2019 Emergency Solutions Grant Funding Priorities
Approved by the NC BoS CoC Steering Committee on July 9, 2019

Purpose

The North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care (NC BoS CoC) has set funding priorities for its Emergency Solutions Grants funding in 2019 to help improve its homeless service system and provide more robust supports to people experiencing homelessness. These funding priorities aim to:

- Help each Local Planning Area (known as Regional Committees in the NC BoS CoC) target ESG funding to specific local needs. These priorities provide guidance to help LPAs make decisions about how to use ESG to improve their local homeless system, rather than simply continuing ESG funding for previous grantees.

- Coordinate goals and ESG funding across the whole CoC. ESG funding decisions are made in each LPA, which makes it difficult for the whole CoC to set and meet goals. These funding priorities aim to coordinate ESG funding to move the whole CoC toward common goals.

- Improve ESG-funded programs. These priorities aim to help move grantees toward best practices by lowering barriers to entry, integrating Housing First practices, and following the NC BoS CoC's Written Standards. These priorities help grantees and communities take steps toward expanding access to homeless services.

How to use the NC BoS CoC's 2019 ESG Funding Priorities to set LPA Funding Priorities:

1. Read the following funding priorities in full. These priorities should guide decision-making in each LPA but are not meant to create new requirements or rules.
2. Convene an ESG funding committee in your Local Planning Area.
3. Set local priorities with your ESG funding committee. Use the LPA ESG Funding Priorities Worksheet to guide the discussion. The worksheet will help LPAs make local choices about how to implement these funding priorities.
4. Develop a scorecard that helps implement the LPA's priorities or use NCCEH's sample scorecard.
5. Submit the ESG Funding Priorities Worksheet and the LPA's scorecard (if developing a local scorecard) to NCCEH by August 9, 2019 using this link.

NC Balance of State Continuum of Care's 2019 ESG Funding Priorities

Ensure people experiencing homelessness in the CoC have access to shelter, rehousing assistance, and supportive services.

- LPAs should only fund additional shelter beds in counties where significant numbers of people live unsheltered. All newly funded shelter beds should be accessible to everyone.
- LPAs should fund street outreach in counties that currently have people living unsheltered.
- LPAs should prioritize funding for currently funded emergency shelters that agree to reduce barriers to entry.
- LPAs should fund rapid re-housing (RRH) that covers every county in the LPA. LPAs may achieve full geographic coverage by funding one or multiple programs.
- LPAs should only fund homelessness prevention programs if accessible emergency shelter or street outreach and rapid re-housing assistance are available in every county.

LPAs should apply for all available funding and recruit applicants who will improve the LPA's response to homelessness

- LPAs should advertise ESG funding widely and actively recruit new applicant agencies so there are enough agencies to apply for all available funding. LPAs should recruit new applicants that would help to fill gaps and improve the LPA's response to homelessness.
- LPAs should work with potential new applicants to understand ESG requirements and best practices, including those found in the NC BoS CoC Written Standards.
- LPAs should not put agencies forward for funding if they have significant compliance problems or other issues that may prevent them from receiving grants. LPAs should use a scorecard that evaluates applicants for compliance.

Only applicants with high rates of spending should be funded.

- Agencies with a history of high rates of spending should be considered first for funding, and agencies with poor spending should be given extra scrutiny before being funded at a reduced or similar level to the prior year.

LPAs should give priority to programs that have integrated best practices, including those found in the NC BoS CoC's Written Standards and in the appendix to this document.

- Agencies that have integrated best practices or are taking positive steps towards doing so should be prioritized for funding. LPAs should require agencies that do not currently adhere to best practices to provide a workplan of how they will work with the LPA to move towards best practices during the grant operating year.

