

Chittenden County Homeless Alliance
Organizational Development Plan (previously called Strategic Plan Update)
November 2018

Background:

In the 1980's, a group of concerned citizens and organizations in Chittenden County, Vermont began meeting to come up with solutions around the growing issue of homelessness. Out of those meetings, the city's first two shelters were created. The group continued to meet on a regular basis and became known as our local Continuum of Care (CoC) – a CoC is a local planning body formed for the purpose of coordinating housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals. When the Department of Housing and Urban Development began to require communities to submit a single application for Homeless Assistance Grants in 1995, Chittenden County's Continuum of Care was ready to assume that responsibility and has been an able steward of the HUD funding process since that time.

Over the past few years, in response to an increase in the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and the complexity of issues facing families and the community, our local CoC re-examined our core purpose, organizational and operating structures and made changes we believed necessary to remain effective and relevant. Today the CoC operates as the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance. As a large multi-stakeholder group, the Alliance holds several inclusive, community meetings of the full Continuum of Care and actively seeks new members at least annually. Based on input and guidance from these community meetings, a Steering Committee of elected representatives, and working committees, meet at least monthly in open reporting and working meeting to:

- Gather and disseminate information about the incidence, prevalence, and current and emerging causes of homelessness including conducting an annual Point in Time count
- Identify and prioritize solutions to homelessness including "bricks and mortar," economic, legal, and social service and program impediments
- Develop and advocate government, programmatic, and legal policies that further the Alliance's vision
- Establish and follow written standards for providing CoC assistance, in consultation with the recipient of Emergency Solutions Grants program funds
- Marshal federal, state, and local government and other resources to further our mission
- Coordinate our efforts with the Balance of State Continuum of Care as appropriate
- Move our agenda forward through annual and multi-year planning including establishing performance goals and measuring and monitoring progress toward these goals
- Evaluate all CoC and ESG funded programs and effectuates change as needed
- Develop a written process for Board selection and reviews that process at least every five years
- Designate and operate a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) at a minimum to meet HUD HMIS requirements

In addition to changing our governance and meeting structure to better and more appropriately engage partners with a role to play, the Alliance negotiated a partnership with the Balance of State to participate in a statewide HMIS system, began to develop strategic goals for the next 3 – 5 years and began exploring the potential of using a Collective Impact approach to better facilitate its work and achieve greater impact.

In the spring of 2016, the Alliance contracted with COPE and Associates to help us begin an exploration of the appropriateness of working within a Collective Impact Approach. Specifically we asked Cope to lead a process to help us reach agreement around two of the five conditions of Collective Impact — common agenda and shared measurements. When it was determined that indeed there was substantial agreement we then asked the consultants to help us assess what it would take to develop the other three conditions of Collective Impact — mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support.

The result of this work made it very clear that the Alliance needs additional, capacity to function as a collaborative backbone organization, provide continuous and effective communication and identify, advocate for and track the effectiveness of our mutually reinforcing activities. It also became clear the addition of capacity at this time would allow the Alliance to be exponentially more effective leveraging its unique position to take advantage of, lend coordination to, or assume leadership for, opportunities to better align community resources to meet the needs of individuals and families unable to secure and maintain safe, sustainable housing.

Over the Summer of 2016, the Strategic Planning Committee developed and the Steering Committee approved a three year organizational development plan that will provide the Alliance with the needed training and staff to fulfill its role as a hub for projects, activities and programs intended to end homelessness in Chittenden County. At the end of the three year grant period the Alliance Steering Committee believed the results of the work completed, the integration of practice and systems changes, and recognition of the value added by and through the work of a highly efficient, effective and appropriate backbone organization will ensure the sustainability of gains realized.

In November of 2016, United Way of Northwest Vermont submitted a proposal to Jane's Trust as the lead applicant for the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance - a coalition of entities and individuals who share the vision of all people having safe, affordable and appropriate housing options in Chittenden County, Vermont. Jane's Trust reviewed the grant and indicated an interest in funding the effort and awarded a one year grant in December of 2016. In addition to this grant, the Alliance received a grant from Delta Dental; to date the City of Burlington through the HUD Planning Grant has paid for relevant activities; and Lisa Steele contributed to support the effort in 2017. Given actual and anticipated resources, the Alliance is projected to have a shortfall of less than \$10,000 to fully fund the (original) three year projected budget.

A Summary Table of Activities and Status is included in Attachment A

Major Accomplishments:

Alliance completed a human-centered design process with the Funders Collaborative that identified two priorities that both providers and individuals seeking service agreed (if improved) would result in better outcomes for individuals and families as well as more fully leverage and align community resources — the two areas identified were accessing services and housing retention services and supports.

Vermont Housing Finance Agency agreed to be the fiscal agent for the Alliance and a Coordinator was hired.

