

Attachment 3.1: Red Flags to Aid in Identification of Homeless Students

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Attendance and enrollment in multiple schools• Chronic hunger or tiredness• Lack of motivation, direction, or desire• Little or no extracurricular participation• Expressed feelings of not belonging in school• Indicated boredom with school• Been retained a grade• Lack of acceptance by his/her peers• Poor social adjustment• Serious economic problems• Problems with sleeping during class• Failure to complete homework assignments• Untimely enrollment• Siblings that may be over protective of one another• Parents seem confused when asked about the last school or grade child was enrolled in• Tendency to exaggerate• Low income motel address on enrollment form	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• High absenteeism rate• Poor grades overall• Frequent health problems• More mobile than other students• Behaviors indicating social or emotional disturbances<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Low self-esteem➤ Disruptive• Lack of records<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Birth certificate➤ Immunization record➤ Pre-school physical➤ School records➤ Incomplete records• Frequent spells of day dreaming• Excessive tardiness• Unkempt appearance and frequent hunger• Insufficient or lack of adequate school clothing• Poor personal hygiene• Exhibited evidence of physical abuse• Poor or no contact between parent(s) and school• Shows reluctance to leave parent when left at school• Has no permanent address
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Source: <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/homeless/resources/identify.pdf>

CHAPTER 4: RESOURCES FOR PROVIDING PERMANENT, TRANSITIONAL, AND EMERGENCY HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

In rural areas, continuums face many challenges affecting their ability to assist homeless and at-risk clients, such as serving clients who are dispersed throughout the service area(s), a lack of service provider capacity, and a scarcity of financial resources. This chapter explores some of the approaches that rural Continuums of Care (CoCs) have taken in trying to serve clients in the face of these and other barriers. Specifically, the chapter looks at the following:

- Approaches to providing permanent housing in rural areas
- Approaches to providing transitional and emergency housing in rural areas
- Sources of funds in rural areas
- Finding and sustaining match resources

Each of these elements is important as continuums help ensure that their clients receive the supports they need to move to stable housing situations as quickly as possible.

PERMANENT AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Due to the limited availability of decent, affordable housing stock in many rural areas and the scarcity of funding sources to subsidize rents, housing opportunities for rural residents with very low incomes often are scarce. In some communities very little rental housing is available at all and in others, particularly those with "tourism value," prices are exorbitant. In rural areas where little new construction or substantial housing rehabilitation takes place, substandard housing can be a significant issue. While estimates vary, somewhere between 7 and 12 percent of the rental housing stock in rural areas is estimated to be substandard.²⁴ In addition, rural areas often face a shortage of housing development professionals, lenders to finance housing projects, and public water and sewer infrastructure needed to support new development.²⁵

The shortage of housing development professionals can be a particularly difficult issue for rural CoCs that want to develop or rehabilitate affordable housing units. It can be extremely challenging to transform service providers into housing developers because the specialized skills and knowledge that allow experienced affordable housing developers to succeed are not readily acquired in a short time. In many situations, it is more practical to create partnerships between housing developers and service partners. This may be done within the context of the consortium, or by partnering with groups that are outside of the continuum. In situations where no suitable housing developer partner is available and a service provider wants to embark on a development project, it is wise to carefully seek out someone with experience to provide guidance and technical assistance throughout the project.

²⁴ According to 2003 American Housing Survey, 1.5 million (6.6 percent) rural homes are substandard. According to the Housing Assistance Council (HAC), 12 percent of all rural homes are substandard.

²⁵ *A Primer for Beginning Rural Housing Developers* (1999). Washington, DC: Housing Assistance Council. <http://www.ruralhome.org/manager/uploads/Primer.pdf>.

The Need for More Affordable Housing

A mountain resort town in North Carolina has recently experienced the phenomenon of economic boom coupled with rising homelessness. Affluent second homeowners are purchasing housing stock in the town as vacation homes and living there only seasonally. This has resulted in a higher cost of living, higher taxes, and the second highest per capita rental costs in the entire state. Over the course of one year during this boom, the local homeless shelter saw a 28 percent increase in the number of homeless families.²⁶

In the face of these barriers, rural continuums use a variety of approaches to augment the supply of decent, safe and sanitary housing that is permanently available and affordable to low-income households. These strategies include enhancing the supply of affordable housing with new units; rehabilitating existing units; and providing rental assistance to help make existing units affordable to households with low and very low incomes.

New Construction of Affordable Housing

Ensuring an adequate supply of permanent affordable housing is essential to eliminating homelessness in rural areas. Construction of affordable housing can either serve homeless individuals and families directly, or can help indirectly by enhancing the overall supply of affordable housing in a community:

- **Targeting people who are homeless.** Sometimes continuums construct new affordable housing targeted especially for those who are homeless, either with or without supportive services attached. While this approach can be expensive, it ensures that the supply of affordable housing is augmented, provides affordable housing directly to the homeless persons in need, and helps ensure that appropriate services accompany the housing.
- **Augmenting the overall supply.** Other times, continuums can simply construct additional housing affordable to those with low-incomes. While the specific units constructed may not be used to house those who are homeless, augmenting the overall affordable housing stock can help ensure that affordable units will be available to those homeless families and individuals who need affordable places to live. Savvy rural continuums include augmenting the supply of low-income housing as part of a broader strategy for eliminating homelessness in their communities.

Permanent affordable housing is needed in many rural areas but it can be difficult to find a location with a water supply and a means of sewage disposal, as well as access to services, employment, and transportation. When deciding whether to commit to an affordable housing project, successful rural continuums consider factors such as these:

- **The local market.** In order to ensure that new permanent housing units will be filled, continuums must determine whether there is demand from a sufficient number of prospective tenants who both meet the income eligibility requirements and are able to pay the rent. This type of market study is required by many funders and lenders, and is a prudent first step before launching a permanent housing project. In areas where there is need for affordable housing but potential residents lack the means to pay, rent subsidies must be considered.

²⁶ Post, Patricia A. (January 2002). *Hard to Reach: Rural Homelessness and Health Care*. National Health Care for the Homeless Council. <http://www.nhchc.org/Publications/RuralHomeless.pdf>.

- **On-going rental subsidy source.** Many low-income tenants will require an on-going rental subsidy to stay in a permanent unit – even one with relatively low costs. To reach the lowest-income households, rural continuums need to seek out sources of funding to provide on-going rental subsidies.
- **Location.** Households emerging from homelessness often benefit from having access to employment centers and support services. This is often a challenge in rural areas, and continuums provide an important service when they work with developers to ensure that affordable housing opportunities are located near services and job centers. In particular, programs that provide housing for individuals with significant physical or mental impairments work best when located near supportive services unless special transportation arrangements are available.

Rehabilitation of Existing Housing (Homeowner or Rental)

Providing subsidies to help homeowners rehabilitate their housing units can help keep families in affordable housing. Without such subsidies, essential repairs may remain undone. In these situations, families may be forced to move to units they cannot afford in order to have decent housing. One technique commonly used by rural continuums is offering weatherization programs for low-income homeowners. These programs often can be flexible enough to allow low-income homeowners to repair storm windows, gutters, and roofs. HOME, CDBG and USDA program funds all offer other options for loan or grant funds to help rehabilitate rural housing units.

Rehabilitation programs can increase the available affordable rental housing stock for lower-income households. While units rehabilitated under various subsidized programs may not be affordable to someone who is homeless and jobless, adding to the affordable housing stock can take price pressure off of that portion of the housing market, and can help ensure that a larger supply of affordable units are available. Rehabilitated rental units offer a solid housing base for low and very low income households, especially when coupled with tenant-based rental assistance.

Rental Assistance (TBRA)

Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) – a rental subsidy to help individual households afford rented housing units at market rates. Assistance may come in the form of rental assistance, utility subsidies, security deposits, and/or utility deposits.

TBRA can be an attractive choice in rural areas if there is available housing stock. It is flexible, can be used wherever the individual is located, and is a good alternative in areas where it is not feasible to build dedicated affordable housing.

Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers

Like the HOME TBRA program, Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers allow individuals and families to find their own rental housing on the private rental market. Low-income voucher holders are able to afford market-rate rents on a long-term basis through a subsidy paid by the program directly to the owner of the unit. Such vouchers are administered by Public Housing Agencies (PHAs). When available, they are an excellent way to help homeless people obtain stable housing in rural areas. However, Housing Choice Vouchers are not always an option.

