Community Case Studies Overview

Beginning in mid-2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) allocated $1.5 billion in Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) funding across the country, infusing communities with new resources to prevent and end homelessness. This influx of new funding provided a unique opportunity and a dual challenge to local communities – both how to gear up quickly for effective implementation and how to do so in a way that anticipated continuity at the end of the ARRA funding period. In the process, HPRP motivated many communities to re-assess, re-configure and re-focus their commitment to homeless prevention and re-housing, promoting many levels of change.

This series of brief case studies documents ways in which seven different communities responded to this challenge with innovative strategies, practices and local systems change. Cities and regions profiled in this series include:

- Charlotte, NC
- Dayton/Montgomery County, OH
- State of Rhode Island
- Sacramento County, CA
- Santa Clara, CA
- Worcester County, MA
- Yolo County, CA

Examination of practices adopted by these communities revealed a series of common processes and dynamics in community-wide change. Five of these transformative processes, in particular, are worth highlighting, as they represent key change mechanisms that are consistent with previous research findings on systems change:

- **Inclusive Governance Structure and Centralized Program Oversight** - All profiled communities referenced a governance and management structure that incorporates diverse community leadership, invests stakeholders in the change process, and centralizes monitoring functions.

- **Commitment of Cross-Sector and Governmental Leadership to Systems Transformation** – In each community highlighted, there was broad commitment from local government and mainstream systems leaders to using HPRP resources as a means to initiate and/or accelerate transformation of the community’s prevention and housing assistance system.

- **Alignment of Organizational Philosophies: Housing Stabilization and Housing First** - Most of these communities reflected a shared philosophical framework drawing on the “Housing First” approach, and, in turn, emphasized training and development that supported this approach.

- **Innovative Use of Local Impact Data** – Most communities went beyond required reporting, and actively used HMIS and client outcomes data to evaluate and improve system capacities.

- **Service Coordination and Standardization** – In most instances, service delivery innovations and practices were standardized across the community to ensure program efficiencies and impact.

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<th>Key Change Factors</th>
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<td><strong>Inclusive Governance and Centralized Program Oversight</strong></td>
<td>In Worcester (MA), Montgomery County (OH), and Rhode Island, local leadership councils integrated service delivery systems by strategically allocating resources from HPRP, CoC, City, State, and other funding sources. Most communities established a system-level HPRP coordinator position to provide consistent coverage via newly coordinated service partnerships.</td>
<td>Centralized leadership structures are vital in re-orienting system-level planning, allocation, and monitoring, and blending resources for prevention and re-housing assistance. Establishing a systems level coordinator is critical to help regions bridge traditional organizational barriers and boundaries.</td>
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<td><strong>Commitment of Cross-Sector and Governmental Leadership to Systems Transformation</strong></td>
<td>In Yolo County (CA), local leaders had established prevention as the centerpiece of their Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, and used HPRP resources to create a regional system of Housing Resource Centers in support of that goal. Leaders in Worcester integrated HPRP resources with all other homelessness system funding to advance commitment to transforming the region’s systems for prevention and housing stabilization.</td>
<td>Commitment of local leaders to systems transformation (both at the jurisdictional and institutional levels) is critical to coordinating and streamlining service delivery systems – leading to more efficient and cost-effective deployment of resources across geographic and programmatic boundaries.</td>
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<td><strong>Alignment of Organizational Philosophies</strong></td>
<td>In Charlotte (NC), local leaders established an innovative program that targets rapid re-housing services to homeless households with multiple housing barriers, based on a prior City-wide commitment to the “Housing First” approach. Training for front-line staff in Housing First methodology, as well as rapid re-housing and prevention strategies, helped align service system models across multiple communities in a unified approach.</td>
<td>Advancing a housing stabilization system requires incorporation of both prevention and Housing First solutions, predicated on shared “buy-in” by all stakeholders and systems-wide efforts to align all practices with this approach and its intended outcomes.</td>
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<td><strong>Innovative Use of Local Impact Data</strong></td>
<td>In Santa Clara (CA) and Montgomery County, communities are using both HMIS and other performance outcomes data to inform leadership of needed adaptations in planning systems re-design.</td>
<td>Early evaluation of HPRP, i.e. assessing the effectiveness and efficiency of new assessment and assistance approaches and networks, is critical in planning for and creating a desired post-HPRP system.</td>
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<td><strong>Service Coordination and Standardization</strong></td>
<td>Sacramento (CA) established “2-1-1” as the community’s centralized intake provider, created a standardized assessment tool, and coordinated legal services providers to pre-screen all eviction cases for HPRP. Yolo County created an integrated system of service and access points by establishing six new Homeless Resource Centers and using common intake tools to standardize service delivery.</td>
<td>The development of standard processes, staffing roles, training, and assessment tools allows all local system providers to adopt consistent practices in the delivery of prevention and housing assistance services.</td>
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**COMMUNITY COMMITMENTS TO SYSTEM CHANGE**

Each region or community profiled in this series was strategic in its use of HPRP funds to create or redesign a community system to achieve sustainable housing assistance practices. Each of these communities relied on leaders who were committed to doing “whatever it takes” to achieve desired results. All operated with openness to new possibilities through a fundamental re-orientation of practice and priorities, and each approached implementation with an investment in ongoing systems improvement and transformation.
Community Profile
Worcester, Massachusetts

Worcester is the second largest city in New England. With 175,454 people, the City is one quarter the total population of Worcester County, where local utilization of HPRP resources have helped to swiftly advance a county-wide rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention system. Propelled into full implementation by HPRP funding, Worcester’s transformation to a regionalized housing/service delivery system involved coordination among several community “plans to end homelessness”; a state-wide mandate to regionalize homeless services; reliance on political leadership in closing a large downtown shelter; and a commitment to institutionalizing the Housing First approach.