The Strategic Planning Committee finalized a strategic planning chart that outlined what it would take to make homelessness rare and brief. (Included as Attachment B)

Increased organizational capacity began to yield real gains in terms of the quantity, quality and timeliness of internal communications. Expanded outreach to promote quarterly meetings has resulted in increasing numbers of the community members attending, including a very successful fall (2017) meeting that provided a forum to preview the proposed Coordinated Entry system and a panel discussion about two resolutions approved by the Burlington City Council about homelessness. With four members of Burlington's City Council in attendance the panel discussion was both informative and engaging.

The HUD requirement that the Alliance develop a process, policies and procedures to implement a region-wide coordinated entry system led to the formation of a team of individuals from multiple organizations that worked for nearly a year to build a system, oriented outward, toward the individuals and families seeking services. The effort, built stronger relationships among providers that supported open and respectful explorations, disagreements and solution seeking. Relationships and work practices that will continue to support the Team through the thorny parts of implementation.

The Alliance supported seeking funds to hire consultants from Community Solutions to work with the Alliance to expedite the launch of our Coordinated Entry system and improve the accuracy and accessibility of our By-Name Community List. The Alliance also allocated funds to support the Alliance in participating in a Built for Zero learning community that will provide support and technical assistance for a year - including how to use feedback loops and continuous improvement practices to provide better, more timely services to individuals and more fully leverage and align this community's housing resources.

The Alliance approved \$100,000 beginning in October 2019 to increase capacity within the Coordinated Entry system.

Strategic Planning Committee began working in February to draft a Strategic Plan that could build on the current effort, maximize existing capacity funding in Year 3 and identify the actions and resources needed in a subsequent three year cycle in support of the Mission of the Alliance.

Strategic Planning Committee Process

The Committee approached the preparation of a plan in three phases:

Phase 1: Accurately updated current status of all activities in original plan.

Phase 2: Combined, deleted and clarified activities in consideration of current conditions in order to develop recommendations on how to move forward. (Attachment C)

Phase 3: Ranked activities to support a recommendation by level of priority. Although the group rated activities across nine categories the two factors given the most weight were urgency and impact. With acknowledgement that activities that are required must also be, or remain, priorities. Analysis of ranking process across all nine categories are included as Attachment D.

Once scored, activities were sorted into three categories of importance; high, medium and low.

An abbreviated summary of results follows:

Activity #	Activity Description	Impact	Required	Urgency
HIGH PRIORITY				
6	Inventory and build agreements around data sharing within and without the HMIS system.	3.25	3.14	2.9
12	Engage in organizational development activities about using continuous feedback loops and human centered design.	3.25	2.00	2.6
14	Identify and strategize how to maintain adequate staffing and operating resources for the Alliance at the end of this three year funding cycle.	3.13	2.50	2.9
8	Evaluate current efforts to engage individuals with lived experience. Expand current efforts to engage individuals with lived experience.	3.13	2.29	2.6
3	Enhance the ability of the alliance to provide or collect outcome and compliance monitoring data on programs recommended for funding by the Alliance.	3.00	4.00	2.9
MEDIUM PRIORITY				
10	Finalize 3-5 year strategic plan that includes ways the Alliance could respond to emergent issues.	3.00	2.20	2.3
7	Draft data-based information about housing and explore ways the Alliance could use and share data.	3.00	2.00	2.0
11	Actively invite funders to explore ways they could work with the Alliance to better achieve their goals of increasing the number of adults and families securely and adequately housed.	2.88	1.43	2.0
17	Review and update Alliance Strategic plan	2.71	2.71	2.2
1	Create appropriately connected and mutually reinforcing internal and external communication plans	2.63	1.00	2.4
15	Hold a one-day planning evaluation retreat for participants actively engage in monthly Alliance Steering Committee meetings.	2.63	1.00	2.3
9	Use the RBA framework to identify and track developmental measures for the Alliance.	2.43	1.00	1.7
LOW PRIORITY				
18	Review and update as needed Alliance Governance Structure and Operating Agreements.	2.14	3.14	1.7

16	Seek opportunities to embed functions critical for the ongoing success of the Alliance within member organizations of the Steering Committee.	2.13	1.43	2.0
13	Develop a process and priorities for the Alliance to develop, implement and evaluate an advocacy agenda.	2.00	1.43	1.6
5	Finalize systems map.	1.88	1.43	1.4
4	Engage in organizational development activities to strengthen relationship among the Steering Committee and key community partners.	1.88	1.00	2.0
2	Integrate and coordinate the work of the Standing Committees and Steering Committee	1.75	1.00	1.3

With these rankings complete, the Strategic Planning Committee developed six over-arching recommendations to accompany the specific recommendations tied to each activity ranked high.

Over-Arching Recommendations

- Focus on the highest priorities first, add or substitute additional priorities as capacity, time, opportunity or need requires or permits.
- For each priority develop detailed work plans that include timeframes and importance decision-making points.
- For each work plan identify the resources needed to successfully complete.
- Assign a lead for each plan and establish regular check in or/and reporting schedules.
- Task the Strategic Planning Committee, with support from the Coordinator, to monitor and support all work plans.
- Task the Strategic Planning Committee, with the support of the Treasurer, to draft operating budget to support both the work plans and operating.