PHAs that serve rural areas are relatively rare, meaning that in some rural areas Housing Choice Vouchers are not available. However, some statewide PHAs administer the Housing

Choice Voucher program for the parts of a state not covered by a local PHA.²⁷ Moreover, if there is no Section 8 program in a particular area, a rural continuum can ask the State PHA to consider implementing a “Balance of State” Section 8 program. A State PHA can serve the area covered by the rural continuum and can conduct outreach to applicants most in need, in order to prevent and alleviate homelessness.²⁸ Those most in need might include target populations such as families, veterans, victims of domestic violence, the physically disabled, individuals with mental illness or substance abuse problems, and individuals who have recently been discharged from public institutions. Targeting homeless people through its outreach may be especially useful for a PHA because those who are homeless typically have extremely low incomes, and at least 75 percent of the Housing Choice Voucher program funding must be used to assist people with incomes at or below 30 percent of the area median income.

Unfortunately, there are often long waiting lists for Section 8 housing vouchers. Moreover, rural areas typically have a limited number of rental units that are available at fair market rents, meet housing quality standards, and are owned by landlords willing to participate in the Section 8 program.

EMERGENCY AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

While the ultimate goal for a continuum is to ensure permanent, stable housing for all residents, emergency and transitional housing is an important part of the puzzle. Providing for these types of shelter is especially challenging in rural communities due to low concentrations of homeless clients.

The McKinney-Vento programs described in Chapter 1 are a valuable resource for ensuring that emergency and temporary housing needs are met, but they do have drawbacks for rural homeless providers:

- **Limited Prevention Funds.** Because of a scarcity of affordable housing and a lack of emergency and transitional housing, prevention is a key strategy for addressing homelessness in many rural areas. Homeless prevention, to a narrowly defined population, is an eligible activity under the ESG program. However, it may be difficult for rural areas to access ESG funding. The three competitively-funded McKinney-Vento programs (SHP, S+C and SRO) do not allow funding to be used for any kind of prevention services. Using these competitive funds to meet other needs, however, can allow other resources to be used for prevention programs.
- **Definition of Homeless.** The three competitively-funded McKinney-Vento programs (SHP, S+C and SRO) are reserved for those who meet HUD’s definition of homelessness, as described in the introduction to this guidebook. Due to the scarcity of emergency shelters and a strong tradition of taking care of one another in rural communities, many people without a home of their own live doubled up or “couch surf,” and therefore do not meet the current definition of “homeless” required for assistance under these programs. For this reason, a sizeable portion of the rural population without stable housing currently fails to qualify for assistance under the competitive McKinney-Vento programs.

²⁷ “Rural Housing Challenges: Meeting the Housing Needs of People with Disabilities in Rural Communities.” Opening Doors, September 2002, Issue 19. Published by Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. (TAC) and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Housing Task Force.

²⁸ For more information on the Section 8 Housing Voucher program and targeting populations refer to *Section 8 Made Simple: Using the Housing Choice Voucher Program to Assist People with Disabilities*.

- **Clients with Disabilities.** Two of the four McKinney-Vento programs – SHP (permanent housing component) and S+C – target permanent housing resources to homeless people with disabilities. However, of those who use homeless services in rural areas, only about 13 percent are individuals living with a disability.²⁹ Using these funds to the extent feasible can free up other resources to meet the needs of the non-disabled population.

Despite these limitations, McKinney-Vento programs can be used effectively in rural areas to help meet certain targeted needs. This is especially feasible when rural areas form CoCs and join forces, allowing them to submit more competitive applications.

Making Transitional Housing Work in a Rural Area

One rural continuum has successfully combined transitional housing for residents with a variety of special needs. They operate an 18-unit facility. Within that facility, 11 beds are funded with McKinney-Vento funds and serve as transitional housing for homeless single adults emerging from alcohol and drug in-patient treatment. This group has its own wing in the facility, which includes congregate living facilities, an office, and careful and intensive case management. In the same facility, separate units are set aside for those with chronic mental illness and/or physical disabilities who can live successfully in this type of setting. Together, the programs are of a large enough scale to manage effectively. With appropriate supervision, the result is “a clean and sober facility that is safe for families and children.”

SOURCES OF FUNDS FOR RURAL CONTINUUMS

Federal Sources

Federal funding for affordable housing in rural areas comes primarily from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):

- **HUD funding** is administered primarily through government agencies at the state or local level. While much of HUD’s funding is targeted to urban centers, some funding can be used in rural areas.³⁰
- **USDA housing resources** are exclusively for use in rural areas and are administered by the office of Rural Development with locations in most states.³¹

With the exception of McKinney-Vento programs,³² HUD and USDA programs generally do not focus specifically on serving homeless clients. However, in many cases the programs can be used to assist those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The various programs also can be used to enhance the overall supply of affordable housing in an area, providing additional opportunities for households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness to access

²⁹ *The Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress.* (February 2007). U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. <http://www.huduser.org/Publications/pdf/ahar.pdf>.

³⁰ For more information on HUD programs and funding see HUD’s website at www.hud.gov.

³¹ A list of Rural Development offices is available online at www.rurdev.usda.gov/recd_map.html. Links to RD programs are provided at http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rhs/common/program_info.htm#top.

³² An overview of the McKinney-Vento programs is provided in Chapter 1. For more detailed information about these programs, see <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/index.cfm>.

an affordable housing unit. Key programs for rural continuums to explore, other than McKinney-Vento programs, include the following:

- **HOME:** HOME funds are distributed each year to all states and participating jurisdictions (PJs). State HOME funds usually are administered by the State's Office of Community Development or a similar agency.³³ With States receiving 40 percent of the total available HOME funding each year, HOME funds are valuable resources for rural communities to build, buy, and/or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent or homeownership. Since HOME funds cannot be used to subsidize operation costs, HOME projects usually require an on-going subsidy in order to reduce costs far enough to serve the homeless and precariously-housed population.

HOME funds also can be used to provide tenant-based rental assistance to very low income households by providing a rent subsidy directly to the landlord, similar to the Section 8 voucher program. This can be an extremely effective use of funds for serving the homeless population in rural areas because it provides a direct subsidy for a rental unit in the community. HOME funds may be the only source of such subsidy since many rural areas do not have Section 8 programs.

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program:** CDBG funds are allocated to every state and to entitlement communities primarily for activities that benefit persons with low or moderate-incomes. Rural areas do not qualify as entitlement communities but 30 percent of funding is allocated to states and must be spent in non-entitlement communities. Rural continuums can work to ensure that CDBG funds available to non-entitlement communities are targeted in ways that best meet the needs of the rural homeless and at-risk population. The CDBG program is flexible and can be used to fund various types of activities including, but not limited to, housing rehabilitation, new housing construction, land and building purchases, and public works, such as water and sewer lines.
- **Section 515 (USDA Rural Rental Housing Program):** This program provides low-interest loans to finance the purchase, construction, or rehabilitation of affordable multifamily housing or congregate housing for families, elders, and people with disabilities who have very low, low, or moderate incomes. While the program has been an important source of affordable housing in rural areas in the past, funding currently is limited. The subsidies provided under the Section 515 program often are not sufficient to make new units affordable for very low-income households and there is an ongoing shortage of Section 521 program funds to provide rental subsidy assistance to Section 515 tenants.³⁴ Without rent subsidy, Section 515 projects typically cannot meet the needs of extremely low-income and homeless households. They can, however, enhance the overall supply of affordable housing in an area.
- **Section 538 (USDA Rural Rental Housing Guaranteed Loan Program):** This program provides guaranteed loans (for up to 40 years) for housing developers to construct, acquire, and rehabilitate rural multifamily housing. Developers applying to a private financial institution for a loan to develop new housing are given lower interest rates in return for providing tenants with lower rents. This program provides housing for residents whose

³³ The HOME allocation for each state and locality can be found at www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/about/budget/budget02/index.cfm.

³⁴ "Rural Housing Challenges: Meeting the Housing Needs of People with Disabilities in Rural Communities." Opening Doors, September 2002, Issue 19. Published by Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. (TAC) and the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Housing Task Force.

incomes are as much as 115 percent of the area median income. It therefore generally does not meet the needs of extremely low-income and homeless households. It can, however, enhance the overall supply of affordable housing in an area.

