

The Way Home

Partner Agency Guidebook

& CoC Policies and Procedures

The Way Home

Statement of Transparency and Collaboration

It is the intention of The Way Home Continuum of Care (henceforth known as “The Way Home”) Steering Committee and the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, The Way Home Lead Agency, to conduct business in an open and transparent fashion. To the extent possible, workgroup and decision-making meetings will be open to the public and minutes will be published on the Lead Agency website and/or made available upon request.

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by individuals and organizations to achieve greater results together than they would alone. The Way Home fosters a system response to homelessness which requires a collaborative process.

This Guidebook was created via agency and stakeholder input to promote transparency and open communication throughout The Way Home and among partner agencies, stakeholders, and the Lead Agency. The Way Home Steering Committee meetings are open to the public and are reported in a timely manner on the Continuum of Care section of the Lead Agency’s website: <http://www.homelesshouston.org/continuum-of-care/steering-committee/>

The Guidebook will be reviewed annually at a minimum. Updates will be vetted at the Provider input forum and posted on the Coalition Website.

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Section 1: Introduction

Consistent with the Statement of Transparency above, this Guidebook was developed for The Way Home through stakeholder input to clarify roles and responsibilities, establish understanding of The Way Home's governance, policies and procedures, and establish collaborative communication guidelines among agency partners according to core beliefs.

The Way Home is the collaborative model to prevent and end homelessness in Houston, Pasadena, Conroe, Harris County, Fort Bend County, and Montgomery County, Texas. Its goals are to understand the size and scope of the problem of homelessness in our community, and to design effective strategies and solutions to address the problem. The Way Home is locally driven, although the process must meet federal objectives and follow a federally mandated process.

Recognizing the need to stimulate community-wide planning and coordination of programs for individuals and families who are homeless, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1994 instituted a requirement for communities to come together to submit a single, comprehensive application for HUD funds for housing and support services for people who have experienced homelessness. The organizational concept to embody this effort is the Continuum of Care (CoC), which is governed by a Steering Committee composed of representatives from across the community.

Read the CoC Charter here: [Updated charter](#)

The CoC was further tasked with creating and promoting the community plan for preventing and ending homelessness. The HEARTH Act amended McKinney Vento Homeless Assistance Act legislation in 2009 tying the funds to a local plan that is measured by community success and coordination between all funding streams.

In 2012, through a community process, the Coalition for the Homeless was selected to serve as the Lead Agency and HMIS for The Way Home. The Way Home's purpose is to:

- Help create integrated, community-wide strategies and plans to prevent and end homelessness;
- Provide coordination among the numerous regional organizations and initiatives that serve those experiencing homelessness, and
- Promote rapid returns to self-sufficiency for household in crisis.

The Way Home members share a core belief that homelessness can be addressed by clear and transparent collaboration, and through measurable data driven performance utilizing best practices to achieve federal and local benchmarks. The Way Home is dedicated to ending and preventing homelessness by establishing a system where any episodes of homelessness are rare, brief, and nonrepeating.

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Section 2: Agency Partnership

Definitions

- *Vested Partner agency:* An agency that meets and maintains the responsibilities of a Vested Partner agency. A Vested Partner may or may not receive funding from the HUD CoC program and/or as a sub recipient of The Way Home Lead Agency. If funded, a vested partner must abide by grantee agreements. Further, a Vested Partner signs the system MOU and is in good standing by satisfying data quality standards, PIT and membership attendance policies. The Vested Partner can also vote for, nominate and become CoC steering committee provider representatives.
- *Community Partner agency:* An agency that meets the responsibilities of a Community Partner agency. A Community Partner agency does not receive funding from the HUD CoC program nor as a sub recipient of The Way Home Lead Agency.
- *Lead Agency:* The agency designated by The Way Home's Steering Committee to lead the daily work of The Way Home.
- *Prospective Partner agency:* An agency that is not currently but could become a partner agency of The Way Home and may have expressed interest in pursuing agency partnership.
- *Provider agency:* An agency that provides services or housing utilized by persons and families experiencing homelessness but otherwise has not met any of the aforementioned partner requirements.

Responsibilities

- A Vested Partner agency should:
 - follow all requirements related to the funding they receive, if they receive program funding;
 - follow the regulatory, statutory and CoC guidelines of the programs in which they participate by:
 - designating at least two (2) representatives from its agency who have decision-making authority to attend quarterly Provider Input Forums and exercise voting rights, attending 75% (3 out of 4) of the scheduled Provider Input Forums in a calendar year as verified by sign-in no later than 15 minutes after the start of each meeting;
 - sign and submit the CoC Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Lead Agency (government entities may be exempt from signing an MOU);
 - Meet all user requirements in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) database, including data quality and correction plans;
 - Actively participate in The Way Home workgroups as appropriate;
 - participate annually in Homeless Count & Survey activities by designating at least two (2) staff members for each day of the count;
 - as applicable, complete and receive certification for housing, case management, LGBTQ+ competency, etc.; and adhere to case management and practice standards as adopted by

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The Way Home's Steering Committee, including but not limited to: Housing First, Harm Reduction, non-discrimination based on LGBTQI status, racial equity, CoC Housing Models and outcomes and Coordinated Access to housing; and

- promote The Way Home consistent with the communication guidelines in this Guidebook.
- A Community Partner agency should:
 - choose The Way Home programs in which they participate;
 - follow the guidelines and requirements of the programs in which they participate; and
 - promote The Way Home consistent with the communication guidelines in this guidebook.
- A Lead Agency will (at a minimum):
 - reach out to geographical regions and agencies to encourage participation in The Way Home on a regular basis to promote membership;
 - Participate in all regional consolidated plans;
 - Coordinate and align with all Emergency Solution Grant (ESG) funded jurisdictions;
 - Operate a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) in accordance with guidelines set by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD);
 - Lead CoC planning to include outreach, engagement, assessment, shelter, housing, supportive services and prevention;
 - Operate a CoC to include project performance targets, monitor performance, evaluation outcomes and take action against poor performers;
 - Conduct the regional point in time count and perform annual gaps analysis;
 - Apply for funding available from HUD through open competitions. Lead Agency will work with partners to establish priorities;
 - Operate a Coordinated Entry System;
 - receive and direct inquiries for agency partnership in The Way Home; and
 - lead the onboarding of new partner agencies in The Way Home;
 - For a comprehensive list of Lead Agency duties, please refer to the [CoC Charter](#).

