



Fredericksburg Regional Continuum of Care

Strategic Plan 2021-2023

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I. Organizational Background

The Fredericksburg Regional Continuum of Care (CoC) is the network of community organizations and individuals working together to prevent and end homelessness in the City of Fredericksburg and the counties of Caroline, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford. The CoC is governed by the CoC Board, which is elected by the full CoC membership, and staffed by the George Washington Regional Commission. The CoC coordinates the community's homeless services through a single homelessness response system.

The CoC is federally mandated, and responsible for fulfilling the requirements outlined in 24 CFR § 578.7: Responsibilities of the Continuum of Care.

II. Local Definition of Ending Homelessness

In May 2017, the CoC adopted the following local definition of ending homelessness. This is the ultimate goal of the CoC, and is reflected throughout this strategic plan.

The CoC will have ended homelessness when the homelessness response system is right sized to ensure that all persons experiencing homeless have a path to permanent housing.

Specifically, it means:

- *Identifying all persons experiencing homelessness*
- *Providing immediate access to shelter for anyone experiencing unsheltered homelessness*
- *Ensuring that all persons experiencing homelessness have the opportunity to move back into permanent housing within 30 days of becoming homeless*
- *Preventing new episodes of homelessness whenever possible*

III. The CoC's Strategic Planning Process

A. Process Overview

The CoC's strategic planning process began in August 2019 when the CoC hired Amy Nisenson, consultant, through a Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) capacity building grant to work with the staff and CoC members to update the 10 Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness (2014-2023). The new strategic plan covers the last three years of the 10 years, from 2021-2023.

Amy partnered with Susan Hallett, a consultant with extensive experience working with the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care, to assist in this work. Amy and Susan's work included the review of the original 10 Year Plan to determine what might need to be carried forward for the next three years, a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis and findings report, a competitive edge analysis, a new three-year strategic plan, and an implementation plan. The CoC's mission statement was updated, and a vision statement and core values were developed for the first time. New goals, objectives, and strategies and a glossary of terms were also developed.

The strategic planning process began with a confidential survey in October 2019 that provided feedback from 35 CoC members, including board members, committee members, providers, grantees, and referring partners. All CoC members were invited to participate in the survey. The survey identified

strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as they related to critical issues to be carried into the updated strategic plan. Following the compilation of the survey, a findings report was created and shared at the CoC Board retreat.

In addition to the survey, four consumer input sessions with individuals with lived experience of homelessness were held in January 2020.

In November 2019, the CoC Board held a retreat to kick off the strategic planning effort. At the retreat, the Board revised the CoC's mission, developed a vision, and began to draft values statements. In addition, the CoC Board reviewed the role of a Continuum of Care as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 24 CFR § 578.7. During this review, the Board discussed whether the CoC is fulfilling the responsibilities as mandated by HUD and if there were areas that needed to be added, restructured, or improved. This review informed the development of the goals, objectives, and strategies as outlined in this strategic plan. The CoC Board also identified individuals to serve on the Strategic Planning Steering Committee.

The Strategic Planning Steering Committee met three times between January and March 2020 to create the key goals and objectives for the plan and provide input on the strategies. It was determined that the updated plan would include three main goals. The goals were grouped to include a system goal, an operational goal, and a community goal. The system goal includes the coordinated entry system, the Homelessness Helpline, the housing prioritization process and all of the functions that make the homelessness response system effective. The operational goal encompasses the governance structure, including committees, policies, and procedures, as well as the resources needed to support the operations of the CoC, such as funding and staff. This goal also includes data, reporting, and evaluation to ensure ongoing compliance with state and federal regulations and to determine appropriate responsiveness and improvements to the CoC's work. The third goal is a community goal that speaks to education, participation, and advocacy of the work of the CoC throughout the region and ensuring that the CoC is seen as the community leader and subject matter expert on homelessness.

Amy and Susan worked with CoC staff to finalize the strategies for each objective, based on the feedback from the Strategic Planning Steering Committee. The goals and objectives were presented to the full CoC membership in April 2020. Following this, the draft plan was posted for public comment.

Once the public comment period was complete, Amy and Susan worked with CoC staff to create an implementation plan, which included identification of the responsible party, measurement, and timeline for each goal, objective, and strategy. The implementation plan also identifies budgetary implications of the plan.

The CoC Board adopted this strategic plan on June 25, 2020.

In accordance with the CoC's bylaws, the CoC Board will review this plan and provide a progress report to the full membership at least annually. Each standing committee will develop an annual action plan in the first quarter of the year that will guide the work of the committee for the year. Annual action plans will be approved by the CoC Board to ensure alignment with the CoC's strategic plan. Final work products, policies, decisions, and reports of each standing committee will be approved by the CoC Board.