- **Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities:** This HUD program provides funding to nonprofit organizations to construct, rehabilitate, or acquire supportive housing and is available to very low-income persons with a household member who has a disability. The program also provides on-going rental subsidies to the tenants to maintain affordability. While it can only meet the needs of households with disabilities, it is a viable resource for that portion of the rural population, including homeless persons with disabilities.
- **Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program:** Income-eligible individuals and families are given a voucher and are able to find their own rental housing, including single-family homes, townhouses, and apartments. Housing choice vouchers are administered locally by Public Housing Agencies (PHAs). A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by the PHA on behalf of the participating family. PHAs do not operate in all rural areas, but where they are present, CoCs can work to ensure that clients who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are able to apply for this type of assistance.
- **Project-Based Section 8 Voucher Program:** This program is a component of the Housing Choice Voucher Program. It works in essentially the same way except that the assistance is linked to a particular unit if the owner meets certain conditions (rehabilitating or constructing a certain number of units, or setting aside a certain number of existing units). Linking the assistance to particular units can be used as an incentive to encourage owners to provide more affordable housing in rural areas.
- **USDA Multi-Family Housing - Rental Assistance Program (Section 521)** Residents of multi-family housing complexes built under both the Rural Rental Housing Program (Section 515) and the Farm Labor Housing Program (Section 514) are eligible to apply for the Rental Assistance Program. While funding is limited and is available only to certain developments, rural continuums can help ensure that rental assistance is sought for these types of developments to enhance affordability for the lowest-income residents.

States, Counties, and Local Jurisdictions

Much of the funding available for addressing issues of homelessness through states, counties, and local jurisdictions come from Federal sources such as HOME and CDBG. Finding non-federal funds can be difficult in rural areas. Local government often has little funding to provide for homeless services or housing, and state and county resources may be spread thin. However, states, counties, and local governments that view homelessness as a priority can establish supplemental funds to serve homeless or at-risk families and/or to provide very low-income housing in rural areas. Community Action Agencies and multi-county PHAs are other possible resources for rural continuums. Continuum members can be active in encouraging such program administrators and helping craft funding systems that will work well for the area.

Examples of State Homeless Initiatives Funded With Non-Federal Sources

- In Utah, the state legislature has established a homeless trust fund, supplemented by individual contributions made on the state income tax form. Trust fund monies go to agencies that move people from homelessness to self-sufficiency. Eligible activities include the following: outreach, emergency and transitional housing, day centers, meals, and case management services.
- In Washington State, the Homeless Housing Assistance Act (HHAA) provides for surcharges on recording fees for real property documents. Funds collected are used to support low-income housing. Sixty percent of the revenue goes to counties and cities for very low-income housing projects. The other 40 percent goes to the Washington Housing Trust Account to support building operation and maintenance costs of extremely low-income housing projects.
- In Kentucky, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) has been variously funded through the Governor's Derby Breakfast, unclaimed lottery prize winnings, and fees on new mortgages, recorded deeds, and other instruments recorded by county clerks. The funds are aimed at helping very low-income households, including those on the verge of homelessness, meet their housing needs. They can be used as matching funds, or targeted to projects such as acquisition, rehabilitation and/or new construction of very low-income housing units.
- In Pennsylvania, the Homeless Assistance Program (HAP) is a \$25 million state-funded program that provides homeless prevention and services. Funds are provided as block grants to each county. Importantly for rural areas, the funding can be used to assist individuals who are living doubled up and for prevention efforts for those who are on the verge of homelessness. Approximately half of the total funding is used to provide rental assistance including rent, mortgage, utilities and security deposit assistance to prevent homelessness and most of the remaining funds are used for case management purposes for those who are homeless and those who are at risk of becoming homeless.³⁵
- In Florida, the Challenge Grant program authorized by the state legislature in 2001 provides funding to local CoCs to help them implement their strategic plans. Eligible grantees are the lead agencies for the continuums. In the first four years of the program, Florida has been able to expand geographic coverage of the assistance from 31 to 61 of the state's 67 counties. The program is funded by state general revenue funds and does not require any local match.³⁶

One advantage of state, county, and local funding sources is that they can be designed with few restrictions, allowing flexibility in meeting a wide range of needs. Rural providers report that having a source of funds that can be used flexibly to meet needs as they arise is extremely valuable. For example, one continuum in the Northwest has established relationships with front-line partners (hospitals, law enforcement officers) who encounter homeless people far from emergency housing services. These partners are empowered to arrange for temporary shelter in a motel. Flexible state funds are then used to pay for the motel bill when the client is transported to a location that offers emergency housing and other needed services.

Philanthropies

Rural continuums can benefit from researching the philanthropic community serving their geographic area. While foundations may be few and far between in rural areas, those that are present are often on the look-out for creative and meaningful ways to distribute their funds.

³⁵ *Pennsylvania's Rural Homeless Reality*. (November 2000). The Center for Rural Pennsylvania. <http://www.ruralpa.org/Homeless.pdf>.

³⁶ COSCDA Best Practice Brief: Florida's Challenge Grant. http://www.coscd.org/cafe/planning_Florida's%20Challenge%20Grant.doc

Some large, national foundations also have an interest in funding activities in rural areas. Continuums that are proactive about seeking out and soliciting funds from foundations often can obtain badly-needed funds for activities not supported by government sources.³⁷

An Unlikely Philanthropic Partner

The Rural Homeless Initiative of Southeast and Central Ohio (RHISCO) has obtained support from an unlikely-sounding source: the Osteopathic Heritage Foundations. The foundations have as their mission “to improve the health and quality of life in the community through education, research and service.” RHISCO has no specific connection to advancing osteopathic healthcare or osteopathic medical education and research. However, this homeless initiative does a great deal to enhance the health and quality of life of homeless and at-risk individuals in the community. That connection was sufficient to capture the attention – and financial support — of this foundation. For more information, see <http://www.endhomelessness.org/section/tools/rhisco>.

Writing grant proposals, ‘selling’ good ideas to foundations, and taking care of financial management and grant reporting requirements are specialized skills. Getting help from a continuum coordinator, experienced peer, or paid consultant may be helpful to rural continuum members that lack these types of expertise. Possible funding sources to help pay for these types of activities include state agencies (e.g., department of housing and community development); state and local funds (e.g., housing trust fund monies); and grants.

Colleges and Universities

Colleges and universities can be a source of support for rural continuums. Faculties often need to find research projects for their students. Students often need to find projects for classes or for community service credit. Internship programs sometimes can supply talented student labor. Continuum members can contract for services with university staff or students, but often they can arrange for volunteers.

Students and faculty can provide assistance in a variety of contexts. When approaching colleges and universities about possibilities for collaboration, continuums can consider a variety of activities:

- Helping with PIT counts
- Analyzing data
- Researching funding options
- Writing grant proposals
- Developing and implementing information technology solutions for data and record-keeping
- Organizing meetings
- Sending meeting reminders and taking minutes
- Following up on tasks assigned at meetings

³⁷ See the Foundation Center at <http://foundationcenter.org/> for a directory of foundations and an online search tool to find specific grant resources.

Nonprofit Organizations, Civic Groups, Businesses, and Religious Institutions

In rural areas, a great deal of community energy is invested in nonprofit organizations, civic groups, businesses, and religious institutions. Rural continuums have found that a key to success in working with these groups on the issue of homelessness is finding ways to harmonize the interests and resources of the local groups with the needs of the homeless community and the continuum providers. Sometimes these groups will be members of the continuum. Other times, active outreach and careful coordination can result in productive collaborations.

One important concept highlighted by successful rural continuums is the need to focus such efforts in ways that go beyond emergency help and work toward alleviating the root causes of homelessness. Volunteer-based home repair programs, programs to supply needed tools, paint and repair equipment, efforts to supply and maintain vehicles that allow people to get to and from employment, supportive job-readiness programs, and so on can all fit well into a rural culture of helping neighbors succeed.

For example:

- A nonprofit in the Pacific Northwest collaborates with the American Legion and area churches to provide winter seasonal shelter and food services for their rural homeless community. The churches use their kitchens to make hot meals, which they deliver to the American Legion where the homeless individuals receive temporary shelter. The churches also provide volunteer monitors to work overnight at the American Legion. Complementing the American Legion's mission, approximately 30 percent of the homeless served are veterans.
- In Washington State, a local newspaper conducts an annual fund drive by advertising in its own paper. This local business contributes the proceeds, amounting to over \$100,000 each year, to a nonprofit organization that serves the homeless. The nonprofit puts 100 percent of the proceeds to meeting the direct needs of the homeless, with no administrative fee charged.
- Habitat for Humanity³⁸ involves needy families in constructing or rehabilitating their own homes, with the help of volunteer labor and donated materials. This widespread program can make effective use of the rural tradition of helping neighbors in need.

FINDING AND SUSTAINING MATCH

Many funding sources require recipients to contribute matching funds. Each program has its own rules concerning eligible sources of match. Some require nonfederal money, while others will accept matches from federal funds or from in-kind contributions. Still others have requirements that vary depending on the grantee. For example, the Emergency Shelter Grants program, the Single Room Occupancy program, and the CDBG program do not require matching funds; the Supportive Housing Program requires a cash match that may be generated from local continuum partners or from other federal, state, or local grants; the Shelter Plus Care program requires that its rental assistance grants be matched with an equal value of supportive services for S+C clients; and the HOME program requires participating jurisdictions to match 25 percent of annual direct expenditures on HOME projects from contributions for affordable housing that can come from a wide variety of sources.