Outreach to prospective geographical areas and agency partners

The Lead Agency performs outreach for The Way Home based on geographical regions to incorporate service areas that are unrepresented or underrepresented. This effort may be directed by The Way Home's Steering Committee or may be undertaken based on the Lead Agency's or a Vested or Community Partner's identification of need.

Prospective partner agencies, once engaged and interested in The Way Home partnership, should follow the procedures below for joining The Way Home.

Joining The Way Home

A Prospective Partner Agency may:

- reach out to the Lead Agency or a Partner Agency to inquire about participating as a partner in The Way Home, or

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- be contacted by the Lead Agency to discuss the opportunity of partnership in The Way Home.

When contact with a Prospective Partner Agency is made, the following procedural guidelines apply to progress a Prospective Partner Agency through the steps to become a Vested or Community Partner Agency:

- If initial contact is not made by the Lead Agency, the Prospective Partner Agency should be directed to the Lead Agency by the person or agency with whom initial contact has been made.
- The Lead Agency will designate a staff person from its organization who will be responsible for addressing Partner Agency inquiries and will direct Prospective Partner Agencies to the person in this role. This Lead Agency designee will:
 - provide general information about The Way Home, including mission and vision, programs, and governance. This information may be given through a phone call, email, letter, brochure, website, training, or other such means of delivery;
 - provide details about the difference between a Vested Partner and a Community Partner, and assist the Prospective Partner in choosing the right type of partnership for their agency; and
 - provide and process a packet of all partnership application documents, including Agency Participation Agreements, MOUs, HMIS set-up forms or other paperwork based on level of partnership the Prospective Partner Agency has chosen to pursue.
- Once all paperwork has been completed and received, the Lead Agency designee informs the Prospective Partner Agency of the completion and acceptance of their documentation and of the next steps in onboarding them as a Vested or Community Partner Agency.

Onboarding New Partners

Once a Prospective Partner Agency has successfully completed all documentation to become a Vested or Community Partner Agency of The Way Home, that agency and its staff must be fully on boarded to The Way Home and its programs to ensure consistency in participation and compliance with its responsibilities.

The Lead Agency will designate a staff person from its organization who will be responsible for onboarding new Partner Agencies of The Way Home. The Lead Agency designee will:

- conduct an initial meeting (in-person or remotely) with staff members of the new Vested or Community Partner Agency;
- perform a site visit if the Vested or Community Partner Agency has housing (like Permanent Supportive Housing), so configuration of the units can be determined (this visit will be performed by workgroup project managers for the Lead Agency);
- coordinate delivery of all relevant trainings to the appropriate new Vested or Community Partner Agency staff (including new user training if the Vested or Community Partner Agency is participating in the HMIS) either in-person or online using computer or web-based training tools; and

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- facilitate engagement with any of The Way Home programs in which the new Vested or Community Partner Agency will actively participate. Leadership at The Way Home programs may have additional materials or training for the new Vested or Community Partner Agency staff to complete.

Change of Partnership Level

From time to time, a Vested or Community Partner Agency may change its level of partnership engagement. To do so, the Vested or Community Partner Agency must:

- inform the Lead Agency of their decision in writing and
- abide by the responsibilities of their new partnership level within The Way Home
- and continue to abide by all regulatory and procedural requirements.

A Vested Partner may fail to meet its obligations and responsibilities as a Vested Partner. If this occurs, The Way Home's Steering Committee, after careful review, may decide to change the Vested Partner's participation level in The Way Home to that of Community Partner. The former Vested Partner may use the Grievance process outlined in this Guidebook to appeal the decision, should they choose to do so.

Exiting The Way Home

There is no means to "kick out" an agency from The Way Home, only to transition them from Vested Partner to Community Partner per the above; however, a partner may choose to leave The Way Home voluntarily.



Section 3: Roles and Responsibilities

Lead Agency

The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, as Lead Agency, performs a variety of necessary functions for The Way Home, such as performance monitoring, workgroup facilitation, provider training, technical assistance, coordination, leadership, advocacy, engagement and education of stakeholders, and submission of the annual collaborative CoC Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) grant application. The Way Home's Steering Committee, as specified through HUD guidelines, maintains an MOU agreement with the Lead Agency that is reviewed and updated periodically, at a minimum, biennially. The Lead Agency is eligible to apply for CoC planning and Coordinated Access funds through the annual CoC NOFA process when available. The Coalition for the Homeless currently serves as Lead Agency and HMIS Lead for The Way Home.

A main function of the Lead Agency is to prepare an application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance competitive grants in support of the community plan to end homelessness. These resources are invaluable in providing housing and supportive services for people who are experiencing homelessness. These funds are made available through a national competition announced each year in HUD's NOFA. Applications must demonstrate broad community participation and identify resources and gaps in the community's approach to providing outreach, emergency shelter, and transitional and permanent housing, as well as related services for addressing homelessness. An application also includes action steps to end homelessness, prevent returns to homelessness, and establishes local funding priorities.

