

A Report on the Homeless Policy Academies National Learning Meeting: Executive Summary

Introduction

Since 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Labor sponsored five Policy Academies on chronic homelessness, two Policy Academies on homeless families and children and three mini Policy Academies on both. To date, 52 of the 56 States and Territories have participated.

Designed to help State and local policymakers improve access to mainstream services for people who are homeless, the Policy Academies objectives are to:

- Assist State and local policymakers in developing an Action Plan intended to improve access to mainstream health, human services, employment, and housing opportunities
- Create and reinforce relationships among key stakeholders
- Provide an environment conducive to the process of strategic decision-making
- Provide technical assistance to support action plan implementation.

After States and Territories had an opportunity to implement portions of their action plans and to track the outcomes, two or three members from each team were brought back to a meeting in Washington, DC, in October 2004. The objectives of the National Learning Meeting were to:

- Showcase innovative approaches that States and Territories have implemented
- Provide opportunities for peer-to-peer technical assistance
- Renew the States' and Territories' commitment to fully implementing their action plans.

The highly successful meeting included 200 participants, representing 55 of the 56 States and Territories; Federal agency partners; public and private organizations addressing homelessness; and TA contractors.

Concurrent and Regional Breakout Sessions: Challenges and Successful Strategies

In order to highlight the promising practices in the States and Territories and provide opportunities for peer-to-peer sharing, the National Learning Meeting included 16 breakout sessions featuring State and Territory presenters. Focusing on six general topics commonly identified within State and Territory action plans and follow-up outcome calls, the 90-minute breakout sessions featured brief presentations by two States or Territories to set the stage, followed by a facilitated discussion among participants about the challenges and solutions within their region. With the help of skilled facilitators and note takers, State and Territory representatives considered strategies for addressing homelessness, barriers or obstacles they encountered, breakthroughs that helped to overcome the barriers, and suggestions for what would help to move the process forward at the State and Federal levels.

The State and Territory representatives also broke into six regional groups to identify the key Federal- and State-level barriers and challenges they encountered while implementing their Policy Academy action plans. Participants considered existing solutions for addressing these barriers and developed potential new approaches for overcoming them. During the regional discussions, common themes emerged that were also emphasized throughout the concurrent sessions. The following table highlights the common topical areas, challenges, and creative strategies discussed by States and Territories in both the State-led concurrent and regional breakout sessions.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE CONCURRENT AND REGIONAL BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Increasing Coordination and Collaboration and Engaging Partners in Solutions

<i>Breakout session topic and presenting State or Territory</i>	<i>Challenges identified in concurrent and regional sessions</i>	<i>Strategies identified in concurrent and regional sessions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating Effective Collaboration Mechanisms (Kentucky, Nebraska) • Promoting Coordination (North Carolina, New Jersey) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty maintaining momentum due to political changes, turf issues, and budget cuts • Difficulty coordinating planning activities due to multiple plans and unique regional issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the work of Policy Academy Teams by integrating planning activities, identifying quick successes, and using data effectively • Enhancing partnerships by reaching out to new stakeholders, tailoring the message, and exploring funding options

Increasing Access to Significant Mainstream System Resources

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing Mainstream Services: SSI and SSDI Eligibility and Application (Oklahoma, Washington) • Accessing Mainstream Services: Broader Access Issues (Arizona, Florida) • Expanding Mainstream Service Coverage: Medicaid (Delaware, Maine) • Expanding Mainstream Service Coverage: TANF and Other (New York, Oregon) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty negotiating eligibility restrictions; cumbersome application processes; budget shortfalls; and challenges in linking services to housing • Difficulty getting mainstream service providers to the table to address homelessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering presumptive eligibility and creating single application forms • Tapping into existing infrastructure (e.g., creating cooperative agreements to provide ID or working with Access to Recovery programs to provide services) • Collaborating with Departments of Employment; Veterans Affairs; Disability Services; and Corrections to coordinate services and explore funding options
--	---	---

Addressing Gaps In and Supply of (Affordable) Housing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple Financing Streams (Maine, Nebraska) • Multiple Financing Streams (Massachusetts, Georgia) • Strategies for Addressing Rural Homelessness (Kansas, Kentucky) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited supply of and access to housing stock • Lack of collaboration with key stakeholders • Lack of resources to address rural housing issues • Lack of services to help maintain housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximizing existing and creating new housing stock through set asides and by partnering with developers; landlords; and Public Housing Authorities • Exploring funding opportunities (e.g., housing trust funds and low income tax credits)
--	--	--

Prevention and Discharge Planning

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention Innovations (Illinois, Massachusetts) • Discharge Policies: Implementation, Challenges and Success (Colorado, Missouri) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty engaging partners • Difficulty proving effectiveness of activities • Restrictive definitions that exclude populations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating buy-in by collecting data, highlighting outcomes, and engaging in state-wide advocacy • Preventing housing loss by linking services to housing and using bridge subsidies and flexible funds • Using requirements to create policy change
---	--	--

Documenting the Problem and Integrating Data Systems

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless Management Information Systems (Arkansas, New Jersey) • Informing Public Policy with Data (Arizona, Hawaii) • Data Collection (Colorado, Montana) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty documenting homelessness due to lack of data and of culturally and regionally appropriate data elements and collection tools • Difficulty utilizing, coordinating, and supporting data reporting systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collecting qualitative and quantitative data from various sources (including mainstream services) • Using data to identify gaps and funding strategies • Integrating data collection efforts through Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS)
--	--	---