³⁸ For more information about Habitat for Humanity, visit <http://www.habitat.org/>.

Match requirements for specific programs are not unique to rural areas, and therefore are not discussed in detail here. Instead, this section discusses techniques that rural areas have used to fulfill match requirements for any of a range of programs that require match.

In a rural area with few obvious options for bringing in additional resources, the prospect of obtaining any type of match—whether cash or in-kind—may seem daunting. However, careful thought can help a rural continuum identify appropriate match. Rural continuums offer several tips for thinking creatively about match options:

- Mainstream agencies that provide services to homeless people are one possible source of match if those mainstream agencies augment their work with homeless people as a result of the program.
- In-kind contributions often are considered match and may include a variety of tangible items and activities such as staff services, donated items, and volunteer time. In-kind contributions are part of the local history and culture in many rural areas, and may be a viable match option.
- Presenting a specific need is often a good approach when soliciting involvement from charitable contributors. Continuums can approach foundations, nonprofit organizations, civic groups, businesses, and religious institutions with specific match needs as part of an overall outreach strategy to involve the broader community in addressing the issue of homelessness.

Rural continuums can take the following steps to maximize match potential:

- Take a careful inventory of what continuum partners are already doing that might be considered match. Remember to include in the inventory both cash and in-kind contributions from the following:
 - Federal sources
 - Other government sources
 - Private and nonprofit sources
- Analyze contributions that might be considered match, but that are provided by agencies that are not part of the continuum. (This may be a good flag that the group should be encouraged to join the continuum!).
- Brainstorm other possible ways that the community and service providers can get involved to provide match where it is needed.
- Develop a plan and work to build relationships in the community and among service providers to solicit involvement from possible match sources.

CHAPTER 5: DATA COLLECTION: THE POINT IN TIME COUNT

INTRODUCTION

To receive Continuum of Care (CoC) funding, continuums must conduct counts of the homeless population in order to help demonstrate and quantify need. A Point-in-Time (PIT) count must be completed at least once every other year. Conducting the PIT count can be particularly challenging in rural areas. This chapter discusses strategies for completing the count and collecting other data to document need in rural areas.

A PIT count is a one-day, statistically reliable, unduplicated count of sheltered and unsheltered persons who are homeless in a defined geographic area. Many rural areas have never conducted a homeless PIT count and therefore the full extent of rural homelessness in those areas has never been quantified. The PIT count is difficult to conduct in rural areas because few staff members are usually qualified and trained to complete it, homeless individuals are dispersed over wide geographic areas, and because of a scarcity of emergency shelters those who are often homeless live in areas that are difficult to find and/or access.

Despite these challenges, the PIT count is a crucial analytical tool for assessing need, allocating resources effectively, planning long term policy initiatives, and quantifying progress toward eliminating rural homelessness over time. The PIT count also is important because it quantifies a ‘hidden’ problem that many believe only exists in urban areas. Nothing can more effectively dispel the myth that homelessness is a non-issue in rural areas than hard data to the contrary. The PIT count is an opportunity to increase awareness and collective knowledge about the problem of rural homelessness and can help make the case for increased state and local funding for rural homeless initiatives.

To conduct the most effective PIT count possible, rural continuums may consider the following strategies:

- **Actively soliciting a wide range of partners to assist with data collection.** Rural continuums can recruit volunteers from local colleges and universities, mainstream service providers, homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, food distribution centers, and job and family service agencies to help conduct the a count.
- **Keeping the count methodology as simple as possible.** This will increase the number of individuals qualified to assist with data collection and help ensure a higher response rate. The count methodology should be simple but also must effectively separate the literal homeless from the at-risk population and identify those that may have been previously counted.
- **Conducting workshops on completing the count for area volunteers and agencies.** Training participating volunteers and service providers increases consistency in the administration of the survey during the count and builds capacity over time. It is helpful to provide a printed copy of instructions for all interviewers to serve as a reference guide when they are working with their clients or out in the field searching for homeless individuals and families.
- **Offering a toll-free phone line dedicated to the count effort.** The phone line can provide technical assistance for volunteers and agencies participating to help complete the count

(particularly when conducting workshops is not feasible) and allow community members to provide tips on the whereabouts of homeless individuals in their area.

- **Talking to homeless and recently homeless individuals in the area.** Homeless and recently homeless individuals who are willing to cooperate can provide information about the location of other homeless individuals and may even be willing to accompany partners to help conduct the count.

Exchanging Goods for Information

Mississippi has found that they have been more successful in gaining cooperation for their counts when they have brought goodie bags filled with personal care items, food, and blankets to the homeless population they are counting. Homeless individuals often are more willing to talk and provide information, even the location of other homeless individuals, when they are offered something in exchange.

Rural continuums also may wish to consider designing a survey that is compatible with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). The continuum can then track aggregate data about the rural homeless and at-risk population as a whole as well as addressing client-level data and case management needs. This can be an effective tool for measuring performance and progress over time as well as for managing caseloads.³⁹

POINT-IN-TIME COUNT METHODOLOGIES⁴⁰

A one night blitz is usually not the most effective way to count the homeless population in rural areas because of the challenges associated with finding the rural homeless population, the large area that needs to be covered in many geographic regions, and the limited resources available to complete the count. PIT count methodologies that rural areas have used effectively to reach their 'hidden' population and overcome resource constraints are described below.

Conducting a Public Places PIT Count Over a Designated Period of Time

Regardless of the number of partners helping with the count collection, it is not usually feasible for a rural continuum to cover its entire geographic area in a single day. In rural areas where there are few homeless shelters and the rural homeless population is often located in remote areas, it is usually necessary to collect count data over a period of time. Collecting count data over multiple days ensures that there are enough resources to cover known places of congregation of homeless individuals, as well as seeking out individuals and families not located in these areas of concentration. For this approach to be successful in a rural context, the continuum needs to have a good sense of the locations where homeless people are known to congregate. Sources who are likely to be able to provide information about where the homeless population congregates or know where specific homeless individuals and families are located include local law enforcement officials, other homeless and formerly homeless people, religious leaders, school staff, and government and nonprofit service providers.

While extending the data collection period increases the chances of capturing data about more homeless individuals living in the rural areas covered by the continuum, it also increases the

³⁹ For more information on HMIS see the HMIS Implementation Guide <http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/homeless/hmis/implementation/implementation.cfm>

⁴⁰ For more information on Point-In-Time Count methodologies in rural areas refer to "A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People." (January 2008). Office of Community Planning and Development, HUD. http://hudhre.info/documents/counting_unsheltered.pdf

chances of duplicative counts. Consistent data collection can be achieved by asking all respondents where they were sleeping on a given night, and conducting the survey over a one week or two week period. To avoid duplication, the count survey should include an enumerating question that asks if the respondent has been asked these questions at any point in time since the count began.

Conducting a Service-Based PIT Count

A service-based approach asks all service providers likely to provide services to the homeless population in a given area to conduct interviews of people using the service over a specified period of time. The key to success with this approach is enlisting the full support of the right partners. Therefore, this effort should include not only providers that work specifically with homeless populations but also mainstream agencies including hospitals, government service providers (federal, state and local), nonprofit service providers, and religious organizations that the homeless and at-risk populations are likely to seek out.

In rural areas where homelessness is often ‘hidden,’ using the service-based approach eliminates the need to find the homeless population and can be a good alternative in areas where dedicated resources to reach out to the homeless population are not available. Since the service-based approach also involves completing the count over an extended period of time, the survey should include an enumerating question in order to avoid duplicative counts.

Combining a Service-Based PIT Count and Public Places Count

Rural continuums also can consider combining the service-based approach with a public places count. In areas with few service providers and a tendency among homeless individuals to fend for themselves rather than seek out help, some homeless individuals may never access available services so the service-based approach alone can be inadequate. The public places count can be targeted to areas where homeless people are known to congregate, but with so much remote area to cover the chances of missing a portion of the homeless population are high. By combining these two approaches, rural continuums can overcome the chief disadvantages of each.

The chances of duplicative counts are even higher when combining both approaches. When combining methods it is imperative to design data collection methods that avoid double counting respondents who may be interviewed twice. Including an enumerating question in order to avoid duplicative counts is a typical strategy for avoiding duplication.

Biannual Counts

HUD requires that continuums conduct their PIT count at some point during the last ten calendar days of January. Some rural areas find it worth devoting resources to completing two counts during the course of the year – one in the summer and one in the winter. This is particularly helpful in areas that experience significant changes in weather between seasons (e.g., extremes of hot in the Southern states and cold in the Northern states) and/or spikes in migratory workers to the area at different times of year.

