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SNAPS In Focus: Partnerships Between CoCs and Faith-Based Organizations

We all know the numbers: 2018 was the third year in a row that showed an increase in the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. After rising 9% from 2016 to 2017, unsheltered homelessness rose an additional 3% from 2017 to 2018, accounting for the entire increase in homelessness during that period. Developing diverse community partnerships in response to this trend is more important now than ever before, to better align strategies and resources with the shared goal of preventing and ending homelessness. This is a strategy that can help reverse this rising trend.

Toward that end, HUD and the Citygate Network (formerly the Association of Gospel Rescue Missions) are joining together for this message to highlight the effectiveness of partnerships between Continuums of Care (CoCs) and faith-based organizations (FBOs). On a local level, close coordination between CoCs and FBOs—which in many communities are the largest, and sometimes the *only* homeless services provider—is a concrete way to strengthen our homeless crisis response systems.

A Partnership That Maximizes Housing Options and Resources

Partnerships between CoCs and FBOs provide opportunities to expand housing options and resources for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Emergency shelters and crisis housing that can ultimately connect people to permanent housing (hopefully as quickly as possible) are a key part of reducing unsheltered homelessness.

We know federal funding is not sufficient to meet the current needs of those experiencing homelessness in our country. When effectively coordinated with federal and private funders, FBOs can help with:

- **Shelter, crisis housing, and services** – FBOs, including rescue missions and ministries with a similar focus, share in the work of ending homelessness by offering resources such as emergency services, emergency shelters and crisis housing units, addiction recovery, career orientation, job training, housing procurement, and follow-up case management.
- **Funding** – Because most FBOs are privately funded by donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and foundations, they provide new, less-regulated funding opportunities.
- **Awareness and involvement** – FBOs have a vast network of churches and volunteers to help provide necessary advocacy for and services to those experiencing homelessness.



By understanding the roles that each organization plays within the current homeless crisis response system, CoCs and FBOs can better integrate and strategically use CoC- and FBO-funded assistance and create meaningful partnerships. They can begin to do this by:

- **Fostering open lines of communication** – CoCs and FBOs both need to not only recognize that the other exists, but also need to get to know one another on a more personal level.
 - Establish standing meetings or regular opportunities for informal interaction
 - CoC leadership can tour FBO facilities to learn more about existing programs
 - Brainstorm together on other unique ways to work together within your community
- **Leveraging Strengths** – While many CoCs focus heavily on providing housing resources (and many FBOs do the same), others focus on services and expanded approaches to providing assistance. By understanding this, CoCs and FBOs can leverage each other’s strengths to avoid duplication of resources and close gaps in assisting individuals and families experiencing homelessness.
- **Partnering for Strategic Planning and Decision-making Purposes** – Be intentional about including FBO and CoC representation in homeless response efforts, including:
 - Strategic planning sessions and regular planning meetings
 - Governing or leadership roles in committees and working groups
 - Decision-making processes and opportunities
 - Developing and refining Coordinated Entry and crisis response initiatives
- **Partnering on Data Collection and Performance Evaluation** – As with CoCs, most FBOs recognize the importance of data collection to fully understand the needs and characteristics of people experiencing homelessness along with the solutions to house them. To strengthen data collection locally:
 - Develop import/export options for FBO data to reduce duplicative efforts
 - Partner for the Point-In-Time (PIT) count
 - Share and use data to prevent public health outbreaks in shelters
 - Support limited staffing resources by developing alternative data collection strategies
 - Design intake processes that support the CoC’s and FBO’s needs while collecting minimal information needed to effectively end a person’s homelessness
 - Develop joint goals and support the FBOs ability to measure and meet these goals

Citygate Network members are largely interested in supporting local efforts to end homelessness, and these days, more and more are open to participate in coordinated entry. Creative solutions can bridge perceived obstacles to participating in this and other efforts. As CoCs take stock of potential improvements to the



community's homeless response systems, partnering with FBOs in that conversation can bring a wealth of resources and potential solutions.

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