Federal funds are also provided through Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). Additional sources of federal funds as well as state, local and private dollars are also be used to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Grants management includes specific tasks generally conducted by the Lead Agency that include, but are not limited to: procurement, monitoring, maintaining funder requirements, and reimbursement.

HMIS Lead Agency

The Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County is the local HMIS Lead Agency as selected by The Way Home's Steering Committee. The HMIS Lead Agency generates The Way Home's Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The AHAR is a report from HUD to the U.S. Congress that provides nationwide estimates of homelessness, including information about the demographic characteristics of persons experiencing homelessness, service use patterns, and the capacity to house persons experiencing homelessness. Additionally, HMIS generates the sheltered Homeless Count & Survey data including the Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and performance measurement data.

These data sets are publicly available through the Lead Agency's website as well as in HUD's Housing Resource Exchange (HRE) website. The HMIS Lead Agency provides monthly data quality reports for all participating programs and monitors responsiveness and adherence to data quality standards.

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For more information about the HMIS, please send an inquiry to hmis@homelesshouston.org.

HMIS Forum

The HMIS Forum is a public input forum for all HMIS user agencies which meets quarterly to monitor data reports, data quality, and to give input on gaps and barriers to the HMIS Lead Agency. HMIS Forums are held quarterly to allow HMIS users and other service agency staff to provide input and guidance on HMIS governance, policy, and issues that are then taken to The Way Home's Steering Committee for consideration.

HMIS Support Committee

The HMIS Support Committee is an advisory group selected through the HMIS Forum to establish and maintain data quality standards for the CoC.

Dashboards and Performance Measurement

Through HMIS, the Lead Agency provides community dashboards at regular intervals which demonstrate the performance of The Way Home against local strategic plans and federal benchmarks. These dashboards can be viewed [here](#).

While all efforts are made to accommodate the individual data needs of The Way Home partners, it is important to recognize that not all individual data needs may be met due to data standardization policies. Please view data standardization policies [by clicking here](#).

The Way Home Partners

It is the expectation of The Way Home that Partner Agencies will collaborate in real and meaningful ways. This often includes partnerships where agencies share space, duties, and contracts, etc.

Partner Agencies develop and maintain MOUs with the Lead Agency and may also develop and maintain MOUs with other partner agencies of The Way Home. When partners design an MOU with one another, it is recommended that the following areas be addressed:

- collaborative working communication to actively pursue the goals of the MOU;
- the use of HMIS data to evaluate performance;
- the establishment of clear performance-related activities and goals;
- the establishment of clear expectations for each agency and their roles; and
- the creation of a proactive plan for maintaining collaborative contact with the Lead Agency for neutral party mediation in the case of disagreements.

For example, please [follow this link](#) to the sample MOU regarding a CoC Permanent Supportive Housing project.

If difficulties arise between two partner agencies of The Way Home, one or more of those partners are encouraged to notify the Lead Agency immediately to arrange for neutral-party mediation.

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Verification of Participation and Letters of Support

The Way Home partner agencies may request that the Lead Agency provide a letter verifying the agency's participation in The Way Home as part of a funder's requirement. The Lead Agency will designate a staff member to review the agency's participation and adherence to The Way Home quality and performance standards and then compose the verification letter accordingly. The Lead Agency will not provide a standard or general verification letter to an agency but will instead provide a unique letter per request.

The Lead Agency will provide verification letters to agencies who are new to The Way Home based on the evidence of their participation in The Way Home to-date and based on the Lead Agency's understanding of the agency's history and current capacity.

CoC Steering Committee

The Way Home's Steering Committee is the governing body for The Way Home as provided by the HEARTH Act and the CoC Charter. The Way Home's Steering Committee is the lead decision-making body responsible for managing community planning, coordination and evaluation to ensure that the system of homeless services and housing rapidly ends people's homelessness permanently. This includes planning for the use of CoC resources as defined in the HEARTH Act and administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and coordinating these funds with other relevant resources in the jurisdiction.

The Way Home has a year-round planning process that is coordinated, inclusive and outcome-oriented, as well as a governing body and a number of sub-committees or working groups. The membership of the governing body is decided through an open and democratic process and is representative of private, nonprofit and public sectors. The Way Home's Steering Committee is composed of representatives from across multiple sectors of the community.

Specific responsibilities of The Way Home's Steering Committee include but are not necessarily limited to:

- providing overall direction and leadership of the process;
- making all formal funding and strategic decisions of the CoC;
- setting policy and procedures of the CoC;
- leading strategic planning and goal-setting;
- aligning and coordinating federal, state, local, and private funding resources;
- ensuring the availability of data for planning;
- establishing priorities for and making recommendations to HUD about the allocation of CoC resources;
- establishing system and program outcomes for system-wide evaluations;

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- monitoring and evaluating both system-wide and individual program performance on established goals;
- establishing sub-committees and task groups as needed to perform CoC functions;
- receiving reports and recommendations from sub-committees and task groups;
- selecting the Lead Agency and HMIS Lead Agency;
- Authorize the lead agency to enter into all contracts and MOUs on behalf of the CoC;
- monitoring performance under these contracts; and
- Authorize the lead agency to distribute official communications from the CoC.

The membership of The Way Home's Steering Committee consists of up to 16 designated seats as outlined below:

- City of Houston Housing and Community Development
- Harris County Community Services Division
- City of Houston Public Housing Authority
- Harris County Public Housing Authority
- Fort Bend Community Development Department
- Pasadena Community Development Department
- Montgomery County Community Development Department
- Two Provider Representatives; one representing permanent housing and one representing crisis response
- Two Consumer Representatives
- Funders Together to End Homelessness Representative
- Up to six (6) At-large Representatives from Public/Government/Academic Organizations (e.g., Health, Mental Health, Veterans Administration, Workforce Investment Board, University, education, criminal justice, etc.)