Appendix: Best practices by activity type

Priority for Accessible Emergency Shelters

All emergency shelters are expected to incorporate the standards found in the [NC BoS CoC's Emergency Shelter Written Standards](#). While each shelter faces barriers to meeting the goals of the Written Standards and may have limitations surrounding internal priorities and funder requirements, the NC BoS CoC expects that each shelter will work towards the goal of integrating the best practices outlined in the Written Standards.

Emergency shelters should be accessible with limited prerequisites for entry, provide voluntary and housing-focused services, and facilitate rapid exits to permanent housing.

Principle 1: Access to Shelter Entry

Anyone experiencing homelessness should be able to access emergency shelter without prerequisites. Clients should experience shelter that feels welcoming and is easy to access. The list below gives examples of how a client should be able to access a shelter. Not all shelters are able to meet all parts of this list, but all shelters should consider how their program policies may present a barrier to client access.

- Clients can receive immediate, 24/7 access to a shelter bed *(where funding allows).*
- Access to shelter without requirements of sobriety, income, proof of identification, or other prerequisites that may make it difficult for some people to access a shelter bed.
- Access to shelter without having to undergo a criminal background check or facing other barriers due to past history of incarceration or arrest *(shelters may check the sex offender registry if the shelter facility also houses children).*
- Access to shelter without limits on the total amount of time allowed to stay in the shelter and the ability to re-enter shelter after leaving.
- The ability to re-enter shelter after breaking program rules except in very egregious circumstances.
- Clients shouldn't face program rules that require participation in chores, groups, religious or spiritual services, or paying rent in exchange for receiving a shelter bed. Program rules and expectations should focus on health and safety. Services should be voluntary and housing-focused, as outlined below.

Principle 2: Voluntary, housing-focused services

Services should focus on moving people quickly into permanent housing and reducing exits to homelessness. Client experiences with housing services should include:

- Clients may choose how and when to engage in services, but staff regularly attempt to engage all clients in planning for permanent housing.
- Services are focused on helping people identify safe, accessible, permanent housing solutions from their first day in shelter with case management conversations that relate to permanent housing.
- Housing-focused services that include helping residents make connections to mainstream housing and income resources and actively participating in the coordinated entry system.

- Access to housing location and placement without requirements to participate in certain services as a prerequisite to moving into permanent housing (such as mental health counseling or job placement). Additional services that may enhance housing stability may also be offered voluntarily.
- Shelters should track length of time homeless and returns to homelessness to help evaluate the effectiveness of their program and adjust services accordingly.

Priority for Accessible Rapid Re-housing Programs

All rapid re-housing programs must follow the [NC BoS CoC's Rapid Re-housing Written Standards](#).

Rapid re-housing programs should have limited barriers to entry and provide hands-on housing identification services, flexible financial assistance, and housing stability services.

Principle 1: Access to Rapid Re-housing Program Entry

Client experiences with rapid re-housing program entry should include:

- Access to rapid re-housing programs without refusal of services due to criminal background, substance use history, disability, income, or other real or perceived barriers to finding or maintaining stable housing.
- Access to rapid re-housing programs under the assumption that all clients are ready for housing and without withholding financial assistance or services if clients do not meet pre-requisites.

Principle 2: Active Housing Search Assistance

All programs should have dedicated staff whose responsibility is to actively assist tenants with housing search and assertively recruit landlords. Client experiences with housing search assistance should include:

- Housing staff that call landlords, visit properties with clients, and advocate for their clients during the housing search.
- Housing staff that assist clients to overcome barriers to housing by helping them acquire identification, background checks, and other necessary documents.
- Housing staff that assist clients to find housing that they find desirable in neighborhoods in which they want to live.
- Services that do not expect clients to find suitable housing mostly on their own, only providing a list of landlords to call themselves.

Principle 3: Flexible Financial Assistance and Services Package

Financial assistance and services should adjust based on the household's needs. Programs should provide only the assistance necessary to stabilize in permanent housing. Client experiences with housing financial assistance and services should include:

- Rapid re-housing services that only provide the assistance necessary to help the household quickly move out of homelessness and stabilize in permanent housing. Services and financial assistance should adjust to meet households' changing needs.

