education to gain full-time employment	Immediate place to stay; support to stay while finishing school. Shallow subsidy for those who can find part-time employment		Short-term crisis housing followed by long-term housing support
Pregnant and parenting youth	Immediate place to stay with supports for youth and their children, and services to figure out a long-term plan		Short-term crisis housing followed by service-rich transitional housing, or perhaps immediate service-rich transitional housing
Etc...			



## Tool 11: Summary of Activities Involved in Modeling an Organized Housing and Services Array

The following list identifies key activities involved in modeling the level of housing and service resources needed for a community. All system modeling activities should be conducted with input from key community partners, including young people.

- ☐ Consider which groups of youth should be prioritized for certain program models, in order to ensure that the most intensive and costly models are targeted to the most vulnerable youth who will not be able to achieve their outcomes absent the intensive assistance.
- ☐ Identify the combination of program offerings that are expected to be packaged together—concurrently or in sequence—to meet the needs of each cohort identified during the needs analysis (Tool 10).
- ☐ Within each package of assistance, estimate the level of assistance (amount and length of assistance) for each program type that is expected to be needed to support the youth in this group.

*For example, if 20 percent of young people are expected to need short-term crisis response with moderate assistance to obtain permanent housing, the community might estimate that each young person in that cohort would need an average of 15 days of emergency shelter support followed by an average of 6 months of rapid re-housing (RRH) assistance and wrap-around family engagement services throughout the entire time and 6 months beyond the end of the RRH assistance. Or alternatively, the community might assume the cohort would need an average of 30 days of emergency shelter support followed by an average 12-month transitional living program stay, with the assumption that family engagement services are provided as part of transitional living program.*

- ☐ Based on estimates for each cohort group, model the overall program inventory needed to meet youth needs with the desired response. Consider turnover during the modeling process. Since each shelter bed can serve multiple people in a year, the number of units/service slots can be scaled based on the average length of assistance expected to be provided.
- ☐ Compare the current system mapping with the proposed system inventory to identify gaps and areas to target for program conversion or development. Set priorities for bringing on new programs.
- ☐ Calculate the costs associated with program development, and develop an investment strategy that accounts for reallocation, opportunities to leverage mainstream resources, and new fund development.



## RESOURCES

This information is not intended to represent a complete service description, but rather to highlight what is working for some programs and further an important dialogue on ending youth homelessness.

### Ideas on Shared Vision and Distinct Roles

- [California Homeless Youth Project](#) developed a State Action Plan to End Youth Homelessness with goals in ten areas commonly identified in research on youth homelessness (e.g. prevention and early intervention, education, housing, etc.) and action steps for service providers, government agencies and policymakers.
- [State of Maryland Annual Report on Homelessness](#) identifies four shared objectives for preventing and ending youth homelessness (p. 15) and then for each, identifies the responsible stakeholder, timeframes for achieving goals, and more detailed action steps.
- [Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services](#): Identifies four objectives for assisting homeless youth and methods to achieve each.
- [Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult \(YYA\) Homelessness in King County by 2020](#): Defines what ending youth homelessness will look like locally and provides specific information on supports to make this happen for different groups of youth (e.g. LGBTQ, youth of color)
- [A Place to Call Home: Brandon's Plan to End Youth Homelessness](#): Defines four priority areas for improving the youth homeless system and the goals related to those areas in light of an analysis of what youth homelessness look like locally.
- [Hamilton County Safe and Supported Community Plan to Prevent Homelessness for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Youth](#): Provides examples of goals and roles related to LGBTQ youth who are homeless.

- [Plan to End Youth Homelessness in Calgary](#): Outlines three agreed upon strategies to end youth homelessness and pairs each with two to seven related goals on how to implement those.
- [A Bold Strategy to End Youth Homelessness in the District of Columbia](#): Outlines strategy with: shared vision, values, history, national context, community components, and a year one timeline for partners.
- [Community Planning to Prevent, Reduce and End Youth Homelessness: Youth Against Youth Homelessness, A Way Home, and the Kamloops Experience](#): Presentation on how community reached an agreed upon 3-step approach to ending youth homelessness, coupled with an implementation strategy, while actively involving the youth voice.
- [From Advocacy to Planning to Action: Connecticut's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness](#): Short article explains planning process in Connecticut and how it led to five agreed upon main strategies for addressing youth homelessness. Link to plan included.

### Ideas on Defining a Decision-making Structure

- [Continuum of Care Governance and Management](#): HUD-sponsored PowerPoint presentation that provides some qualities of effective CoC governance structures that could be adapted for youth systems as well.
- [Governance Charter - All Home King County, Washington](#): Sample governance charter covering duties and responsibilities of governance charter and its advisory boards.
- [Keys to High Performance: A Strong Governance Structure](#): Blog from the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) on qualities on a strong governance structure.
- [Effective Governance Models: Overseeing Your Continuum of Care and Homeless Assistance System](#): NAEH conference presentation covering funding a governance structure, ensuring broad community participation, efficient decision-making, oversight, accountability, and outcomes.