Conducting Multiple Counts

In the rural areas outside of Las Vegas, the rural homeless population spikes during the summer months due an influx of migratory workers. Due to these migratory population patterns, Nevada conducts two PIT counts every year – one in January and one in the summer. Knowing what fluctuations to expect throughout the year allows the continuum to better plan for local cyclical needs.

ANNOUNCING THE COUNT

To ensure a successful count, rural continuums need to spread the word far in advance of the actual count. Announcing the count in advance helps locate homeless people through self-reporting and service provider reporting and allows time to recruit and train volunteers and partners to help conduct the count. Rural areas have used the following methods to get the word out:

- **Local media.** Newspapers and radio stations are effective tools to get the word out about an upcoming count effort. Continuums can work with newspaper and radio outlets to run an article or public service announcement about an upcoming count and accompany it with any information about how to participate and who to call to self-report. It may be more effective to tap local newspapers and radio outlets rather than major news stations (which are generally located in larger communities). Any outreach plan should carefully consider the local area when deciding which media outlets to use.
- **Mainstream providers.** Mainstream providers are important resources for providing homeless assistance in rural areas generally, and count efforts are no exception. Engaging mainstream providers to capture better count data and including them in count efforts from the start is important. Rural continuums can contact these agencies well in advance of the count, requesting that the agency (1) keep track of how to locate those who are homeless in the weeks prior to the PIT count if conducting a public places count, or (2) requesting that they administer a survey to their clients if using a service-based approach. Once these relationships with mainstream providers have been established, continuums can easily partner with them in future years. As an added bonus, collaboration on the PIT count also can serve as the basis for enhancing on-going relationships with participating mainstream providers.
- **Canvassing and mailing efforts.** Canvassing at local churches and service organizations and targeted mailing efforts can be an effective way to recruit volunteers to help conduct a public places count.
- **Local law enforcement.** Law enforcement officials in rural areas often are the first to come into contact with homeless individuals and families and are usually intimately familiar with what goes on in their local jurisdiction. Rural continuums should contact local law enforcement for tips on where to locate the homeless population and to coordinate availability to escort participating partners during a count to areas that might be dangerous or remote.

Rural Outreach for PIT Counts

Alabama begins publicizing their count four weeks in advance in order to help find the difficult-to-reach rural homeless population in their state. They request that anyone who is homeless call in, and then send out a team to interview the person or household. Other community members that may know of the location of homeless individuals also are asked to call in.

USING THE PIT COUNT FOR OTHER PURPOSES

During a PIT count, continuum members and volunteers are in contact with a larger percentage of the homeless population than at any point during the rest of the year. This is an opportunity that rural continuums, faced with limited resources and capacity, can leverage to (1) educate homeless individuals and families about the services available to them and (2) collect more

detailed information about the homeless and at-risk population in the area and the services that they have utilized in the past or may need in the future.

The extent to which a rural continuum may want to engage in such an awareness campaign and data collection effort will depend somewhat on the capacity of the volunteers and service providers completing the count. A continuum will have to gauge to what extent they can collect and provide additional information while still executing a successful count. Continuums may want to collect further data so they can gauge progress over time or they might want to collect data to assess the success of a recently-implemented program or outreach strategy.

Collecting Information about Homeless Services Accessed

For those who are currently homeless, rural continuums should consider collecting information about the services the homeless individual has accessed in the past, their disability history, and how long they have been homeless. Making this information available to all members of the continuum with HMIS access can help ensure that scarce resources are used efficiently, and that homeless clients are put in touch with all available resources.

Collecting Information about At-Risk Populations

The count also offers an opportunity to collect information about the at-risk population in the area. This is particularly important in rural areas where many of those without homes of their own nonetheless fail to meet the HUD definition of “homeless.”

When individuals who are identified for the PIT count do not meet the definition of “homeless,” rural continuums can collect information regarding people who are any of the following:

- Living doubled-up or ‘couch-surfing’
- At risk of losing their housing and the reasons for that risk
- Eligible for services that could help prevent homelessness
- Aware of the services available to them through the continuum

This information can be used to help prevent homelessness, for case management purposes, and for planning to help the continuum develop programs and services to more effectively meet the needs of the at-risk population.

Distributing Information about Available Services

During the PIT count, continuums mobilize substantial resources to find and contact people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Each of those contacts represents an opportunity to distribute information about available services to those in need. If the continuum has developed outreach materials listing of available resources, that information can be shared with individuals who are contacted for a PIT count.

CHAPTER 6: MAXIMIZING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RURAL CONTINUUMS OF CARE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines three issues that are of particular relevance for rural groups involved in (or considering becoming involved in) a CoC:

- **Partnership Building.** Establishing effective rural CoCs requires building partnerships that work in rural areas, including recruiting and sustaining relationships with partner agencies. This chapter discusses strategies for partnership building and offers ideas about the kinds of partners to consider including in a CoC.
- **Communication and Organization.** Communication and organization can be challenging and time consuming in any organization. For rural continuums the challenges are magnified by distances, technologies, and a limited number of staff pulled in multiple directions. This chapter provides suggestions for effective communication in a rural continuum environment, and reviews ideas for ensuring that the continuum is organized effectively.
- **Capacity Building.** Having sufficient capacity to provide the services needed to address homelessness in rural areas also can be challenging. This chapter highlights best practices and capacity building success strategies.

Several barriers to service were discussed in Chapter 3 in the context of challenges serving homeless populations in rural areas. Some of those same challenges also affect organizations that provide services to homeless rural populations:

- **Transportation:** Large distances make continuum members' work more difficult. The time and expense involved in getting to clients in need of service or meeting with other providers is magnified when travel difficulty is greater.
- **Shortage of Services:** Services required by homeless populations generally are sparse in rural areas, and provider capacity typically is stretched. Providers often must serve as "jacks-of-all-trades," making it difficult to provide the quantity and quality of services needed.
- **Isolation:** Because of the shortage of services and the limited number of providers, people who provide services to homeless clients can themselves feel very isolated and without support.

These barriers can influence a continuum's effectiveness in serving its clients in many ways, and the chapter's recommendations include actions that address them.

BUILDING AND SUSTAINING PARTNERSHIPS

Developing partnerships helps build and sustain a network of relationships among the myriad players that contribute to solving the problem of homelessness. The partnerships developed through a CoC can help reduce providers' sense of isolation in the following ways:

- Developing strong networks among providers
- Enhancing service provider effectiveness through resource sharing, economies of scale, policy influence, and improved operational efficiency
- Strengthening both the capacity of individual organizations and the sector as a whole

One of the primary goals for any CoC is to have maximum participation in the planning process by all stakeholders. The level of participation will vary from stakeholder to stakeholder depending on the nature of the continuum and the relationship of the stakeholder to the continuum. Continuums can, however, do a great deal to build and sustain partnerships. This section discusses a variety of techniques for partnership building:

- Identifying a range of possible partners
- Conducting active outreach
- Keeping partners involved between meetings
- Publicizing the continuum's successes
- Making continuum participation fun and worthwhile

Identify a Range of Possible Partners

In most rural areas, few organizations are dedicated exclusively to serving homeless clients. Although the number of homeless services may seem small, successful rural continuums emphasize the importance of bringing a wide range of providers into the CoC. A surprising number of organizations offer services that are important to serving those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Some important community, health, and social service groups to consider working with at the state and local levels are listed in Exhibit 6-1. Not all of these types of organizations would have equal interest in or willingness to be involved in a CoC. However, being aware of the broad array of partnering possibilities can help strengthen rural continuums.