Each CoC Steering Committee member must have the fiscal and program authority of the organization they represent.

The Way Home's Steering Committee is scheduled to meet on the 2nd Thursday quarterly at the Lead Agency offices at 3:30 pm. These meetings are open to the public with the opportunity to sign up for public comment (limited to 3 minutes) to be given at the end of the agenda. The meeting is accessible remotely at satellite locations in Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties. Please see the Lead Agency website for past meeting minutes and agendas and for meeting changes: <http://www.homelesshouston.org/continuum-of-care/steering-committee/>

The Way Home Workgroup and Project Management

Homelessness is a complex issue, and effective efforts to prevent and end it require broad community participation. Citizens who care about the problem and become educated on the issues can advocate much more effectively for improved solutions. The Way Home is composed of several workgroups that

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plan and implement in a number of areas to inform The Way Home's Steering Committee. A list of The Way Home workgroups can be found on the Lead Agency website: <http://www.homelesshouston.org/continuum-of-care/work-groups/>

Lead Agency staff members generally lead The Way Home workgroups and facilitate meetings. Included in the facilitation process are planning and developing work plans, creating and generating reports and dashboards, implementation of work plan activities, developing and recording agendas and meeting summaries when applicable, evaluating performance measures and data, case conferencing, and delivering tools and training when necessary. The Way Home workgroups may submit items for consideration by The Way Home's Steering Committee in the form of memoranda and/or proposed resolutions.

Provider Input Forum

Under CoC regulations, decision makers of homeless service providers are expected to be involved in discussions and recommendations made to The Way Home's Steering Committee. The Way Home's Steering Committee approved the creation of quarterly The Way Home Provider input forums where these discussions can take place.

Consumer Input Forum

Consumer Input Forums are the primary vehicles through which The Way Home gathers input from the consumer (homeless) population. Attendees of Consumer Input Forums include those currently experiencing homelessness and those who have previously experienced homelessness. Focus groups of specific populations may be utilized as Consumer Input Forums.

The two consumer representatives on The Way Home's Steering Committee are selected from participants in the Consumer Input Forums. These representatives, in cooperation with the Lead Agency, will convene Consumer Input Forums no less than twice a year to gather input and inform The Way Home's Steering Committee of recommendations for Steering Committee consideration.

RRH CMI

The Rapid Re-Housing Case Management Intermediary (RRH CMI) provides oversight and guidance to Rapid Re-housing partner agencies. The RRH CMI is currently The Way Home Lead Agency, the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County. Duties include monitoring, reviewing housing stability plans, evaluating progress on performance goals, compiling performance improvement plans and over-seeing spend-down on grants dedicated to RRH.

FAI

The Financial Assistance Intermediary (FAI) facilitates the payment of rental subsidies to property managers participating in The Way Home's Rapid Re-housing program. The FAI maintains fiduciary duties to The Way Home and maintains all financial and funding protocols. Currently, the Houston Housing Authority is the FAI.

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Welcome Home Fund

The Lead Agency helps raise and maintain a fund on behalf of The Way Home known as the Welcome Home Fund. The Welcome Home Fund provides Welcome Baskets full of home goods, buys furniture, and pays for application fees and other financial burdens that other funding sources do not cover for individuals and families moving into permanent housing through The Way Home. The policies for The Way Home fund may be found [here](#) . For more information, contact TWHfund@homelesshouston.org.

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Section 4: Communications

Collaborative communication is necessary for the health of The Way Home. Collaborative communication includes transparent, direct, and clear communications guided by roles and responsibilities of the collaborative parties. Communication may be between the Lead Agency and partners of The Way Home; the Lead Agency and the community at large through newsletters, website; to designated providers; and/or between partners of The Way Home and the community at large. Additional communications mechanisms may include blog posts, text alerts, in-person or phone/video calls, and through social media including Facebook, Twitter etc.

Connecting with The Way Home Lead Agency Communications Team

The Lead Agency's Development & Communications Department, in conjunction with a contracted communications/public relations firm, manages all of the communications (including but not limited those mediums mentioned in the paragraph above) on behalf of The Way Home CoC.

- To be added to e-newsletter lists, collaborate on blog and/or social media, or ask questions/provide feedback on websites, please email the Communications Coordinator, Abbie Wright, at awright@homelesshouston.org.
- For media or Collaborative Communications Workgroup information, please email the Director of Development & Communications, Sara Martinez, at smartinez@homelesshouston.org.
- For information on the Welcome Home Fund and other fundraising opportunities on behalf of The Way Home, email the Development Coordinator, Renee Cavazos, at rcavazos@homelesshouston.org.

Virtual Communication

Virtual communication is used to reach the greatest number of audience members with the fewest barriers. This includes web-based meetings, web-based trainings, and video conferencing with remote satellite locations, social media, blog posts, text alerts, e-newsletters, website updates, and other uses of technology for virtual communication.

The Way Home has a [Facebook channel](#) that is a collaborative space to share client successes, system collaborative successes, to feature the work of The Way Home, and provide public education on homelessness and related issues in general and as they relate to our geographic region. A [digital toolkit](#) has been created for partner agency staff and the public to use as a resource with sample social media posts, images, photos, and more to make interacting on Facebook easy.

The Way Home Talking Points

The Way Home Messaging and Key Facts are developed and maintained by the Lead Agency. The Lead Agency provides communication management through its External Affairs Department with input from partner agencies, and a contracted communications/public relations firm. A copy of The Way Home

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Messaging and Key Facts document can be obtained by sending an email to smartinez@homelesshouston.org.

