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.

---

### Key Change Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inclusive Governance and Centralized Program Oversight</th>
<th>Examples of Community Activity</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment of Cross-Sector and Governmental Leadership to Systems Transformation</th>
<th>Examples of Community Activity</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alignment of Organizational Philosophies</th>
<th>Examples of Community Activity</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovative Use of Local Impact Data</th>
<th>Examples of Community Activity</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Coordination and Standardization</th>
<th>Examples of Community Activity</th>
<th>Lessons Learned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<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>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### 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
Yolo County, California

Yolo County’s 200,000 residents live in the rural agricultural region of California’s Sacramento River Delta. Facing a 13.2% unemployment rate and growing homelessness, Yolo County’s Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-housing (HPRP) award of $1.6 million helped to establish a network of Housing Resource Centers (HRCs) across the County. HRCs act as “hubs” in a new systems-coordination model, centralizing consumer-focused requests and referrals for all prevention and housing stabilization services, thereby reducing duplication and improving access across the entire region.

HPRP funding enabled creation of the HRC network and motivated the County’s Ten Year Plan (TYP) leadership to focus on prevention as the nucleus of their TYP, with the synchronistic timing of Yolo County’s Ten Year Plan initiation and the HPRP planning process.

Local Environment before HPRP

Prior to the advent of their HPRP plan, Yolo County’s homelessness prevention assistance providers offered consumers many doors into their system, but no assurance that a person seeking services would actually receive the referrals or assistance they needed. Prevention assistance staffs were often unaware of many available services, and referrals were made primarily based on personal and organizational relationships, rather than on the best matches for consumers. There was no systematic way for staff to learn about homelessness prevention and housing stabilization services, nor was there any standardized set of tools to assess client needs and link households to the most appropriate resources. At the same time, prevention resources were scarce and narrowly targeted.

Local Systems Transformation Through HPRP

Active Outreach and Simplified Access: HPRP resources allowed Yolo County leaders to establish a coordinated county-wide system of prevention assistance and housing stabilization services through the development of HRCs in four major cities and in one rural town. The HRCs provide “one-stop” access to direct housing assistance and referrals to a wide range of services -- offered through each Housing Resource Center. Streamlined processes allow HRC staff to respond to client requests via appointment, drop-in, phone, e-mail.

Yolo County also set a specific goal of targeting people not historically connected to the traditional homeless service system of care. In turn, they have created an integrated service system that has multiple access points for all households that seek to engage new consumers through active outreach. Outreach is happening through mainstream services as well as the homeless service system.
**Innovation Through Housing Resource Centers:** HRCs build on a “one-stop” service model where all services and referrals are focused on stabilizing consumers’ housing. Yolo County’s HRCs offer financial assistance and relocation, housing counseling, utility assistance, credit repair and landlord mediation services. They also provide housing-retention supports such as tenancy skills workshops, financial counseling/money management workshops, and benefits assistance -- including a single-portal system which allows clients to apply for many different public benefits with one application. HRCs also provide representative payee and legal services, court-based eviction prevention, and referral of clients for housing stabilization services that include employment and vocational training, health care, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, family services and childcare.

**Coordinated Triage and Assessment Using HMIS:** A single tool assessing clients’ housing stability and identifying level of imminent risk for homelessness has been developed for Yolo County’s HRC network. Local agencies are using HMIS to input all client assessment data, as well as individualized housing and service plans.

**Individualized Case Management:** A uniform, and individualized, Housing and Service Plan is developed with households accepting HPRP financial assistance. The type and intensity of case management is based on the assessment of each household’s specific needs. Most HRC staff is also bi-lingual, and work closely with mainstream service staff to ensure that the referral process is both culturally competent and responsive.

**Client Data Guides Outreach and Evaluation:** Clients’ addresses and the types of services sought are tracked to identify high-risk communities and neighborhoods, target outreach efforts and guide new service development. HRC’s ability to track homelessness-risk, housing-related issues, services used, and resulting housing stability outcomes increases the efficiency and effectiveness of each Housing Resource Center.

**Key Features of Systems Change**

- **Network Collaboration:** In the context of significant state funding cuts, HPRP funds have allowed providers to increase the level and intensity of programmatic collaboration among existing housing-related prevention and stabilization services. This highly collaborative network supports evolving systems change with a wide range of resources so the system will not be entirely dependent upon maintaining the same level of funding for future services.

- **Increasing Alignment of Organizational Philosophies:** HRCs have standardized all housing and prevention activities in their regions, and participating agencies and front-line staff have developed a “no wrong door” model, and closer service partnerships. Moreover, HRC staff members now provide homeless prevention training to CoC providers, police agencies, schools, governmental offices, Housing Authorities, landlord-tenant services, Courts, Department of Corrections, hospitals, residential treatment facilities, and faith-based organizations. The trainings encourage these partners to turn to the HRC as their primary source of assistance for consumers in need of prevention and housing support.

- **Use of Data and Evaluation:** HMIS data is being used to identify key referral sources within each HRC, and to gauge the effectiveness of the linkages and/or HPRP assistance provided. HMIS-derived outcomes are being used to guide future planning for Yolo County’s network of HRCs now and after HPRP funds expire.

- **Reframing Ideas:** HPRP in Yolo County is helping to create broader public understanding and awareness of homelessness. It has drawn attention to the fact that one’s own neighbors, family, or friends are often at risk. Community trainings are also reframing community ideas on housing need and resources for all households.

**KEY LESSONS LEARNED**

- Housing Resource Centers can serve as key system hubs, streamlining referrals and more efficiently matching household need with service system supports.

- HMIS-based triage, referral and evaluation tools can improve system efficiencies, interagency coordination and community-wide planning.