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SNAPS In Focus: Partnering to End Homelessness in Rural America

One of the core tenets of *All Routes Home: Ending Homelessness in Rural America* – a national strategy to end rural homelessness [announced last August](#) – is **collaboration**. We can't end homelessness as individual organizations. It takes all of us working together.

Developing cross-system and cross-sector partnerships that are important for preventing and ending homelessness takes time and work in any community. But it is uniquely challenging in rural communities, where there are limited CoC staff (often 1 or 2 staff members) covering hundreds of miles over several counties or even the entire state and where there is often limited funding. As promised in *All Routes Home*, HUD and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) along with our other federal partners will do what we can to hear your challenges and develop resources to help you overcome them.

A good place to start developing these partnerships is to identify those entities in your community that are receiving federal resources (or could be receiving federal resources) that can help you address homelessness. The [Federal Funding Tool for Addressing Homelessness in Rural Communities](#) showcases these programs and can be searched to either 1) look up eligible entities who can receive funds or 2) find the types of eligible costs you need in your community. Armed with this information you can identify the partner who is already carrying out these activities or an agency to apply for these funds to bring a needed service to your community.

A second necessary strategy to develop these partnerships is to identify those private or faith-based organizations in your community that can help you address homelessness. The Community Action Partnership compiled several [examples of these partnerships with public and private organizations](#) that highlight how effective these partnerships can be in serving rural communities. Who you engage will depend upon the organizations in your geography, but as recommended in a [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs \(VA\) research brief](#), you will definitely want to include local landlords on your list if you haven't already, as they are vital to the process of ending homelessness. You will also want to be creative and think outside the box about potential partners and the types of resources they might be able to bring to the table. In all cases, though, you will want to be specific about your request and highlight the value that working with your organization will bring them.

Once partnerships have been developed and resources brought to the table, you will need to ensure you are using those resources as effectively and efficiently as possible, so they will serve as many people as they can. At the federal level we are working hard to provide toolkits and trainings to share how our resources can be effectively used. HUD's [Rural Gateway](#) acts as a clearinghouse for resources that address rural housing and economic development issues, including [case studies](#) on how rural communities have addressed housing, services, and economic development issues. But we know that we have more work to do on this.



And finally, we would be remiss if we didn't address one of the key challenges that rural areas face – limited staff capacity. Utilizing existing staff more effectively will only get you so far. We encourage you to think about the way other community partners can help you achieve your goals (and also highlight why partnership building is so important). Also, think about the role of remote services such as telemedicine and telepsychiatry in providing necessary services to program participants. This accomplishes two goals – 1) utilizing staff in other areas of the country or making better use of your own staff's time and 2) making it easier for program participants to receive services in areas of the country where transportation is known to be a challenge. But ultimately, more staff is typically needed, and for that you can consider recruiting [Americorps Volunteers in Service to America \(VISTA\)](#) members to serve in your community.

In closing, HUD and USICH are also working with a national group of stakeholders that are committed to ending homelessness in rural areas. Forming partnerships and collaborating is hard work and rural communities have unique hurdles to overcome. Even so, we see rural communities face these challenges head on and succeeding. We at HUD with our partners at USICH and other federal agencies will continue to work with you, the experts, and other national stakeholders to share successes, emerging practices, and tips to help you end homelessness in your community. Thank you for the work that you do.

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