Media Communications

Broadcast media, including television and radio, represent a powerful way to communicate the successes and objectives of The Way Home and on homeless issues in general and as they affect the region. As such, it is critical that communications with media outlets are clear and consistent with The Way Home talking points. The guidelines for media communications are as follows:

- All communications with media outlets regarding The Way Home and its housing and case management programs should be referred to the Lead Agency. This is to ensure message clarity and consistency to media outlets.
- If a Provider Agency receives a request for or a question during a media interview regarding The Way Home, the Continuum of Care, or related programs, activities or results, they should then contact the Development & Communications Department of the Lead Agency to inform the Lead Agency of the media question or request and response, so it can be addressed and/or directed for follow up.
- Partner Agencies are free to speak with media regarding their own agency and agency-specific programs at their discretion, without consulting or coordinating with the Lead Agency.
- The Lead Agency receives frequent requests from media outlets regarding all aspects of homelessness and related issues. The Lead Agency frequently routes inquiries to the appropriate partner agency based on topic area of the inquiry.
- Media inquiries can be directed to the Director of Development & Communications, Sara Martinez, at smartinez@homelesshouston.org or Julia Davis, at our contracted communications/public relations firm at julia@theckpgroup.com.

Advocacy

The Coalition for the Homeless as lead agency to The Way Home Continuum of Care serves as an advocate for those experiencing homelessness and on behalf of strategies and policies that will advance the goals of the CoC. The lead agency also coordinated advocacy activities as needed and shares advocacy opportunities with the public through social media, e-newsletter, and other methods.

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Section 5: Strategic Plans

Developing a comprehensive strategy to prevent and end homelessness requires participation by a broad number of stakeholders from multiple sectors. Even before the creation of the CoC and The Way Home, the Houston area has been engaged in local planning efforts and has drawn guidance and inspiration from other local, regional, and federal plans. See <http://www.homelesshouston.org/continuum-of-care/strategic-plans/> for more information on current and historical strategic plans from the Houston region.

Opening Doors

The first comprehensive federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness was presented to the US Congress on June 22, 2010. The US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) updated and amended the plan in 2012 and again in 2015 to reflect what we have learned. To view the Opening Doors website, [click here](#). Opening Doors and its updates provide benchmarks and criteria to measure ending homelessness at the community level. The Way Home elected to adopt these federal benchmarks and criteria locally and have followed them to develop and measure our local strategies to end homelessness. To view the community charrette report, [click here](#).

Community Charrette

In 2012, through the provision of HUD Priority Communities and Technical Assistance, and in alignment with HEARTH Act objectives, the CoC conducted a Community Charrette with over 400 stakeholders including both providers and consumers to create recommendations for the community action plan.

NEST Initiative to prevent and end LGBTQ Youth Homelessness

In 2014, HUD provided technical assistance to the Greater Houston community to devise an education and awareness plan for law enforcement, criminal justice, education and homeless response system providers to prevent homelessness or LGBTQ youth. The Montrose Center of Houston acted as the project manager to bring together local constituents to create a plan to prevent LGBTQ youth homelessness. Recommendations included the need for targeted competency training for system that impact youth. [Click here](#) for a copy of the NEST plan.

Youth Community Conversation

In 2015, the CoC hosted a community-wide, two-day Community Conversation on Youth and Young Adult Homelessness that was hosted by The Coalition to develop a unified community plan to prevent and end youth homelessness. Over 150 stakeholders participated in the conversation (facilitated by HUD Technical Assistance consultants CSH), including 30+ young people currently or recently experiencing homelessness. Eight young adults also served as subject matter experts on the issue panels.

Recommendations included:

- Employment as a primary intervention/goal

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- Independent housing without programmatic requirements
- Reunification with family (including cultivated family and siblings of origin)
- Ability to define their own mental health needs.

Home Together

[Home, Together: The Federal Strategic Plan](#) to Prevent and End Homelessness, available at usich.gov, was issued in July 2018, covers Fiscal Years 2018 – 2022, and builds upon strategies and actions taken across multiple administrations and upon the previous federal strategic plan.

The Plan was developed with extensive stakeholder input from staff across federal agencies, national organizations, state and local agencies and organizations, and from people with lived experiences of homelessness.

Community Conversation

On November 27, 2018, the CoC hosted the Community Conversation that included 130 community stakeholders to update The Way Home Action Plan for 2020 and beyond in Accordance with the new federal plan, “Home, Together”. The five areas of focus as determined by the participants will guide The Way Home Action Plan moving forward. The five areas of focus include vulnerable populations (aging, behavioral health needs with co-occurring medical morbidities), youth and young adults, single adults who do not fit federal definitions of priority, connections to other systems that feed into/affect persons experiencing homelessness, and future funding; all under a racial equity and social justice lens. [Click here](#) for the Community Conversation Report.

The Way Home Action Plan

The Action Plan is an update of the groundwork created by the Charrette and/or Community Conversation and its recommendations. The action plan specifies local progress, criteria and benchmarks in alignment with the federal plan. See <http://www.homelesshouston.org/continuum-of-care/strategic-plans/> to find the embedded, interactive update to The Way Home Action Plan.

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Section 6: Grievances

Grievance Policy

From time to time, The Way Home partner agencies, clients and/or the public may disagree about a choice, a vote, a decision, or an action that occurs as part of defining, developing and operating The Way Home. In keeping with The Way Home's commitment to transparency and collaboration, aggrieved parties may communicate a grievance at any time without fear of reprisal, and with the understanding and expectation that their grievance will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. The specific procedures to register a grievance and follow it through the process are defined below, based on the type of grievance registered.