Increasing Public Education and Awareness

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining Momentum (Hawaii, Maryland) • Mounting a Public Awareness Campaign (Puerto Rico, Utah) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance and lack of public awareness • Lack of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching public awareness campaigns; conducting public hearings; and educating legislators • Using tax return check-offs and foundation support
---	--	---

The Listening Session: What Would Help Teams Move Forward

States and Territories had a unique opportunity in the Listening Session to provide direct feedback to the Federal funding partners. All four Deputy Assistant Secretaries were in attendance to introduce themselves and their agency, listen to the points raised by the States and Territories, and then comment on their agencies' relevant activities during the closing session. For the presentation, the regional breakout session facilitators and note takers compiled a summary of the "What Would Help" notes from each regional breakout group to outline the issues that States and Territories wanted to emphasize for the Federal partners. The following section outlines the six primary themes and highlights several concrete strategies for each category.

1. Increasing collaboration among Federal, State, and Territory partners
 - Assisting States with plan implementation by sharing Policy Academy outcomes and materials; providing more guidance about how to integrate multiple plans and councils at the State level; providing funding for a staff person to coordinate plan implementation; and connecting States and Territories experiencing similar (specific) issues.
 - Increasing coordination at the Federal level by creating common data elements, funding streams, and definitions for homelessness; creating a Federal interagency strategic plan; coordinating the Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) and Policy Academy processes at the Federal and regional levels; and re-evaluating Federal goals in the context of lessons learned through this process.
2. Engaging partners in solutions
 - Involving additional partners such as Veterans Affairs; Social Security Administration; Department of Labor and Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs); Departments of Justice and Corrections; Governors and the National Governor's Association; Legislators; community-based organizations; and faith-based communities.
 - Maximizing peer-to-peer learning by hosting regional homeless summits to bring States and Territories together.
3. Supporting different approaches to meet varying need
 - Tailoring assistance for rural areas by conducting research to document effectiveness of rural models; regionalizing funding, planning, and delivery of services and housing; and providing resources for planning and capacity building.
 - Tailoring assistance for Territories by addressing differential funding levels; building relationships with regional Federal representatives; adding staff at the Federal level who understand the cultural, social, and political contexts; and providing funding to start programs.
4. Addressing gaps in and supply of (affordable) housing stock
 - Increasing funding for housing by providing funds for operation and supportive services, not simply housing; and investing in provider capacity to access resources and develop housing.
 - Maximizing resources by involving Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) in the change process; fully utilizing Section 8; using the Continuum of Care process as an organizing force; and integrating all HUD mainstream and homeless planning and reporting functions into one plan.
5. Increasing access to mainstream system resources
 - Enhancing coordination and instituting policy changes by creating universal application and eligibility processes for all Federal programs; expanding presumptive disability for people who are homeless; creating State and Territory mandates to set aside resources for homelessness; and

mandating that publicly-funded institutions cannot discharge to homelessness (and putting funding behind the mandate).

- Expanding capacity by providing income supports and housing options for people with primary substance abuse diagnosis; instituting a Medicaid waiver to serve homeless people; providing universal health insurance coverage; and disseminating best practice models.

6. Integrating data systems and reporting requirements

- Creating uniform data collection by mandating mainstream services to collect data on housing status; enhancing compatibility of Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) with mainstream data systems; providing funding and staff support for HMIS; and developing performance measures to evaluate whether access to mainstream resources is increased.
- Improving use of data as a planning tool by creating a cross-walk of all Federal programs and funding; thinking strategically about the use of technology and potential barriers; and sharing strategies for using data to identify needs, make a case, and show cost savings.

Meeting Evaluations and Recommendations

By asking participants to assess the meeting content and format and to identify their learning and intentions, the evaluations provided valuable feedback to guide future meeting development and for potential technical assistance activities. The following section highlights some of the findings.

- **Useful and effective aspects:** The format of the peer-to-peer learning sessions received the majority of positive comments from National Learning Meeting participants. State and Territory participants also reported that the regional breakout sessions provided an opportunity to discuss common barriers and solutions, helping them to recognize that their challenges were necessarily unique and that breakthroughs are possible.
- **Issues requiring more guidance or information:** States and Territories that were smaller, rural, or experiencing severe budget constraints felt that their unique issues required more attention. It was also suggested that the follow-up technical assistance available to States could be used to address some of the issues related to employment, TANF, HMIS, and prevention strategies that were specifically mentioned.
- **New ideas and future action steps:** Throughout the evaluations, attendees expressed a sense of inspiration from listening to the successful strategies endorsed by their peers. Many left with new ideas about collaboration and partnerships; data collection and integration; utilizing presumptive eligibility for SSI or SSDI; and addressing housing challenges. The majority of the priority actions identified by participants involved reinvigorating their Teams either with new members, the institution of an Interagency Council, or a renewed commitment to involve policy makers and Governors. Also mentioned was the integration of multiple State plans from Interagency Councils, Continuums of Care, or the Chronic and Families with Children Policy Academies.

Many State and Territory participants expressed a desire to continue to meet with Federal partners perhaps at Regional or State levels to discuss ways to overcome some of the challenges identified during the listening session.

Please note: The full report outlines the planning process for the National Learning Meeting and includes the detailed findings from the concurrent breakout sessions and regional breakout sessions; the presentation from the listening session; and the meeting evaluation results. Specific session presentations can be accessed on the Homeless Policy Academy Web site: www.hrsa.gov/homeless.