A Proposal & FAQs for Cross CoC Evaluation of the Implementation of Housing First Practices

A Proposal: Teams of at least three people from one Triangle Continuum of Care (CoC) would evaluate the implementation of Housing First standards in an organization receiving CoC funds in a neighboring CoC.

1. **What is Housing First?** Housing First is a national best practice model that quickly and successfully connects individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing without preconditions such as sobriety, treatment compliance, and service and/or income requirements. Projects offer supportive services to maximize housing stability to prevent returns to homelessness.

2. **Why Evaluate Housing First implementations?** The goal of homeless housing systems is to make experiences of homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) encourages CoCs to implement and strengthen Housing First implementation throughout the CoC in order to achieve this goal. Evaluating how well organizations and projects are implementing Housing First best practice standards hopefully would improve the Housing First implementations in the CoC and lead to reductions in the length of time households experience homelessness and reductions in returns to homelessness. Projects that are shown to have strong and successful Housing First implementations would serve as models within the CoC and throughout the Triangle for other projects which may be weaker in their Housing First implementation.

3. **Why "Cross CoC Evaluation"?** Sending evaluation teams from one CoC to a neighboring CoC would increase the impartiality and objectivity of the evaluations. Evaluators would be less likely to bring previous knowledge and awareness of an organization and project into the evaluation than if the evaluators were from within the same CoC. There also would be less reason/temptation to inflate evaluation scores as evaluators ordinarily would have little contact with the organization and project after the evaluation is completed.

4. **Which projects and organization would be evaluated?** CoC-funded Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing projects would be evaluated. Organizations that contribute staff and/or volunteers (preferably a team of 3) to participate in the evaluation of a project in a neighboring CoC would have their own project(s) evaluated by a visiting team.

5. **What Tool would be used for the Evaluation?** The "Housing First Standards Assessment Tool" would be used. HUD developed this tool to support and encourage CoCs and providers to implement and strengthen Housing First practices. It is used by CoCs throughout the nation to evaluate Housing First implementation.

6. **What would the Evaluation process be?** The process would consist of the following steps:
   a. Goals are to form at least six teams of at least three people with each of the three Triangle CoCs forming at least two teams and to evaluate at least one CoC-funded RRH and one PSH project in each CoC. Prospective team members could be from the CoC-funded organizations (their staff, Board, and volunteers), the CoC Board, CoC evaluation and/or ranking committees, CoC Lead Agency staff, and CoC membership. Staff in each CoC would be responsible for recruiting and forming teams within their CoC.
   b. Teams would be oriented and trained in the use of the Housing First Standards Assessment Tool by CoC Lead Agency staff.
   c. Teams would be responsible for choosing a "Team Lead" from among themselves.
   d. Teams would be randomly assigned to one participating project & organization in a neighboring CoC by CoC Lead Agency staff. The Team Lead would be provided contact information for the assigned project.
   e. The Team Lead would make contact with the assigned project & request electronic copies of the project's Policies & Procedures (P&P) of the project and any other organizational documents relevant to the Housing First implementation.

f. Upon receipt by the Team Lead, the P&P and other documents would be distributed to the team. The first evaluation step would be for the team members to evaluate how well the P&P and other documents provide written evidence/documentation that supports the project's compliance with each Housing First standard.

g. The Team Lead would then coordinate the scheduling of a Site Visit, preferably in person, to the organization & project with the team members and the organization's project implementation team. The Site Visit would have two components:

    i. A dialogue with the project's implementation team through which the evaluation team would seek to determine how well the project implementation team can verbally describe what they do to implement each standard and how well the standards are actually being implemented.

    ii. A dialogue with a "Focus Group" of project participants through which the evaluation team would seek to determine how well the standards are actually being implemented in the project. (The project implementation team would be responsible for recruiting Focus Group participants.)

h. Following the Site Visit, the team would meet, virtually or in person, to finalize its scores on the Housing First Standards Assessment Tool.

i. The final completed Housing First Standards Assessment Tool would then be forwarded by the Team Lead to the CoC Lead Agency of the applicable CoC and the organization's Executive Director or Chief Exec. Officer.

j. CoC Lead Agency staff would conduct an evaluation of the process upon the completion of all Evaluations. The evaluation of the process would be shared with the participating organizations and the CoC Boards.

7. **What is the proposed Timeline for the completion of this Evaluation?** Upon approval of this process by the CoC Boards, we envision beginning the team recruitment and formation process in the third quarter of calendar year 2022. Team training and orientation would be conducted after the completion of the 2022 CoC Homeless Grants competition. Evaluations of the projects would occur in the fourth quarter of 2022 and/or the first quarter of 2023.

8. **How many hours will Evaluation Teams be expected to contribute to this process?** We expect that participating team members may spend a total of eight to ten hours as part of an evaluation process over 1-3 months in the following activities: Orientation to the Housing First Standards Assessment Tool (.5 to 1 hour), organization of the team and review of the project's Policies & Procedures and other relevant documents (2 hours), team preparation for a Site Visit (.5 hours), Site Visit (3 hours, not including any needed travel), team preparation of final Assessment findings (1-2 hours), evaluation of the process (.5 hours). These estimates do not include additional activity required of the Team Lead, e.g. making contact with the project being evaluated, scheduling virtual or in-person meetings, etc.

9. **How will the results of the Evaluations be used?** How the Evaluations are used by the organizations and projects evaluated will be up to the leadership of those organizations and projects. A hope is that projects that do not score as well as they would like would consider what changes to their policies and practices would strengthen their Housing First implementation. How the Evaluations are used by each of the CoCs will be determined by the CoC.

10. **What incentives/benefits are there for projects and organizations to participate in this process?** We hope that projects and organizations that are committed to Housing First would welcome this opportunity to have an impartial, trained team evaluate how well the project is implementing Housing First best practices. Members of the Evaluation Team would benefit from learning how a project in a neighboring CoC is implementing Housing First best practices. The individual CoCs and Lead Agencies would determine how the results of the Evaluations contribute to the ratings and rankings of CoC-funded projects in the 2023 CoC Homeless Grants competition and will strengthen the monitoring component among CoCs' required activities.

11. **Will this Evaluation process be conducted annually in the future?** That decision will be made by the CoC Boards after this first pilot process has been completed. The CoCs may decide to make this a part of the annual process of rating and ranking CoC funded projects. Biannual or triannual processes also are options. ESG funded and other projects also could be included in future processes, according to the decisions of the CoC Boards.