Grievance Procedures

Partner Agency Grievance with Lead Agency

If a partner agency has a concern or concerns regarding actions, decisions or communications with the Lead Agency staff that are unrelated to the funding process or funding decisions and wishes to file a grievance, the partner agency may communicate the grievance in writing to the Chief Program Officer for the Lead Agency, Eva Thibaudeau, at ethibaudeau@homelesshouston.org. The Chief Program Officer will attempt to resolve the matter with the partner agency. If the partner agency feels the grievance is not resolved to its satisfaction, the partner agency may submit its grievance in writing to The Way Home's Steering Committee Chair at Mike.Temple@wrksolutions.net. If the grievance is with the Chief Program Officer, a grievance should be communicated directly to the President/CEO of the Lead Agency at mnichols@homelesshouston.org. If the grievance is not resolved, a grievance may be submitted in writing to the Chair of The Way Home's Steering Committee. In some instances regarding partner agency contracts directly with HUD; if the grievance is not resolved, a HUD funded agency may follow HUD policies for grievance.

Client Grievance with Partner Agency

Typically, a client grievance with a partner agency is addressed and resolved within the partner agency. If the Lead Agency is notified by a client of his or her grievance, the Lead Agency will refer client back to the partner agency, and inform the partner agency of the grievance communicated to the Lead Agency. The Lead Agency maintains records of client grievances regarding partner agencies as they are received by the Lead Agency. Clients are welcome to share comments during the public comment section at the end of each CoC Steering Committee meeting and are encouraged to participate in Consumer Input Forums.

Appeal of Change of Partnership Level

A Vested Partner may fail to meet its obligations and responsibilities as a Vested Partner. For instance, if the agency fails to meet its obligations set forth in The Way Home MOU. If this occurs the lead agency will put the vested partner agency on notice and require a corrective action plan. The Way Home's Steering Committee, after careful review, may decide to change the Vested Partner's participation level in The Way

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Home to that of Community Partner. The formerly Vested Partner may appeal the decision, should it choose to do so. The Vested Partner must provide the appeal in writing and submit it directly to the Chair of The Way Home's Steering Committee at Mike.Temple@wrksolutions.net , who will resolve the issue.

Grievance Between Partner Agencies

Should a conflict arise between partner agencies that is related to The Way Home activity or participation, the partner agencies may reach out the Lead Agency for mediation of the conflict by sending an email to ethibaudeau@homelesshouston.org. The Lead Agency may choose to contract with a third-party mediator to address the concern.

Appeal of Funding Decisions

A Vested Partner who has applied for funding through The Way Home may choose to appeal the decision made on funding. For funding competitions that are managed by the Lead Agency, each competition will have its own grievance procedure. Please refer to the terms of the competition for the appropriate steps to take to register a grievance. For funding opportunities that are managed by The Way Home's Steering Committee, please refer to The Way Home's Steering Committee's grievance policy and procedure to register a grievance.

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Section 7: Procedures

Governance Procedures

Governance Procedures for The Way Home are addressed in the CoC Charter and in this Guidebook.

Program Procedures

The Way Home includes several programs that have their own program procedures:

- [Rapid Re-Housing](#)
- [Coordinated Access](#)
- [Income Now](#)

Each program's procedures are defined and managed according to governmental regulations by each program's workgroup and are governed by The Way Home's Steering Committee.

- [Housing Prioritization Policy](#)
- [Coalition for the Homeless Agency MOU](#)

Procedural Adherence

Partner Agencies who participate in The Way Home are expected to follow all governance procedures and the procedures for any The Way Home program in which they participate. If any Partner Agency staff member is unclear about the required procedures or has questions about them, it is the responsibility of the Partner Agency to contact the Lead Agency to get all procedural questions or needs addressed via email at ethibaudeau@homelesshouston.org.

Failure to adhere to governance or program procedures may result in remedial actions, up to and including CoC Steering Committee review of the Partner Agency's partnership level with The Way Home.

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Section 8: Revisions

CoC Charter

The Way Home's Steering Committee, Provider input forum, and the Lead Agency are responsible for revisions to the CoC Charter. Please see the [CoC Charter](#) for its review and revision process.

Continuum of Care Guidebook

While The Way Home's Steering Committee authorizes The Way Home Partner Agency Guidebook, the Lead Agency is responsible for review, revision and updates to The Way Home Partner Agency Guidebook to ensure it remains relevant to The Way Home community as needed, but no less than annually.

The Lead Agency will engage partner agencies, workgroups, committees, The Way Home's Steering Committee and others as needed to review and revise this Guidebook. Suggestions for changes, improvements, revisions or requests for review by the Lead Agency may be made at any time by a The Way Home community organization or member. As part of The Way Home's commitment to transparency and collaborative communications, the Lead Agency will convene an ad hoc workgroup to address requests as they arise.

Changes that impact the CoC Charter or funding suggested and approved by the workgroup will be included in a quarterly meeting of The Way Home's Steering Committee for review, discussion and decision on permanent incorporation into The Way Home CoC Guidebook. Changes on any other section of The Way Home CoC Guidebook will be reviewed by the partner agencies during a quarterly meeting of the Provider input forum.

Changes made to this Guidebook will be posted on the website and the Lead Agency will communicate the change notification through The Way Home CoC Connection e-newsletter and the Provider Input Forum.



