



U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

The Keys to Strong Relationships Between Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and Continuums of Care (CoCs)

There are many reasons for Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) and Continuums of Care (CoCs) to partner. The 2021 American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act provides a significant rationale. The relief legislation granted nearly 700 PHAs with a total of \$5 billion in emergency housing vouchers (EHVs) for roughly 70,000 households. The ARP requires PHAs to partner with CoCs so people can access this federal assistance through systemwide coordinated entry.

What are the benefits of partnerships between PHAs and CoCs? USICH asked several communities with strong alliances, and here's what they said:

- “Some of our most vulnerable and chronically homeless are housed because of better collaborations and partnerships with the PHA.” – **Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara (California)**
- “Due to the strong relationships that have been built in Boulder County over time, they were able to move quickly to implement a plan and use the new emergency housing vouchers.” – **Metro Denver (Colorado) Homeless Initiative**
- “The CoC collaboration with PHA has enabled us to increase the amount of affordable housing stock to serve those experiencing homelessness. Our collaboration also helps us target our efforts related to landlord engagement and housing placements to improve program efficiency, flexibility, and streamline admission processes. This is essential as we implement HUD requirements, such as coordinated entry, HMIS data standard updates, and the EHV program.” – **City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**
- “Additional political will from our city and county, which then leads to additional projects and funding when opportunities arise.” – **City of Fresno, California**
- “Resources! We can't do our work without housing subsidies, and our local PHA is one of the largest providers in our community.” – **Austin (Texas) Ending Community Homelessness Coalition**
- “While CoC resources help our community get hundreds of people into housing each year, the Housing Authority administers many thousands of vouchers, far eclipsing our homeless-specific resources. Through great leadership and trusting relationships, suburban Cook County is targeting its housing resources to homelessness.” – **Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County (Illinois)**
- “Partnership means that we can keep each other informed and act swiftly when new opportunities come on board.” – **City of Tucson, Arizona**

What follows is four more takeaways from these conversations with PHA and CoC leaders around the country about what it takes to build and maintain a strong partnership:

Establish clear roles between the CoC and the PHA.

- In **Denver, Colorado**, the Boulder County PHAs actively collaborate with the CoC to refine local crisis response and homeless service systems to quickly move people experiencing homelessness to permanent housing with the support they need to remain stably housed. Achieving this goal involves intensive local planning and coordination. The PHAs provide housing resources for people exiting homelessness and participate in regular meetings and communication to track local progress.
- In **Fresno, California**, the PHA focuses on the development, placement, and management of affordable housing units. In contrast, the CoC focuses on providing wraparound services to ensure overall housing success. Both agencies look at themselves as parts of a single whole. The PHA prioritizes people experiencing homelessness and stepped up to be the CoC's collaborative applicant and the HMIS administrator.
- In **Tucson, Arizona**, the CoC identifies mutual pressure points to find mutual solutions. It's not about finger pointing but helping each other. If there are broader PHA management issues, the CoC talks with the leadership and commissioners. PHA expertise and CoC expertise are different. PHAs deal with housing policies, requirements, and permitting; CoCs provide services and care.
- In **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**, the CoC conducts verification about the households that meet the federal definition of homelessness prior to making referrals to PHA. This eliminates a potentially time-consuming administrative burden on the part of PHA staff members who may not have experience with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and associated regulations.

Set a homeless preference and coordinated entry system with the PHA.

- In **Cook County, Illinois**, mainstream vouchers and set-asides are filled through coordinated entry between their PHA and the CoC. Through an HMIS report that safely transmits a list of active, consented people experiencing homelessness, the CoC compares that list to their waitlists, prioritizing those who appear on both. Then the coordinated entry team activates the homeless providers serving those clients to help them complete the housing application and navigate their way through the process of getting a voucher.
- In **Denver, Colorado**, the three Boulder County PHAs are hiring a "move-on housing case manager" to help people transition from Permanent Supportive Housing to more independent housing through the PHAs' emergency housing vouchers. The PHAs identify households in need by participating in local case conferencing with the CoC and by building solid relationships with various local providers.
- In **Fresno, California**, the PHA has a limited homeless preference that's connected to their "move-on strategy." Additionally, a coordinated entry process is used, and there's a homeless preference when new affordable housing projects or new project-based vouchers become available.

Coordinate early, often, and with the right people.

- In **Cook County, Illinois**, the PHA participates in the CoC's HMIS and coordinated entry. The two entities share data quarterly and coordinate almost daily. PHA and CoC staff attend each other's board meetings. They established a routine process for referral and admission into HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH). The PHA issues HUD-VASH vouchers on a monthly basis with a mutual goal of housing veterans as quickly as possible.
- In **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**, the CoC and PHA coordinate on a systematic, weekly, or bi-weekly basis. In addition, the local Interagency Council serves as a formal space for communication, and the PHA is represented on their CoC Board and Intergovernmental Council to End Homelessness. PHA and CoC staff also informally connect often via email or phone about training opportunities, best practices, new ideas, and collaborations.
- In **Santa Barbara, California**, the CoC and PHA hold weekly calls with the larger coordinated entry system and a weekly call exclusively dealing with emergency housing vouchers. The CoC develops a relationship with the PHAs' executive directors, deputy directors, and directors of housing programs. If there are still issues with the partnership, the CoC reaches out to the chair of the PHA governing board.
- In **Fresno, California**, the PHA's senior management serves on the CoC's Executive Committee. The PHA encourages local leaders with authority to appoint CoC board members and PHA commissioners to consider whether appointees have the requisite expertise and focus on people experiencing homelessness.

Understand PHA regulations – and limitations.

- In **Fresno, California**, the more CoC leadership understands the regulations and standards that PHAs must follow, the better the two agencies can work together. For example, CoC leadership can explain and offer their expertise in case management, transportation, and inspections, which would allow the PHA to focus on ensuring and sustaining a high utilization rate of vouchers and other rental assistance.
- In **Cook County, Illinois**, CoCs do their homework, talk to experts, and read HUD guidance on what PHAs can and cannot do to support the homeless cause. PHAs must manage competing priorities from many community advocates, and the regulations they work within are substantial. It takes not just good intentions but strong technical expertise to solve problems together.
- In **Tucson, Arizona**, the CoC kept saying, "we need vouchers," and the PHA kept saying, "we must adhere to various regulations around the vouchers." Both were true, and now they strive to find the mutual benefit. Each agency needs to understand the other. When that happens, the PHA gets more empathetic, and the CoC understands the rationale behind the bureaucracy.

[Contact your local PHA.](#)

[Contact your local CoC.](#)