Exhibit 6-1: Candidates for Inclusion in a Rural Continuum

Political Leadership	Affordable Housing Developers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governor's Office • County Executives • Local City/Town Mayors • State, county, and local government representatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonprofit housing providers • Builders/developers interested in affordable housing • Development corporations
Government Housing Agencies	Business and Funding Community
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Housing and Community Development • USDA Rural Development • Public housing authorities • State housing finance agencies • State, county, and local, CDBG, HOME and low income housing tax credit agencies • State, county and local development and planning departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chambers of commerce/business owners • Lenders/Banks • Foundations • United Way
Government Service Agencies	Community Service Organizations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health • Substance Abuse • Health/Medical Assistance • Income support (TANF, Social Security) • Employment • Corrections/Justice • Aging/Youth Services • Veteran's Services • Community Action Agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local law enforcement • Hospitals • Schools/guidance counselors
	Nonprofit and Advocacy Groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless Shelters • Transitional housing programs • Supportive housing programs • Civic organizations • Religious organizations • Minority service programs • Disability organizations • Domestic violence programs • Legal services • Other nonprofit service providers

Conduct Active Outreach

Once potential partner organizations are identified, the next step is to reach out to engage them in the continuum. People prefer to be asked before joining an activity. Once asked, they are even more likely to join if they are encouraged to do so for a particular purpose and they see that their participation will offer benefits for themselves and their organizations. Developing an outreach and recruitment plan can help rural continuums ensure that they have wide and diverse membership. Strategies for successful recruitment may include the following:

- Identify and initiate contacts with key groups. When possible, identify the specific individuals within those organizations that should be approached and encouraged to participate.
- Explicitly invite those groups and individuals to participate in the CoC. Spell out what the continuum intends to accomplish, how the target organization fits in, and what the commitment to participate in the continuum will entail.
- Structure the continuum to allow different levels of participation and to let participants focus on the aspects of the continuum that most closely relate to their concerns.
- Be ready to explain how the CoC functions in a rural environment and why collaboration is important for achieving important goals for addressing homelessness in the area.
- Clearly articulate answers to potential partners' questions in advance. Know how you will 'sell' the continuum by describing the advantages the group's participation will bring to the target organization, as well as to the continuum, and the people served by the continuum.
- Pursue activities that lead to partnerships with organizations that are not currently part of the continuum. Building partnerships through shared activities is one good way to build relationships that may, eventually, convince the individual or organization that participation in the continuum is worthwhile. Even if they do not ultimately join the continuum formally, the established relationship can be beneficial to the service system as a whole.

Once a new partner agrees to join the continuum, it can be useful to formalize the relationship by developing a memorandum of understanding. This helps to codify the relationship, makes mutual expectations official, and generally leads to more successful long term partnerships. A sample memorandum of understanding is provided in Attachment 6.1. While the specifics will need to be adjusted to suit the particular situation in any given continuum, the basic outline offers a starting point for framing an effective agreement.

Keep Partners Involved Between Meetings

Continuum vitality is enhanced when partners stay connected to each other between meetings. This connection can be fostered in a variety of ways:

- Maintaining a directory of continuum members, as well as updating and distributing it regularly
- Establishing working groups to move the continuum forward between meetings by tackling joint project
- Encouraging partners with similar interests to join forces, either by sharing information/best practices or working on strategies to collaborate and support each other's efforts
- Sharing information regularly to maintain a focus on homelessness in general and the continuum in particular

Publicize the Continuum's Achievements

Partner organizations are more likely to want to remain associated with a continuum that is perceived as successful, while positive publicity can help make participation in the continuum attractive to new organizations.

Continuums can pursue a variety of techniques to get the word out about their achievements, including the following:

- Send tailored messages to individuals and organizations that the Continuum wishes to recruit, sharing the statistics and success stories that will be of interest to the target

audience. Email is the most economical method of sending messages, but postal mail is sometimes a good option.

- Disseminate written documents produced by the continuum or any of its members (e.g., strategic plans, mission statements, resource lists, tools to enhance service). Even if the readers do not join the continuum, they may adopt some of the ideas or use the tools to enhance services in the area.
- Take advantage of opportunities to report on continuum activities in public forums. In rural areas it may be possible to get access to forums such as town meetings and civic club activities.
- Cultivate relationships with local news media to ensure that continuum successes receive maximum media coverage. Recognizing individual contributions can be a good "hook" for a story, and seeing friends and acquaintances in the news can encourage others to participate.

Make It Both Fun and Worthwhile

In rural areas where service providers often are stretched and where continuum participants often must make a substantial effort to attend meetings at distant locations, it is essential to make the sessions rewarding in order to promote continued participation:

- To make sessions fun, arrange time for socialization and offer opportunities for networking. This strengthens relationships, and is particularly important for providers who see each other rarely because of geographic separation.
- To make sessions worthwhile in a substantive sense, provide training on topics of interest to the group and share tools that others have found useful in a rural environment.
- To make the time spent feel effective, use meeting time efficiently to accomplish the group's goals. Ensuring that the continuum is well organized and has excellent communication, as discussed in the next section, can do a great deal to minimize frustrations and make participation in a continuum feel worthwhile to its members.

One-on-One Relationship Building

Not all partnership efforts involve the full continuum as a group. One rural continuum member described how important it is to go out of one's way to get to know others on a personal basis. She makes an effort to establish connections with other rural providers by meeting over coffee and chatting on the phone. Despite the time and distance involved, she finds the relationship-building to be worth the effort. Overall, she noted that in small communities where everyone tends to know one another, there is a deep sense of all being engaged in the process. Fostering personal connections supports that engagement and enhances collaboration.

COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION

A rigorous focus on communication and organization is critical to the success of rural continuums, in which physical distance between partners and a limited number of providers challenge effective operations. Strong continuum communication and organization achieves the following:

- Reduces the sense of isolation often felt by rural service providers

- Involves partners at all levels and across all areas so they feel a part of the decision-making process and have a stake in the outcomes
- Provides opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance, information sharing, and dissemination of resources and best practices, which is particularly helpful for rural providers who often are asked to wear many hats as they serve homeless clients
- Helps develop collaborative relationships that lead to efficient, quality care to clients

Some rural continuums have found it helpful to assign responsibility for communication with continuum members to a single point of contact. This helps ensure that communication is coordinated, responsive, aligns with the mission and the core values of the continuum, and is disseminated to everyone appropriately. When a designated coordinator is available, this person is the logical one to coordinate information dissemination and communication.

Face-to-Face Contact

Information technology allows continuums to communicate remotely but rural continuums still find it extremely important to convene face-to-face meetings. These meetings may take the form of round table discussions, conferences, or training sessions. Most rural continuums try to limit the number of in-person meetings to minimize the travel burden. Given the infrequency of in-person meetings, there are some key factors to consider when planning a face-to-face event:

- Plan well in advance to allow participants to block off time for the meeting, as well as required travel time.
- Consider the calendar, being careful to plan around holidays, special events, and seasons with extreme weather.
- For those who are not able to attend the meeting in person due to scheduling conflicts or travel budget issues, consider offering a call-in option.

When logistical or budgetary barriers prevent some continuum members from attending a meeting, regional representatives can be sent to act on behalf of the region's interests and report back to their stakeholders following the meeting. Alabama uses this model, conserving precious travel resources in the process. Alternatively, the continuum can use a 'circuit rider' approach. In Arizona, key staff members make the rounds to visit continuum members in 13 of the state's 15 counties, learning about the continuum members' perspectives, and sharing information as they go.

Some states find it effective to have their physical meetings in the same central location each time. In Utah, for example, the steering committee meets monthly in the same location and those who cannot attend in person have the option of participating by conference call. Other states find that it works better to change the location of each meeting so that all regions have the opportunity to attend and so that regions share the burden equally in terms of travel time and costs. Wisconsin uses this approach, holding meetings in different parts of the state so that providers have the chance to converse, network, and share their experiences in an informal setting as well.

The best approach for a particular continuum will largely depend on the continuum's geographic coverage and the available resources. Regardless, it is generally a good practice to provide telephone and/or videoconferencing capabilities so that those continuum members who cannot attend in person have the option of linking in electronically.

Real-Time Electronic Communications

Electronic communications are ubiquitous, but in rural areas – particularly those with large geographic spans and/or challenging terrain – they are particularly key to building and maintaining partnerships. To take advantage of such technologies, however, rural continuums must have access to the technology, have the ability to use it, and consciously build its use into regular communications.

The Challenge of Geography

According to one rural homeless program administrator, holding a meeting “may be a simple process when participants are located in the same area and can meet an hour or two for lunch. It is a different scenario when meeting regionally and participants must travel for three hours or so in order to meet.” Given this reality, electronic communications are key to ongoing collaboration.

A variety of real-time electronic communication methods are available for simultaneous group communication. The right choice will depend on the group’s needs, the equipment required, and the comfort level continuum members have with each technology. Options to consider include the following:

- **Conference calls** are an important tool in rural areas where meeting in person is geographically challenging. Teleconference services are convenient as well as relatively low cost. Many companies now provide conference call services and can be located easily on the internet. Once an organization has set up an account, conference calls can be scheduled as necessary and participants can call in to a toll-free number to join the call.
- **Web conferencing** allows participants to view slide presentations or documents on their own computer screens while participating in a conference call by phone. The presenter is able to control the image being viewed on all participants’ screens. With more advanced skills, participants can interact using their screens, for example by jointly editing documents. Appropriate software must be installed on each computer, and there is a fee to the originator for using the service.
- **Videoconferencing** is harder to arrange and more costly unless the appropriate infrastructure is in place. However, some continuums do have access to such facilities. Those that do not might consider getting such technology established as a possible long-term goal. Because of the costs involved, continuums would need to think creatively about ways to partner with other organizations to establish such a communications network.