Section 9: Glossary of Continuum of Care Terms

Term	Definition
811 Vouchers	Housing and Urban Development (HUD) vouchers competitively awarded to Public Housing Authorities (PHA's) for Non-elderly, disabled (NED) populations. Vouchers can be tied to homeless preferences within a PHA.
1115 Medicaid Waiver DSRIP	The 1115 Medicaid Waiver Delivery System Reform Incentive Payment (DSRIP) is a part of the Social Security Act (Section 1115) that gives the Secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) the authority to approve experimental, pilot, or demonstration projects that promote the objectives of the Medicaid and CHIP programs, with the purpose of using innovative service delivery systems that improve care, increase efficiency, and reduce costs, among other approaches. The Way Home made use of the 1115 Medicaid Waiver DSRIP to provide supportive services to 300 chronically homeless individuals.
3rd Party Monitor	An entity that provides independent oversight of grant compliance and performance.
Chronic Homelessness	Chronic homelessness indicates a person or member of a family who has been homeless for at least one (1) year either continuously or during four (4) episodes of homelessness within a three-year period that totals one (1) year of homelessness AND also has a disabling condition who needs ongoing support and rental subsidy to stabilize in permanent housing.
Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)	The Community Development Block Grant is a program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development which funds local community development activities such as affordable housing, anti-poverty programs, and infrastructure development.
Continuum of Care (CoC)	A Continuum of Care is a planning process designed to promote the development of comprehensive systems to address homelessness and provides communities with a framework for organizing and delivering services in an efficient and effective manner. The local CoC is known as The Way Home and encompasses the cities of Houston, Pasadena, Conroe, and Harris, Fort Bend, and Montgomery Counties in Texas.
CoC Charter	The guiding governance structure for The Way Home. You can view the current CoC Charter here .
CoC Steering Committee	The governing board of The Way Home . Includes elected and ad-officio positions pursuant to the CoC Charter.
Coordinated Access (CA) also known as the Coordinated Entry System (CES):	Coordinated Access is a standardized process for entry into the homeless response system and housing and/or income assessment which results in a coordinated referral process to prevention, housing, income or other related service(s).

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Consumer Input Forum	Consumer Input Forum. The forum where persons with either current or prior lived experience of homelessness give policy level input that is then taken to The Way Home’s Steering Committee and published on the Coalition’s website
Domestic Violence (DV)	Domestic Violence, also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), is a pattern of abusive and often violent behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another partner.
Domestic Violence Rapid Re-housing (DV-RRH)	Domestic Violence Rapid Re-housing is Rapid Re-housing that has been adapted with consideration for the safety of domestic violence survivors and staff in mind.
Emergency Shelter	An Emergency Shelter is any facility, the primary purpose of which is to provide temporary shelter for homeless individuals and/or families and which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements. While there are not time limitations, the goal of the CoC is that all shelters will be housing and income focused so that no one needs to experience an episode of homelessness that is greater than 30 days.
Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)	The Emergency Solutions Grant is a program of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development that can be used for five program components: street outreach, emergency shelter, homelessness prevention, Rapid Re-housing assistance, and Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS). ESG recipients can also use a certain allocation for administrative activities.
Family Unification Program (FUP)	The Family Unification Program provides Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs) to two different populations: families for whom the lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the imminent placement of the family’s child/children in out-of-home care; and youth between the ages of 18-21 who left foster care at age 16 or later and lack adequate housing. There is no time limitation on FUP family vouchers. FUP vouchers used by youth are limited by statute to 36 months of housing assistance.
Federally Qualified Healthcare Center (FQHC)	Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers include all organizations receiving grants under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (PHS). FQHCs qualify for enhanced reimbursement from Medicare and Medicaid among other benefits. FQHCs must serve an underserved area or population, offer a sliding fee scale, provide comprehensive services, have an ongoing quality assurance program, and have a governing board of directors.
Financial Assistance Intermediary (FAI)	A Financial Assistance Intermediary generates rental assistance payments to approved landlords on behalf of The Way Home. An FAI might also refer to an entity that receives funds for direct service that are sub-contracted to provider agencies through a public procurement process.
Geographic Information System (GIS)	A Geographic Information System allows users to visualize, question, analyze, and interpret data to understand relationships, patterns, and trends.
Grant Per Diem (GPD)	The Veterans Affairs (VA) Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program is offered annually (as funding permits) to fund community agencies providing services to homeless Veterans, with the goal of promoting development and provision of supportive housing and/or supportive services, ultimately helping homeless

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	Veterans achieve residential stability, increase their skill levels and/or income, and obtain greater self-determination.
Harm Reduction	Harm reduction is a housing intervention that provides safety and security to individuals and families experiencing homelessness who have a substance use disorder. This intervention does not demand abstinence as a caveat for receiving permanent housing assistance. Supportive Services focus on promoting long-term tenancy.
Homeless	The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines individuals and families experiencing homelessness as those who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes a subset for an individual who is exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less, and who resided in an emergency shelter of a place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution.
Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP)	The Homeless Housing and Services Program was established during the 81 st Texas Legislature, and codified during the 82 nd Texas Legislature. HHSP provides funding to the eight largest cities in Texas (Arlington, Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio) in support of services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)	The Homeless Management Information System is a computerized data collection tool specifically designed to capture client-level, system-wide information over time on the characteristics and services needs of men, women, and children experiencing homelessness. The use of HMIS is required for homeless service providers that receive HUD McKinney-Vento funding.
Public Housing Authority (PHA) Homeless Preference	A part of a PHA's administration plan and approved by their acting Board that allows for a designated number of vouchers to be allocated to households experiencing homelessness. The preferences may be related to all vouchers (project based, tenant based, VASH, FUP, 811, public housing, etc....).
Coordinated Access Assessment	A housing assessment is a questionnaire that is completed through Coordinated Access and gathers information on an individual/family's homeless history, medical history, and other relevant information. The assessment results in an appropriate housing and/or income referral.
Coordinated Access Assessors	Housing Assessors work on behalf of The Way Home system to administer Housing Assessments to individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
Housing Choice Voucher – Transition In Place (HCV-TIP)	HCV-TIP is a housing model where families transition from homelessness to housing stability, in the same housing unit, with the aid of a Housing Choice Voucher.
Housing First	Housing First is a nationally-recognized best practice that establishes housing as a primary intervention to end homelessness and requiring low-barriers to when accessing housing.
Housing Navigators	Housing Navigators work on behalf of The Way Home system to assist individuals and families with any and all steps (obtaining IDs; gathering,