Recommendations by Activities Ranked High:

Over the next year, the Alliance should focus its energy and resources on following five activities.

Activity 6: Inventory and build agreements around data sharing within and without the HMIS system.

Recommendation: Review and approve the work plan of the Coordinated Entry Committee and work with the Committee to identify and secure the resources needed to complete the plan. Schedule regular reports from the Coordinated Entry Committee about systems performance as well as barriers, needs, attempted solutions, gaps and areas that need attention. When appropriate establish time limited Ad Hoc Committees to work with Coordinated Entry Committee to enhance performance or address barriers to performance.

Activity 12: Engage in organizational development activities about using continuous feedback loops and human centered design.

Recommendation: Focus efforts to use feedback loops and human centered design on the Coordinated Entry System at both the consumer and frontline provider levels. Leverage resources available through Community Solutions, Built for Zero and Fund for Shared Insight to support this

effort. Consider providing some training or funding a small pilot to test ways of sharing feedback across the broader system.

Activity 14: Identify and strategize how to maintain adequate staffing and operating resources for the Alliance at the end of the current three year funding cycle.

Recommendation:

Currently the Alliance does not have a Standing Committee that is charged with resource development. The Steering Committee needs to assign this function to an existing committee or create a new one to fulfill this role and develop a charter for the committee that would further define composition, scope and responsibility. Once created this Committee could host efforts to integrate work around each of the following issues to gain a clear understanding of the resource needs of the Alliance:

What actions will the Alliance need to take to fully implement, evaluate and sustain the Coordinated Entry System.

What actions will the Alliance take to move forward its other identified priority — insure all individuals and families have access to efficient, effective and appropriate housing retention services and supports — Hold a general conversation about this priority at a Steering Committee meeting as a prequel to a facilitated conversation among any interested members to further define and refine an approach to making retention services more consistent and available. Steering Committee should consider creating a dedicated committee – similar to Coordinated Entry Committee to lead this effort.

Proposals on ways to move forward would be brought back to the Steering Committee for consideration and decision-making.

Re-visit the initial assumptions around the on-going costs of sustaining operational support and capacity for the Alliance.

Work in each of these areas will yield both an action plan and essential information to build a multi-year budget.

Note: In many ways this activity is closely tied to Activity 11 which requires the Alliance to explore and clarify its various roles in resource development. Consideration should be given to finding a way to integrate some of the essential conversations outlined in Activity 11 in this effort.

Activity 8: Evaluate current efforts to engage individuals with lived experience. Expand current efforts to engage individuals with lived experience.

Recommendation: Support the efforts of the Coordinated Entry Committee to establish consumer and frontline staff satisfaction feedback loops within Coordinated Entry. Request quarterly reports and updates on results and actions taken. Survey members of the Alliance to gain a better understanding about current practice around getting and using feedback within member organizations and, if appropriate, host a conversation about ways these efforts could be streamlined, shared or aligned for the benefit of the community, individual organizations and people being asked for feedback. Continue to provide appropriate opportunities and supports for individuals to provide input and appropriated track responses.

Activity 3: Enhance the ability of the Alliance to provide or collect outcome and compliance monitoring data on programs recommended for funding by the Alliance.

Recommendation: The Monitoring Policy and Procedures approved by the Steering Committee, evaluative work completed as part of the start-up and implementation of Coordinated Entry and process and systems measures that will be developed by Strategic Planning Committee should be connected and integrated appropriately. The Steering Committee should discuss whether the monitoring and evaluation function could be assigned to an existing committee, shared and aligned among committees or whether a new Committee should be organized for this purpose. Once this decision is made, task the committee with drafting a work plan that addresses integrating and coordination efforts currently underway. Consideration should be given to holding a facilitated discussion about evaluative work in general - to build a common understanding of what it can and cannot do, as well as, what it must do to be implemented and supported across the Alliance.

Summary

In putting recommendations forward, the Strategic Planning Committee tried to balance the needs of the Alliance to act as both an effective, efficient and appropriate backbone organization and an able steward of our mission and community resources with the urgent need and interest to make significant progress on our two systems and programmatic priorities – Access to Services and Housing Retention Services. Although some or all of the highly ranked activities should be seen as comprising an on-going effort, the level of effort should moderate with focused attention over the next year. A decrease in effort, coupled with the potential of increased resources and capacity should allow the Alliance to move its focus to other priorities.

On-going, the Alliance should use the activities outlined in the current capacity building plan to set operational priorities on an annual basis, and the integrated chart of what it will take to make homelessness rare and brief to set programmatic priorities on an annual basis. This combination will ensure the Alliance maintains an appropriate balance of internal and external focus and use its resources strategically.