- Rapid re-housing services that regularly evaluate the assistance provided and exit households quickly from assistance if they are stable in housing.
- Rapid re-housing programs that do NOT provide a set number of months of assistance or other restricted, one-size-fits-all, services or financial assistance packages.

Principle 4: Client-Driven Housing Stability Services

Services should focus on helping clients achieve housing stability, be voluntary, and allow the client to choose the services they need. Client experiences with housing stability services should include:

- Services provided by rapid re-housing programs that focus on housing stability. If a client desires other assistance, like long-term mental health treatment, rapid re-housing programs should connect them to mainstream services.
- Voluntary services without additional requirements on clients that are not required for other tenants. Clients should not be exited from the program for not engaging in services.
- Client-driven services chosen by the client based on their own needs and desires.
- Services that are assertive through engagement and provided in tenants' homes. Case managers should help identify and address challenges that may put a client's housing at-risk and continue to provide services and motivate clients even when they seem resistant.

Priority for Effective Street Outreach Programs

All street outreach programs must follow the NC BoS CoC's Street Outreach Written Standards.

Street outreach programs should fill gaps in services, serve unsheltered people with high barriers to receiving services and housing, and rapidly connect clients to emergency services and permanent housing.

Principle 1: Filling Gaps

- The LPA should aim to fund street outreach in counties with unsheltered counts or without shelter options.
- Street outreach programs may be funded instead of shelter in a county where the existing shelter has high barriers to access.

Principle 2: Targeting People with High Barriers

- Effective street outreach programs should target people with the most barriers to receiving services.
- Street outreach programs should engage anyone living unsheltered, even if they seem resistant to receiving services.

Principle 3: Rapid Connection to Emergency Services and Permanent Housing

Client experiences with connection to emergency services and permanent housing should include:

- Street outreach services that focus on meeting emergency needs, such as connecting people living unsheltered with physical health, behavioral health, shelter, and other needed services

(this could include community outreach events, visits to places where people experiencing unsheltered homelessness may reside, partnerships with local businesses or public services such as libraries, etc.).

- Street outreach programs that facilitate rapid connections to permanent housing through coordinated entry.
- Street outreach programs that do not put barriers (such as required services or sobriety requirements) in place before referring and connecting clients to emergency services or permanent housing.

Principle 4: Agency Experience

- Agencies running street outreach programs should have experience working with people living unsheltered, especially people with significant barriers to permanent housing, including people with severe mental illness and substance use disorders.

Priority for Homelessness Prevention Programs That Reduce Returns to Homelessness and Prevent First Time Experiences with Homelessness

All homelessness prevention programs must follow the [NC BoS CoC's Homelessness Prevention Written Standards](#)

LPAs should fund homelessness prevention programs that focus on preventing returns to homelessness and target funding to individuals at the most imminent risk of homelessness. Targeting HP on return prevention ensures people who have previously experienced homelessness are not re-traumatized by experiencing subsequent periods of homelessness. It also helps rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing programs serve more people by helping agencies feel comfortable exiting households from programs earlier, knowing they can prevent subsequent returns to homelessness, if necessary.

Principle 1: Targeting and Prioritization

- Homeless prevention programs should prioritize funds to prevent returns to homelessness among people previously served by rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing in the CoC.
- HP programs should only provide prevention funding to people who are at imminent risk of homelessness. Most funding should be used to divert people who would otherwise enter sheltered or unsheltered homelessness that same night, without prevention assistance.
- HP programs should provide prevention funding as a last resort: if someone is not going to be homeless that night, HP programs should provide services and support to attempt to avert that client's homelessness with other resources before using prevention financial assistance.
- People with other permanent housing options, other income, or other options to resolve their housing crisis should be served with mediation or other services only.
- Clients that do receive financial assistance should receive the minimum assistance necessary to prevent their homelessness.