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	completing, and submitting lease and other paperwork; etc.) to get them moved into permanent housing.
HUD	The US Department of Housing and Urban Development
HUD-VASH	Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing. A collaborative program between the US Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs that provides housing and supportive services to homeless Veterans.
Income Now	Income Now is an initiative that is hosted within Coordinated Access and connects those currently experiencing homelessness with income to secure and maintain permanent housing. The initiative coordinates services and providers, including Workforce Solutions, so as to leverage the expertise and resources throughout The Way Home’s jurisdiction for the benefit of those looking to secure income as quickly as possible.
CISD	Consolidated Independent School District
ISD	Independent School District
Lead Agency	A Lead Agency is selected by The Way Home’s Steering Committee and provides facilitation, project management, and strategic planning; convenes stakeholders; applies for CoC funds and assures compliance with federal regulations through regular performance monitoring, in an effort to end and prevent homelessness.
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer
LIHTC	Low-Income Housing Tax Credit. The federal government’s primary program for encouraging the investment of private equity in the development of affordable rental housing for low-income households.
Managed Care Organization (MCO)	A Managed Care Organization is a health care provider or a group or organization of medical service providers that offers managed care health plans and contracts with insurers or self-insured employers to finance and deliver health care using a specific provider network and specific services and products.
NOFA	Notice of Funding Availability. As it relates to The Way Home, the NOFA refers to the annual Continuum of Care collaborative application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance funds as amended by the HEARTH (Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) Act. The competition is facilitated by the Lead Agency with direction by the CoC Steering Committee. The collaborative application is submitted by the Lead Agency on behalf of The Way Home.
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	Permanent Supportive Housing is a Housing First Intervention that combines indefinite leasing or rental assistance with supportive services to help people and families experiencing chronic homelessness achieve housing stability.
Positive Youth Development	Positive Youth Development is a framework that guides communities in the way they organize services, opportunities, and supports so that young people can develop to their full potential.

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Provider Input Forum	Under CoC regulations, decision makers of homeless service providers are expected to be involved in discussions and recommendations made to The Way Home’s Steering Committee. The Way Home’s Steering Committee approved the creation of quarterly The Way Home Provider Input Forums where these discussions can take place.
Rapid Re-housing (RRH)	Rapid Re-housing is a housing first intervention that emphasizes housing search and location services and short to medium-term rental assistance to move individuals and families experiencing homelessness (with or without a disability) as rapidly as possible into permanent housing. Intense but short-term case management is provided to help families stabilize and prepare to live independently.
Rapid Re-housing Case Management Intermediary (RRH CMI)	An organization that provides oversight of the Rapid Rehousing case management system and project manages case management deliverables and standards of care according to the Rapid Re-housing business rules.
RFP and RFQ	Request for Proposals and Request for Qualifications used in procurement bidding for vendors.
Safe Haven	Safe Havens are defined as a form of supportive housing that serves hard-to-reach homeless persons with severe mental illness who come primarily from the streets and have been unable or unwilling to participate in housing or supportive services. Currently, there is not an existing Safe Haven program in The Way Home.
SAMHSA/CABHI	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration/Cooperative Agreement to Benefit Homeless Individuals. A jointly funded program to enhance or develop the infrastructure of states and their treatment service systems to increase capacity to provide accessible, effective, comprehensive, coordinated, and evidence-based treatment services, permanent housing, peer supports and other critical services to chronically homeless individuals with substance use disorders, serious mental illnesses, or co-occurring substance use and mental disorders.
SOAR	SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery. SOAR seeks to end homelessness through increased access to SSI/SSDI income supports for those who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness and have a mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.
Steady State	Also referred to as “Functional Zero,” Steady State is the condition established when a CoC has met the criteria of federal benchmarks in ending homelessness for a particular subpopulation. Steady state indicates that the CoC has right-sized its homeless response system and can quickly re-house an individual or family experiencing homelessness within that subpopulation, should they choose to accept the resource.
Street Outreach	Any activity that engages with individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered to provide immediate support, intervention, and connections with homeless assistance programs and/or mainstream social services and housing programs.

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SSVF	Supportive Services for Veteran Families. A program of the US Department of Veterans Affairs with the goal of promoting housing stability among very low-income Veterans and Veteran families who reside in or are transitioning to permanent housing.
Supported Employment	Supported Employment refers to service provisions wherein people with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, mental health disorders, and traumatic brain injury, among others, are assisted with obtaining and maintaining employment originally through the primary models of job crews, enclaves, or the often-preferred job coach or person-centered approaches.
TA	Technical Assistance. TA is targeted training and coaching that is provided by subject matter experts.
Transitional Housing	Transitional Housing (TH) is an intervention designed to provide homeless individuals and families with the interim stability and support to successfully move into and maintain permanent housing. Transitional Housing is a model that allows for up to 24 months of housing with structured programmatic requirements. HUD prefers that CoC's utilize Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) in lieu of Transitional Housing whenever possible but recognizes that TH may be needed in specific cases such as substance use rehabilitation.
VA	The US Department of Veterans Affairs
VAMC	Veterans Affairs Medical Center
Voucher	A voucher is a housing subsidy from the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that is administered locally by public housing agencies (PHAs) through a Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program. Common vouchers issued to end homelessness include: Project-Based Vouchers (PBVs) that are tied to specific housing units; and Tenant-Based Vouchers (TBVs) used for very low-income families to afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Commonly known as Section 8.
Youth/Young Adult Homelessness	Youth homelessness encompasses all people experiencing homelessness who are under the age of 24 and without a head of household older than 24. More specifically, homeless youth are those who are homeless and under the age of 18; homeless young adults are those who are homeless and between the ages of 18-24.