B. Partner Survey Results

A survey was circulated to all CoC members, and the CoC received responses from 35 stakeholders. The survey asked a series of eight questions ranging from what the respondent saw as the role of the CoC to what goals from the 2014 strategic plan were still relevant and which had the CoC made progress on. In addition, the survey asked stakeholders what the CoC's top priorities should be for the next five years. The results of the survey and the CoC Board's take-aways from the results were incorporated into the goals, objectives, and strategies of this plan.

Key takeaways included the following:

- **Role of CoC:** There is understanding of the CoC's role as the applicant for federal and state funding, as well as the convening partner and entity responsible for communicating information. In addition, the CoC is seen as the entity that sets the strategic priorities for the homelessness response system and the place for data analysis.
- **Top Priorities for the Next Five Years:** The CoC should continue to work on coordinating systems within the CoC. There is a need to offer better referral to services for clients, to better manage community education, and to continue to diversify funding for the CoC.

C. Consumer Input Sessions Results

Amy, Susan, and Christian Zammis conducted four consumer input sessions, at Loisann's Hope House, Micah Ministries, Empowerhouse, and Thurman Brisben Center. Twenty-two total consumers participated in these input sessions. Feedback was compiled and shared with the Strategic Planning Steering Committee, and major themes were incorporated into the goals, objectives and strategies of the plan.

Key takeaways included the following:

- **Shelter Access:** There is confusion about how to access shelter via the Homelessness Helpline and lack of clarity around the referral and prioritization process for shelter. Transportation is an issue for many in getting to shelters, between service providers, and to job sites.
- **Prevention:** Consumers were not made aware of available prevention resources (funding or support services) when they called the Homelessness Helpline.
- **Moving from Shelter to Housing:** Consumers appreciated that all providers met basic needs, but felt that in order to move out of homelessness and into permanent housing, it takes self-advocacy, familiarizing yourself with the resources available, and learning who to talk to. There was general confusion about how clients are prioritized for housing. Many mentioned the importance of employment services, financial counseling, and budgeting assistance, and asked for more.
- **Consumer Suggestions:** Consumers suggested improved access to mental health services to address the grief and trauma associated with homelessness. Consumers suggested revising resource sheets to make sure they are up to date, easy to understand, and accessible at many different locations.

IV. Strategic Plan

This strategic plan will guide the CoC from 2021-2023, the final three years of its 10 Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness, which was adopted in 2014.

A. Vision

A compassionate, thriving community where all people have access to a place to call home.

B. Mission

Prevent and end homelessness by developing, supporting, and promoting a coordinated system of human services and housing opportunities in the Greater Fredericksburg Region.

C. Core Values

The work of the CoC will be guided by our commitment to these core values. The CoC will uphold these values in our work and promote them throughout the community. These values represent what we believe in, what we stand for, and how we approach everything we do.

Collaboration: We value trust and transparency and are committed to working together as a system.

Accessibility: We strive to create a system that is equitable, inclusive, welcoming, and easy to navigate.

Respectful: We are committed to maintaining a non-judgmental environment centered on thoughtfulness and understanding.

Effectiveness: We aim for continuous improvement informed by best practices and driven by evidence-based decisions.

D. Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

The CoC has identified three goals, each with its own set of objectives and strategies.

Goal 1 (System Goal): Achieve a housing-focused homelessness response system that is comprehensive and effective.

Goal 2 (Operational Goal): Strengthen the internal operations of the CoC to effectively support community strategies that address homelessness.

Goal 3 (Community Goal): Enhance the CoC's role as the community leader and subject matter expert on homelessness.

Goal 1: Achieve a housing-focused homelessness response system that is comprehensive, effective, and equitable.

Objective 1.1: Refine the coordinated entry system so that it is accessible and understandable for those seeking services.

Strategy 1.1.1: Enhance marketing of the Homelessness Helpline.

Strategy 1.1.2: Enhance outreach to those least likely to connect with services.

Strategy 1.1.3: Ensure a consistent understanding and comprehensive approach to diversion across the homelessness response system.

Strategy 1.1.4: Refine the process for effectively prioritizing people seeking homelessness response system services.

Strategy 1.1.5: Develop stronger relationships with mainstream resources to ensure warm hand-offs.

Objective 1.2: Enhance the functions of the homelessness response system.

Strategy 1.2.1: Ensure homelessness response system providers have access to information, training, and education on best practices.

Strategy 1.2.2: Develop community standards for each program type.

Strategy 1.2.3: Support homelessness response system providers in meeting program and system standards by providing technical assistance.

Strategy 1.2.4: Formalize partnerships among homelessness response system providers and with the CoC.

Objective 1.3: Ensure homelessness response system effectiveness and equity through regular evaluation and monitoring.