Statewide Videoconferencing

In Iowa, continuum meetings are held via videoconferencing through the Iowa Communication Network. With more than 300 locations across the state and no need to travel more than 10 miles to connect, travel time and costs are nearly eliminated. The Iowa Communications Network is a state agency that administers a statewide fiber optics network enabling authorized users such as hospitals, state and federal government, libraries and schools to communicate using high quality information technology. For more information about Iowa’s Communication Network visit <http://www.icn.state.ia.us/>.

In order to be successful, conference calls and videoconferences, like face-to-face meetings, need to be well-organized and have a specific agenda. However, running a good conference call or videoconference is different from running a good meeting in some important ways. The following are some examples:

- For technologies with no real-time visual connection, it is important that participants receive the agenda and any written materials in advance of the call since materials cannot be handed out on the spot.
- Without body language to give visual cues, conference call leaders with no real-time visual connection have to work hard to get feedback from those on the phone to know whether everyone is tracking the conversation and has had a chance to express their views.
- If the meeting has some people physically together in a room and others in one or more remote locations, the challenge of keeping everyone engaged is even greater. Good-quality microphones are a must, as is making sure that those physically present do not dominate the conversation.

Establishing consistent procedures for following up with people who are not able to attend meetings is essential to keeping people involved. Ideas for such follow up include the following:

- Writing up and distributing detailed meeting minutes (via email, post, or listserv) shortly after the meeting
- Posting minutes on a collaborative website
- Having the coordinator (if there is one) touch base with each missing partner
- Assigning a 'buddy' to each missing partner and asking those individuals to touch base with those who were absent. This spreads the work load, but has the added benefit of ensuring that individual partners support each other and get to know each other outside of the meeting context

Real-time communication technologies also can facilitate one-on-one or small group communication:

- Instant messaging allows two or more users to type messages to each other in real time. An advantage of instant messaging over email is that users know instantly whether the person they are trying to reach has gotten the message.
- Voice-over-internet protocol allow free conversations among computer users. With an inexpensive camera attached to the computer, they also allow a visual image to be transmitted simultaneously.
- In the mass of new technologies, picking up the telephone can still be the fastest and most straightforward communication tool available.

While these forms of real-time, interactive communication are often desirable, current technology also facilitates the communication of information to a broader audience whenever needed. In between real-time conversations, group members can stay in touch through email, listservs, and websites. In the time between real-time conversations, email, listservs, and websites can help group members stay in touch:

- **Mailing list distribution.** One of the most basic, and most powerful, technological tools available to help a continuum collaborate with all its partners is the automated mailing list. An automated mailing list may consist of a formal, moderated listserv that participants must join, or it can be as simple as an email distribution list. These lists can be set up quickly and cost very little, if anything, to maintain. The biggest benefit is that they get to the recipient almost instantaneously.
- **Website.** Rural continuums sometimes can centralize information and make it readily accessible for remote partners by posting it to a website. Rather than developing their own

websites, some continuums have partnered with a state agency to use the state website to carry information or links including the following:

- Information on the work of the continuum
- Resources
- Plans and implementation
- Research and data
- Funding availability

The drawback to the website is that the intended audience must actively take steps to visit the site, while mailing lists automatically go to the intended recipients.

Electronic communication can be quick and cost effective. However, providers without email or web access need other channels of communication. A solution some continuums have used is partnering with local businesses and libraries to help partners gain access to broadband service. Old-fashioned mailing via the postal system is another option.

Rural providers have found that electronic communication can be used to foster a culture of information sharing, even among providers who may not be a formal part of the continuum. This might involve sharing an interesting and relevant news article or alerting others to a useful resource that is available online. Such periodic contacts can help build a sense of community and mutual support among providers who often work in relative isolation.

BUILDING CAPACITY

Although some individuals and organizations in rural areas have a great deal of capacity, providers in rural areas regularly note that a lack of capacity impedes service to the homeless. Rural providers report that this manifests itself in everything from lack of computer technology, to "thin" expertise in many substantive areas, to a lack of shared information about basic mainstream services available in the community. Of particular concern to continuums as they apply for funding are weaknesses in the areas of grant writing and grant management; interpretation of federal funding requirements; and the savvy needed to effectively apply for McKinney-Vento funds.

There are a number of ways rural continuums can build capacity. HUD makes numerous guidebooks and toolkits available on the Homelessness Resource Exchange, www.hudhre.info. You may also contact your local HUD office to request technical assistance in the form of a workshop individualized meetings be provided to your CoC. Additionally, relatively easy and low-cost first step is to build a list of the local mainstream resources available in each region covered by the continuum along with contact information, and distribute the information to all service providers in the service area. This not only lets providers know what resources are available, it also establishes a baseline on which to build further capacity.

Staff retention and staff quality issues can be significant obstacles to building long-term capacity in rural areas where pay is generally low. Similarly, it also can be difficult to attract affordable housing developers and professional resources to oversee housing construction, manage affordable housing projects, and provide supportive services as a component of housing. To attract high quality staff and experts in the field, rural continuums may need to actively solicit such involvement through outreach and education to affordable housing professionals who might otherwise not engage in working in rural areas.

There are several strategies to provide activities, resources, and support to strengthen the skills and abilities of providers in rural areas:

- Establishing a dedicated continuum coordinator
- Providing year-round technical assistance
- Building skills among jacks-of-all-trades
- Coordinating services in areas with diverse needs

A Dedicated State Continuum Coordinator

One effective way to build capacity in a rural continuum is by hiring a coordinator who works as a dedicated resource for all continuum partners. The coordinator is available to work at the local, regional, and state levels to coordinate agencies, sustain momentum, and keep the stakeholders at the table. Even if the position is not full-time, having a designated individual in a coordinating position can be extremely helpful to a rural continuum.

Dedicated Coordinator

Virginia has a staff person dedicated to addressing continuum challenges and to visiting partners throughout the state. The position is paid for by the State, and approximately 40 percent of the FTE dedicated to the Continuum, with heavier emphasis during the grant application process. Virginia continuum members report that a centralized coordinator has been an important key to success. Ongoing and concentrated efforts have led to better results than a model used previously, in which several different staff were assigned to managing different parts of the Continuum process.

Dedicated continuum coordinators have been used in a variety of ways in rural areas. Some of those that have been noted as particularly effective include the following:

- Fundraising and grant writing. Coordinators often spend more time on continuum duties during peak periods in the McKinney-Vento funding cycle
- Recruiting agencies not already involved in the continuum
- Serving as a resource that partners can reach out to at any time. This decreases the sense of isolation often felt in rural, remote areas and increases the collective institutional knowledge of the continuum

Hired Consultants

Unfortunately, many rural continuums lack the resources they would need to employ permanent full-time staff to augment their capacity. An important resource for many is the use of paid consultants for certain discrete tasks. Roles that consultants have played in rural continuums have included the following:

- Developing and coordinating the SuperNOFA application process

This can include assisting with the committee planning processes, training sponsors to develop strong applications, facilitating the rating and ranking process, and assisting with the formal application development and submission process

- Developing other funding applications and writing grant applications
- Providing technical assistance to support continuum members on particular issues

- Providing training to grantees and communities to help build capacity in local continuums
- Organizing and implementing homeless count surveys

This might include providing training to agencies and individuals involved in the homeless count; coordinating with state agencies, planning groups, and other continuums; and coordinating with HMIS management.

- Conducting research such as bed/unit inventories and gaps analysis
- Improving coordination and planning among continuum partners through tasks such as scheduling meetings, coordinating with continuum members for agenda/planning items, facilitating meetings, and assisting with the development of local plans to end homelessness
- Organizing and conducting project evaluations

Year-Round Technical Assistance

Focusing on providing technical assistance year-round can build capacity beyond the annual application preparation process. Rural providers have noted that technical assistance focusing on project administration, management, and performance, in addition to application preparation, is very important for building capacity and spreading technical expertise.