## Ideas on Establishing a Youth Advisory Board

- [Pennsylvania Homeless Steering Committee's Youth Subcommittee](#): Summary of process conducting focus groups with 6 regional youth advisory boards to learn more about homeless youth.
- [Larkin Street Youth Advisory Board](#): San Francisco group composed of clients dedicated to advocacy and leadership. Created mission statement to guide purpose/work; conduit between clients and staff.
- [Jackson Street Youth Services](#): Group in Oregon utilizing both formerly homeless and not formerly homeless youth on advisory board; focus is leadership and advocacy (accepts 15-20-year-olds to serve).
- [generationOn Game Changers: Establishing a Youth Advisory Council toolkit](#): Toolkit that is not specific to youth homelessness, but offers some structure for youth looking to take leadership on community issues.
- [Engaging Youth Experiencing Homelessness Core Practices and Services](#): Guide created by National Health Care for the Homeless Council that includes a comprehensive outline of considerations when establishing a youth advisory board.
- [Engaging Youth on their Turf: Creative Approaches to Connecting Youth through Community](#): Report highlighting six programs utilizing creative approaches to connecting youth with their community.
- [Want to know what youth want and need from your program? ASK THEM.](#): MANY video talk on the importance of listening to youth to understand if programs and services are really working.
- [Engaging Youth not Traditionally Asked to Serve](#): Guide with tips and tricks for ensuring successful engagement and involvement of youth from diverse backgrounds.

## Ideas on Counting Youth Experiencing Homelessness

- [Voices of Youth Count](#): A collaborative, research-based effort that is actively building new evidence about youth homelessness, including multi-method strategies to count the number of youth

who experience homelessness and to understand their characteristics and needs.

- [We Count, California!: Lessons Learned from Efforts to Improve Youth Inclusion in California's 2015 Point-in-Time Counts](#): Report detailing efforts by the California Homeless Youth Project to engage youth in annual Point-in-Time data collection efforts.
- [Connecticut Homeless Youth Count](#): Strategies employed for a statewide count of homeless youth and lessons learned.

## Ideas on Creating an Organized Housing and Services Array

- [HUD SNAPs CoC Competition Focus: FY2016 Policy Priority to End Youth Homelessness](#): HUD guidance on key topic areas communities should focus on to meet the priority of ending youth homelessness, including data use, program design, and coordinated response.
- [USICH: Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness: A Coordinated Community Response](#): The federal vision for a coordinated response to ending youth homelessness.
- [A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#): A comprehensive guide to planning an organized housing and services array with links to plans from communities in Canada.
- [Solving Youth Homelessness: Lessons from Abroad](#): NAEH workshop examines strategies being used in Australia and Canada to combat youth homelessness.
- [Serving and Improving Outcomes for LGBTQ Youth](#): NAEH workshop examines homelessness prevention for LGBTQ youth, such as family intervention and strategies to create inclusive and affirming crisis programs and transitional housing programs.
- [Department of Health and Human Services Promising Strategies to End Youth Homelessness Report to Congress](#): Report on interventions to prevent and end youth homelessness, including implications for policy and program development.
- [Preventing and Ending Youth Homelessness: Early Intervention](#): NAEH workshop focuses on strategies to target the youth at



imminent risk of homelessness and the creation of a system that can identify and assist youth early in their homeless experience.

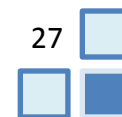
- [National Alliance to End Homelessness: Ending Homelessness for Unaccompanied Youth Age 18-24](#): Research on approaches most likely to succeed in reducing the number of homeless youth.
- [USICH: In Utah, a History of Progress Inspires Greater Action](#): Lessons learned from Utah on ending homelessness for other subpopulations that may be helping in thinking about a system for youth.
- [Illinois Department of Human Services Homeless Youth Logic Model](#): A look at needed community inputs, activities, and strategies to meet specified intermediate and longer range outcomes related to the goal of placing youth in safe and stable housing.
- [Minnesota Department of Human Services: Rural Homeless Youth Listening Sessions Project Summary Report](#): Research on issues related to youth homelessness in rural and tribal communities in greater Minnesota in order to help educate policy makers, funders, and the general public.
- [10 Reasons for Integrating Trauma-Informed Approaches in Programs For Runaway and Homeless Youth](#): Concise description from the Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership on the importance of including trauma-informed approaches to a youth homeless system design.
- [Trauma Informed Consequences for Homeless Youth](#): Resource from Hollywood Homeless Youth Partnership on understanding trauma-informed care.
- [Positive Youth Development Overview In 10 minutes by Dr. Karen Pittman](#): MANY video talk on the key elements and importance of positive youth development, and why it should be included in a youth homeless system design.
- [True Colors Fund](#): Website of resources for working to end homelessness among LGBTQ youth.
- [NEST: Collaborative to Prevent LGBTQ Youth Homelessness](#): City-wide effort in Houston to prevent and end homelessness among

adolescents and young adults who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) by 2020.

- [Systemic Initiatives](#): Examples from Cincinnati on youth homelessness prevention strategies, including those specifically for LGBTQ youth.

## Designing Coordinated Entry Processes for Youth

- [Coordinated Entry Policy Brief](#) and forthcoming Frequently Asked Questions: HUD has issued initial guidance on coordinated entry that will help communities understand basic expectations for any coordinated entry process. Specific guidance for youth coordinated entry processes will be published in the future.
- [Coordinated Community Responses to Ending Youth Homelessness \(Convening 2\)](#): MANY's compilation of responses from a variety of communities on how they are implementing coordinated entry processes for youth.
- [Coordinated Entry and Assessment: Key Components in Creating Coordinated Community Responses to Ending Youth Homelessness](#): MANY's main takeaways on implementing a coordinated entry process for youth after discussing the topic with a variety of communities.
- ["Next Step Tool for Homeless Youth"](#): An assessment tool that incorporates elements of the CSH Transition Age Youth Tool and the Vulnerability Index – Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (TAY-VI-SDPAT).
- [Online Toolkit to Promote Screening and Assessment of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs](#): Toolkit that includes information on more than 50 screening and assessment tools, including their intended audience, key subject areas, requirements for use, and estimated cost.



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