Strategy 1.3.1: Develop a process for regular project, program, and system evaluation that includes regular client feedback.

Strategy 1.3.2: Develop a process for regular monitoring of project compliance.

Strategy 1.3.3: Develop a process for sharing evaluation and monitoring results and improvement strategies with appropriate stakeholders.

Objective 1.4: Coordinate the work of the CoC with other systems that intersect with the homelessness response system.

Strategy 1.4.1: Engage representatives of other systems, such as healthcare, criminal justice, education, and transportation, in the work of the CoC.

Strategy 1.4.2: Formalize the discharge planning process for those at risk of homelessness.

Goal 2: Strengthen the internal operations of the CoC to effectively support community strategies that address homelessness.

Objective 2.1: Support a governance structure that has robust policies and diverse and representative participation.

Strategy 2.1.1: Ensure that the CoC's members, board, committees, and working groups have broad community participation.

Strategy 2.1.2: Maintain and enhance CoC governing documents, such as bylaws and policies and procedures.

Strategy 2.1.3: Ensure the governance structure and work of the CoC are aligned with the CoC's strategic plan.

Objective 2.2: Sustain and build adequate resources to support CoC operations and the homelessness response system.

Strategy 2.2.1: Seek additional funding and other resources to build staff capacity.

Strategy 2.2.2: Intentionally engage volunteer leadership to support CoC staff and priorities.

Strategy 2.2.3: Ensure the CoC remains competitive for state and federal funding.

Strategy 2.2.4: Identify non-traditional funding sources to allow more flexibility in service delivery.

Objective 2.3: Use data to guide decision-making and planning.

Strategy 2.3.1: Ensure data collection by funded and non-funded homelessness response system providers, through HMIS, a comparable database, or other methods.

Strategy 2.3.2: Develop a process for regular reporting of project, program, and system data to appropriate stakeholders.

Strategy 2.3.3: Continue to use data to inform CoC funding decisions, as outlined in the CoC's Funding Policies and Procedures.

Strategy 2.3.4: Formalize the process for an annual gap analysis that includes racial disparity analysis to determine homelessness response system improvement needs.

Goal 3: Enhance the CoC's role as the community leader and subject matter expert on homelessness.

Objective 3.1: Encourage a common understanding of the role of the CoC and the homelessness response system.

Strategy 3.1.1: Empower CoC members to be ambassadors of the CoC within the community.

Strategy 3.1.2: Promote the CoC to increase engagement and encourage partnerships.

Strategy 3.1.3: Educate community partners and other stakeholders on the homelessness response system and the role of the CoC.

Objective 3.2: Support, participate in, and advocate in strategic community efforts that impact homelessness.

Strategy 3.2.1: Support and participate in community efforts related to affordable housing, transportation, racial equity, and other topics impacting homelessness.

Strategy 3.2.2: Advocate for the needs of those served by the homelessness response system, as it relates to public policy.

V. Glossary of Terms

CoC Member: an organization or individual that has formally applied to be a member of the CoC

Community Partner: an organization or individual who has an interest in and works with the CoC to improve the outcomes of the homelessness response system

Coordinated Assessment: the initial screening performed to identify a participant's immediate needs and assess eligibility for emergency services, including emergency shelter, prevention, or specialized services (e.g. veteran or domestic violence services)

Coordinated Entry System: the CoC process that ensures all people experiencing a housing crisis have fair and equal access to services and are quickly identified, assessed, and connected to housing and assistance based on their strengths and needs

Evaluation: assessment of the performance and effectiveness of the homelessness response system, a program type, and/or a project

Gap Analysis: evaluation of the capacity, utilization, performance, and costs of the CoC's homelessness response system to determine system improvement needs

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): the information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness

Homelessness Response System: the CoC's service delivery system, which is comprised of coordinated assessment, outreach, prevention, emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and housing location

Homelessness Response System Provider: an organization that provides coordinated assessment, outreach, prevention, emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and/or housing location on behalf of the CoC

Mainstream Resources: all other community assistance options outside of the CoC's homelessness response system (e.g. assistance through the Department of Social Services, United Way, Salvation Army, etc.)

Monitoring: assessment of a project's compliance with applicable federal, state, local, and/or CoC requirements

Program: a type of service offered by the homelessness response system (i.e. coordinated assessment, outreach, prevention, emergency shelter, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and housing location programs)

Project: a specific organization's implementation of a homelessness response system program (e.g. Agency A's rapid re-housing project)

VI. Acknowledgements

This strategic plan is the culmination of many hours of work by the Fredericksburg Regional Continuum of Care's board, committees, membership, and staff. Their input and expertise were invaluable to the process and content of the plan. The CoC extends its gratitude to these individuals and organizations, and looks forward to working in partnership towards the goals outlined in the plan.

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