



# U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness

## *Council Chair Responsibilities*

### **Purpose**

This document is intended to provide background on the mission of USICH, the structure of the council, and opportunities for the chair to leverage their role to advance progress toward ending homelessness.

### **Introduction to the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)**

USICH was created by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 (renamed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in 2000) and most recently reauthorized through the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009. Recognizing that solutions to homelessness cut across federal, state, and local jurisdictions, Congress charged USICH with building a robust interagency, cross-sector approach to preventing and ending homelessness. USICH coordinates the implementation of a federal strategic plan, strengthens the capacity of state agencies and community-based organizations, and provides expert guidance and support to member agencies' homelessness-related activities.

USICH is led by an executive director and guided by a council comprised of leaders from 19 federal departments and agencies. Per USICH's authorizing statute, members of the council must be secretaries/agency heads or their designees. The council meets quarterly and elects a chair and vice chair every year from among five principal agencies: Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Labor (DOL), and Department of Education (ED). At the end of each term, the vice chair typically rotates to the chair role, and the chair becomes past chair. A discussion regarding designation of office should usually begin in the fall, near the start of the new fiscal year (October 1<sup>st</sup>).

### **Council Chair Responsibilities**

The chair is responsible for being knowledgeable about USICH's federal strategic plan as well as convening quarterly council meetings, presiding over those meetings, and ensuring the council collectively performs its functions and duties. The chair sets the final agenda for each meeting after considering recommendations from the vice chair and executive director.

The chair develops and implements a process to annually evaluate the performance of the executive director, with input from the vice chair and other members of the council, as requested by the chair. Evaluation of the executive director's performance shall follow assessment guidelines established for the USICH executive director position.

The chair, in consultation with members of the council, may establish additional standing or ad hoc committees; redefine their purposes and responsibilities; or abolish existing committees.

The chair has a unique opportunity to provide the necessary leadership to promote cross-system collaboration, to increase communities' understanding of the importance and distinct purposes of federal resources for homelessness, and to help communities use data and evidence-based practices to connect people experiencing homelessness with housing and homeless assistance. The chair can strengthen their agency's efforts to address homelessness and provide leadership on preventing and ending homelessness by:

- Publicly supporting the federal strategic plan and highlighting areas of increased focus;
- Highlighting interagency efforts of the council to strengthen partnerships between housing and homelessness services and the chair's agency during community and program visits as part of official travel;
- Incorporating messages on homelessness within appropriate remarks and speeches, social media, and other public events where the chair can reinforce federal priorities and strategies for ending homelessness; and
- Directly engaging other council members to involve them with collaborative efforts, as needed.

## **Preparation for Council Meetings**

The council meeting will take place virtually for the foreseeable future until it's safe to resume in-person meetings. Virtual council meetings will be held on the USICH platform or the council chair's platform. Materials for the meeting are typically sent one week prior to council meetings. A typical agenda includes:

### **a. Welcome, Opening Remarks, and Introductions**

### **b. Report from the Executive Director**

This is an opportunity for the USICH executive director to present a semi-annual progress report, or progress of work to date, on the federal strategic plan and statutory obligations. The executive director will highlight key interagency accomplishments, updates, and opportunities to drive progress moving forward. If data from ED and HUD are available, the council meeting is also an opportunity to preview measures of homelessness.

### **c. Policy Topic #1**

Policy topics are brought by staff to council leadership, are traditionally aligned with the federal strategic plan, and are grounded in data and evidence-based practices. The discussions typically surround strategies that can impact local systems, opportunities to discuss mainstream programs that aren't specifically targeted to people experiencing homelessness, and ways to strengthen the federal government's ability to prevent housing crises and homelessness.

All council members will also be asked to discuss possible actions that their agencies might take to increase community capacity and strengthen practices to prevent housing crises and homelessness. The chair is strongly encouraged to discuss actions they or their agency can implement in support of this work.

### **d. Policy Topic #2**

### **e. Agency Updates**

This is an opportunity for the agencies to provide key updates on their efforts to address homelessness and for the chair to highlight their agency's current efforts with USICH or other council member agencies to address homelessness.

### **f. Closing Remarks and Adjournment**