Rural continuums have implemented a range of innovative and promising ways to provide this year-round technical assistance. For example:

- **Requesting Technical Assistance from HUD.** HUD contracts with several technical assistance providers in each state to provide technical assistance at no cost to CoCs and grantees. Assistance can take the form of trainings and workshops or direct technical assistance visits, where the technical assistance providers work one-on-one with the grantees. Contact your local HUD office to find out more about the availability of such technical assistance.
- **Partnering with a Nonprofit:** A major nonprofit in Albuquerque has agreed to help small towns and communities in rural areas develop and manage permanent supportive housing projects as well as fulfilling federal paperwork requirements.
- **Building Local Planning Capacity:** Washington State passed the Homeless Housing Assistance Act (HHAA), which provides each county with funds for supporting planning groups and project activities to build long term capacity at the local planning level.
- **Toll Free Technical Assistance Phone Line:** In Iowa, a dedicated 800 number is available for agencies seeking technical assistance for activities related to completing annual progress reports, preparing project applications and ESG submissions, and drawing down funds from a grant.
- **Dedicated Housing Staff:** Specific staff members in Arizona have been assigned to provide technical assistance and offer consulting to any agency wishing to explore housing development options and learn about state housing resources and the application process to receive housing assistance. Before this technical assistance resource was available, most rural shelters and agencies were exclusively focused on service delivery rather than housing development and homelessness prevention strategies.
- **Training:** The CoC in Wisconsin provides training as requested by their continuum partners in conjunction with planning meetings at various locations across the state. Wisconsin has developed and delivered training modules on topics including mental health and drug abuse,

accessing social security benefits, and case management for case workers. The State also uses the trainings as opportunities to provide updates and share experiences.

Rural continuums may wish to consider these best practices to build capacity among their continuum partners:

- **Capitalize on Gatherings.** Occasions when rural continuum partners are together in one place are often few and far between. These occasions can be used to increase capacity by offering opportunities for technical assistance or skill enhancement.
- **Mentoring.** Rural continuums can systematically enhance capacity by teaming up an experienced person or group with one less experienced on a given topic. This type of mentoring relationship can facilitate a habit of information sharing for the more experienced person or group, while spreading knowledge to the less experienced person or group.
- **Partnering.** Capacity also can be enhanced by bringing in a wide array of partners. Each group bolsters the continuum's overall capacity. In order for a new partner to be integrated successfully, the partner should understand its role and responsibilities in the continuum, as well as getting a clear picture of other continuum members and the services they offer.

Jacks-of-All-Trades

Because of low population density, rural service providers often wear many hats. In an urban area, separate staff or even separate agencies might be responsible for assessing things like housing, nutrition, education, job-search, mental health, physical health, and substance abuse needs. In a rural area, in contrast, a single individual may be the client's primary point of contact for the continuum, and may have to consider this whole range of issues. Because no individual can be an expert in all fields that are potentially relevant to any given homeless client, these "jacks-of-all-trades" must do the best they can with what they know.

Because providers must wear multiple hats in rural areas, some rural continuums work to give those providers tools to help more effectively identify client needs. The agencies and individuals partnering in rural continuums can tackle this problem with a range of steps:

- Drawing on the partners' varied expertise to develop screening questions to help providers who encounter homeless clients do the best possible job of issue identification
- Building education components about various issues into regular meetings to help all members of the continuum become better-informed about a range of topics
- Holding educational lectures or workshops on 'hot topics'
- Distributing fact sheets, links, or informative articles via email, listservs, or mail

All of these activities can help deepen the understanding that multi-tasking staff have about a range of issues relevant to homeless service provision, and enhance their capacity to serve homeless clients. Providers without specialized training may still have difficulty accurately identifying certain conditions such as depression or schizophrenia, especially when a client has co-occurring conditions, where one condition may be masked by another. However, activities to educate such providers about particular topics that come up often in the homeless population can help improve their ability to steer clients to the right resources.

Service Coordination

One important challenge for rural continuums striving to build capacity, especially those that are spread across diverse terrain and areas of a state, is keeping in mind that the nature and causes of homelessness may be somewhat different in one rural area than in another. Rural

service providers emphasize that continuums must remain sensitive to these local features and determine which services to emphasize accordingly. For example:

- Areas with farming sectors may have a higher homeless population during the harvest season than any other time of the year due to the influx of low-wage workers - often immigrants with limited English proficiency. Providers in such situations plan to have 'surge capacity' during the harvest season, and strive to provide interpreters during that time of year.
- Areas in close proximity to a public mental health facility may be home to an unusually high percentage of homeless individuals who have a disabling mental health condition. Providers that serve such a population consider ways to augment their mental health care service capacity, as well as finding ways to offer access to appropriate prescription drugs.
- Areas with "luxury economies" (e.g., casinos, resorts) have a high proportion of low-wage service workers year round, often in an area with skyrocketing housing costs. Providers that serve these areas concentrate on their capacity to augment the stock of affordable housing.

Whatever the combination of circumstances, geographically dispersed communities are likely to have diverse capacity needs. Making continuum members aware of the extent of the diversity in their areas can be a challenge. Helping the group think creatively about ways to address the varied needs of the homeless populations in different parts of the continuum's service area can be even more challenging. However, through clear communication, careful planning, conscious cooperation, and a long-term view of the solution, a rural continuum can ultimately serve the needs of all of its community members.

Attachment 6.1: Sample Memorandum of Understanding⁴¹

I. BACKGROUND AND INTENT

This Agreement for participation in the development, implementation and management of programs to end homelessness in Insert region name is entered into between member agencies of the Insert Continuum of Care name Continuum of Care and Insert partner name.

Whereas, the Continuum has formally adopted a Continuum of Care Plan which sets forth several goals and objectives toward ending homelessness in the area; and,

Whereas, the sole purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding is to encourage cooperation between each member of the Continuum and Insert partner name, and to further detail the separate and distinct roles and responsibilities of each party with regards to the operation and implementation of projects to end homelessness in our community; and,

Whereas, each member of the Continuum understands that certain activities must be undertaken in order to meet federal, state and local requirements for funding; and

Whereas, each member of the Continuum agrees to:

- Participate in the HMIS/Service Point system so that data can be submitted to the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Insert state agency name in the manner in which they prescribe
- Participate in each Point-in-Time Survey
- Advocate on behalf of the homeless community and participate in the Continuum's Homeless Awareness activities and in the Homeless Prevention activities
- Actively participate in the Continuum's committees. The member understands that participation in the Continuum is one of the review criteria establishing priorities for funding
- Provide accurate data to the Continuum in a timely fashion as determined by the Continuum. Accuracy and timeliness of data is understood to be of critical importance to funding agencies such that failure to provide the data in such a fashion could result in unpleasant consequences
- Act as a liaison with the community at large and with their respective agencies to provide information about the Continuum's activities
- Participate in the development of the evaluation and selection criteria to determine priorities for the Continuum
- Participate in funding opportunities following state and federal criteria
- Work with other agencies in the community to prevent a duplication of effort and services to serve the needs of the homeless
- Work with the Continuum and Insert partner name to ensure that there are no gaps in service to the homeless or at risk of homeless population in our community; and

⁴¹ Source: Muskegon County Homeless Continuum of Care Network, <http://muskegoncoc.org>

Whereas, the Insert name of Continuum Continuum of Care is obligated by certain federal and state statutes to review and prioritize projects. Insert partner name will review the work of the Continuum and support its decisions.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Whereas, all parties under this Memorandum of Understanding jointly recognize that individuals with very low-incomes, and representing the specified target populations, are diverse in terms of their strengths, motivation, goals, backgrounds, needs and disabilities:

- Those individuals are members of the community with all the rights, privileges, opportunities accorded to the greater community;
- Those individuals have a right to meaningful choices in matters affecting their lives; and
- Input of the individuals shall be sought in designing and implementing services.

III. TERM

This Agreement will begin Insert date, and will continue until terminated in accordance with Section VII below.

IV. TERMINATION

The partners may terminate their participation with this Agreement for any reason by giving the other parties ninety (90) days prior written notice.

V. CONFIDENTIALITY

The partners agree that by virtue of entering into this Agreement, they will have access to certain confidential information regarding each other's operations related to the Continuum of Care's activities. The partners agree that they will not at any time disclose confidential information and/or material without the consent of that party unless such disclosure is authorized by this Agreement or required by law. Unauthorized disclosure of confidential information shall be considered a material breach of this agreement. Where appropriate, releases will be secured before confidential information on an Individual is exchanged. Confidential information will be handled with the utmost discretion and judgment.

VI. NONDISCRIMINATION

There shall be no discrimination of any Individual on account of race, color, creed, religion, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age, handicap, ancestry or national origin in the operation of the apartments.

VII. SEVERABILITY

In the event any provision of this Agreement shall be found to be invalid, illegal, or unenforceable in any respect, such invalidity, illegality or unenforceability shall not affect the validity, legality and enforceability of the remainder of the Agreement.

VIII. AMENDMENTS

This Agreement may be amended only with the mutual written consent of the partners.

IX. CERTIFICATION OF AUTHORITY TO SIGN AGREEMENT

The persons signing this Agreement on behalf of the partners hereto certify by said signatures that they are duly authorized to sign this Agreement.