Local Environment Prior to HPRP

In early 2009, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts established regional networks across the state, awarding $10 million across ten regions with the intent of replacing emergency shelters with innovative housing and prevention service systems. Designated by the State as a regional network, Worcester County’s model was built upon state-supported Three Year Plans to End Homelessness which shared the following goals:

- System-wide shift to a Housing First approach
- Expansion of homelessness prevention
- Improved service delivery strategies
- Siting of housing and services equitably across neighborhoods throughout the region
- Enhanced City oversight and accountability

HPRP funds quadrupled the level of housing assistance and staffing resources available to this already-emerging commitment to systems re-design. The HPRP Regional plan set a target of re-establishing housing stability for 500 homeless households, including both single adults and families.

Local Systems Transformation Through HPRP

Collaborative Regional Leadership: A Regional Leadership Council comprised of the CoC lead agency, nonprofit providers, funders, State agencies, police, faith-based, community, and consumer members was established as a collaborative decision-making body, charged with meeting Three Year Plan goals. HPRP funds were used to advance the fulfillment of these goals. The City of Worcester was allocated $1.9 million in HPRP funding as an entitlement city, and an additional $2.5 million in HPRP funds was awarded by the State to Worcester County. HPRP thus brought over $4 million to the County’s regionalized system change process.

Distribution of all HPRP funds came under the management of the City, which empowered the Regional Leadership Council with responsibility for resource distribution and oversight of the county-wide effort.

Worcester County, Massachusetts

Regionalized Access to Housing: Worcester’s regional system now incorporates both the City of Worcester and communities across the County. As such, it coordinates more effective triage and rapid housing placements both inside and outside City limits. Political support for this regional plan is maintained through assurance that assertive efforts are made to distribute housing placements equitably across City and County neighborhoods.

Expanded Landlord Networks: The advent of HPRP and its focus on rapid re-housing revealed that the existing network of partnering landlords was too small. Community agencies are working in concert to recruit additional
landlords into the program to meet a surge in demand for housing placements that exceeds existing options. Housing resources are now shared by all regional partners.

**Improved Tracking / Housing Placement Mapping:** HPRP funds are also used to expand the tracking of housing placements through a system-wide inventory of both the types and the levels of service supports provided by each organization for all individuals and family households served. This new tracking system affords the network of providers a county-wide view of all possible housing opportunities, aligning household need with appropriate levels of housing and service assistance. An individualized housing plan is developed for every household in the system, and progress is tracked from intake through housing placement and stabilization.

With buy-in from all partners, the new tracking system is now merged onto a single shared site with HMIS software. Information on apartment locations, unit size, and service support utilization is now centralized and accessible in the same HMIS system that tracks progress and status for all households using HPRP and other resources. This real-time data system maximizes regional/community resources and evaluates success.

**Creating New Housing Opportunity from Old Resources:** Through this ongoing placement-planning system for all chronic, near-chronic and non-chronically homeless households, members of Worcester’s cross-agency system are able to increase access to both existing permanent supportive housing slots and new ones by moving people who no longer need intensive supports out of long-term housing -- creating case management efficiencies and real cost savings. The influx of HPRP resources also made a regionalized tracking system possible, motivating partner buy-in as HPRP funds could then be strategically focused on homeless households that need less intensive case management assistance.

**Regional Integration of Funding:** Combining HPRP funding with other resources across a regionalized system has also allowed for flexibility of short- and medium-term subsidies for housing support, as well as creating new staffing positions deemed necessary to attain systems change goals (e.g., shelter diversion, triage, and housing stabilization).

**Key Features of Systems Change**

- **Strategic Leadership and Alignment:** Worcester County’s Regionalized Leadership Council incorporates a broad diversity of leaders with “seats at the table” and a mutual investment in planning, allocating, and monitoring Three Year Plan and HPRP outcomes. All CoC renewals and new programs are now required to align with Three Year Plan goals to qualify for endorsement for continued funding.

- **Philosophical Alignment:** In 2007, the Three Year Plan to End Homelessness embraced a Housing First philosophy for all City and County efforts. As area organizations and programs move towards adopting a Housing First commitment, promoting housing stability has become the key focus of local strategy for preventing and ending homelessness.

- **Political Opportunity:** In the context of state-mandated regionalization, political will for broader systems change was heightened by the closing of the deteriorated downtown shelter. HPRP funds provided additional housing resources to make shelter closing an attainable reality.

- **Network Collaboration:** In the past, individual agencies in Worcester competed for community funding. Regionalized coordination, allocation, and monitoring have re-focused attention on the needs and priorities of the entire regional network. The role of the City of Worcester as a neutral convening agency brokering new cross-agency partnerships has been fundamental, with HPRP agencies forming a collaborative network accountable to City management and Leadership Council oversight.

- **Use of Data:** Worcester County’s success is driven by targeted, short-term objectives set by the Three Year Plan. System-wide progress in meeting goals is closely monitored using data-based tools.

- **Sustainability:** Local leaders believe savings from community systems change can and will be re-directed to support continuity of regional strategies.

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**KEY LESSONS LEARNED**

- Governmental leadership and “buy-in” are critical in cultivating cross-systems integration.
- HPRP resources, when strategically targeted in alignment with comprehensive community plans, can help to catalyze broad housing systems change.