

Creating an Effective Governance Charter

One of the requirements of the Continuum of Care (CoC) is to establish a governance charter in consultation with the collaborative applicant and the HMIS Lead. The governance charter should outline all of the functions and responsibilities assigned by the CoC to the Board, committees, the HMIS Lead, the Lead Agency staff, as well as the process for reviewing and amending the charter.

This tool can help CoC's evaluate their governance charter to ensure they are not only meeting all of the required elements, but that they have designed an effective and sustainable governance model with a strong leadership structure (which is clearly outlined in their charter).

By adopting a strong leadership and governance structure, CoC's can:

- ✓ Confirm that the "vision and values" which guide the CoC towards the goal of ending homelessness **ALIGN** with and are **SUPPORTED** by the structure of the governing body of the CoC.
- ✓ Create a formalized governance model that includes an efficient, effective, and transparent structure and decision-making process, allowing providers, consumers, and other stakeholders the opportunity to understand and participate in the CoC, which will in turn create a more strategic and coordinated continuum.

Elements of a Governance Charter –

Your Governance Charter should include sections that detail each of the following:

- 1) **ESTABLISHING AND OPERATING THE COC** – The charter should describe how the CoC will:
 - ☐ **Establish and recruit membership** – The Continuum of Care must represent all the required stakeholders required to end homelessness in a community, including:
 - Jurisdictional leaders, housing authorities, veteran organizations, mainstream resource providers, victim service providers, key homeless population providers, businesses and business associations, faith-based organizations, school districts, consumers, and advocates.

Key to success: Consider including a chart (like the table below) identifying the relevant organizations your CoC determines are required and the agencies/individuals that will represent each organization or subpopulation. Use this to assess your current membership and establish a process to engage new community partners who bring additional ideas and resources to the table.

Table 1: Membership Chart

Relevant Organizations	COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE [Name of agency & designated representative]
Jurisdictional/Government Leaders	
Public Housing Agencies	
Veteran Organization	
Mainstream Resource Providers	
Victim Service Providers	

Non-profit Homeless Providers	
Businesses and Associations	
Faith-Based Organization	
School District	
Consumers	
Advocates	
Mental Health Agency	
Law Enforcement	
Affordable Housing Developers, Owners and Operators	

- ❑ Structure and coordinate membership meetings – The charter should specify how the CoC will handle membership meetings, including:
 - Frequency – How often will the full membership meet? (Meetings of the full CoC membership should be held at least semi-annually, however CoC’s may choose to hold meetings more often.)
 - Location – Where will the meetings be held? (Consider ease of access for all members.)
 - Public notice – How will the membership and community at large be notified of meeting details, agenda, and minutes? (These meetings are opportunities to: provide training and/or preparation for funding applications, keep stakeholders informed and engaged in the progress, discuss/plan new projects or initiatives, or engage and recruit new membership.)

Key to success: Document the activities of all continuum meetings. At a minimum, documentation should involve keeping attendance and minutes of all meetings. For ease of communication and transparency, this information should be readily available to both interested organizations and the community at large.

- ❑ Document policies and procedures – Outline the policies and procedures needed to carry out CoC responsibilities and to develop and implement the strategic plan.
- ❑ Define the oversight and decision-making process - The decision-making process for continuums will differ in complexity depending on the size and structure of the CoC.
 - Some continuums may be able to have a process that involves face-to-face meetings with the entire membership for all decisions.
 - CoC’s with a large membership may delegate the decision-making for certain policies to a leadership group that is representative of their stakeholders, while other decisions may need to be voted on by the full membership.

Whatever process a continuum decides to use, the ultimate goal is that all involved stakeholders consider the decision-making process to be legitimate and fair and the ground rules for participation and influencing the decision-making is clear to everyone involved.

Key to success: Developing “up-front” and transparent decision-making policies and procedures allows the membership to agree on how decisions will be made, gives members a written procedure to follow, and provides members with a sense of fundamental fairness in the decision-making process.

- 2) **COC PLANNING** – The charter should explain how the CoC will:
- Coordinate the implementation of a housing and service system within the CoC's geographic area that meets the needs of homeless individuals and families
 - Plan and conduct a Point in Time Count
 - Conduct annual gaps analysis
 - Provide information required to complete the Consolidated Plan
 - Consult with state and local government ESG recipients
 - Establish performance targets and evaluate outcomes for the CoC – How will the CoC monitor and measure performance of its homeless assistance providers and the system as a whole? And how will the CoC act on those performance outcomes?
 - Establish and operate a coordinated entry system
 - Regularly evaluate its planning and service delivery process and determine whether it is moving the existing homeless system towards the goal.
- 3) **ESTABLISHING THE COC BOARD** – The charter should clearly define how the CoC will address:
- Board membership - Selection process, term limits, vacancies
 - Board officers - Selection process and officer term limits
 - Meetings – Frequency, location, quorum
 - Decision-making process/authority
 - Code of conduct/conflict of interest policies
 - Recusal process for the board, its chair, and any person acting on behalf of the board
 - Other duties and responsibilities assigned by the CoC - ***It is important to note that the board does not have an explicit role unless established by the CoC and specified in the governance charter.*** Without assigning a duty to the board or other designated entity, the responsibilities are retained by the CoC.
- 4) **ROLES OF THE DESIGNATED ENTITIES** – The charter should specify who will fulfill the following required roles:
- Designate and operate an HMIS - Establish which entity is the designated HMIS Lead and specify the responsibilities and requirements of the function.
 - Collaborative applicant/Lead agency – Establish which entity is designated as the collaborative applicant and/or lead agency and specify the responsibilities of each.
- 5) **ESTABLISHING THE ROLE AND STRUCTURE OF COMMITTEES AND WORKGROUPS** – The charter should define which committees or workgroups will be established within the CoC, including the following:
- Membership selection process
 - Ongoing versus time-limited or ad hoc committees
 - Leadership or ongoing committees may be held quarterly or every other month. The purpose is generally to advance the goals of the CoC and develop and/or approve policies or new projects. Whenever possible, these meetings should be open (although the vote is restricted to leadership/members) and minutes should be shared publicly.

- Workgroups/task-group meetings may be held more frequently to accomplish the specific work or tasks for which they are charged. This is generally where the work of the continuum takes place. The size of these groups is generally smaller with members who have specific expertise or skills related to the work of the group.
- ☐ Roles and responsibilities – including expected outcomes for each committee and what the oversight or decision-making process includes.

6) PROCESS FOR REVIEWING AND UPDATING THE CHARTER – The charter must have a clearly defined plan for:

- ☐ Reviewing and updating the charter - the charter should outline a process to evaluate the governance structure on an ongoing basis (at least annually) and make revisions or refinements as necessary.