



North Carolina Coalition

securing resources ■ encouraging public dialogue ■ advocating for public policy change

to End Homelessness

Exploring Homelessness Series

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What is a Continuum of Care?

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Homeless Housing and Service Providers receive federal dollars through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program, administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Communities are awarded McKinney-Vento grants from two programs: the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) Program and the Continuum of Care (CoC) Competition. About 20% of McKinney-Vento HUD funding is distributed through the Emergency Shelter Grant (ESG) program, which is a block grant to the state. The NC ESG program is administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity, and primarily funds emergency shelter operations across the state. The remaining 80% of McKinney-Vento HUD funding is distributed through a competitive process: the Continuum of Care process. In FY 2008, \$13,705,827 was awarded to North Carolina's CoCs through the competitive process.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Definition of Continuum of Care:

"The Continuum of Care is a community plan to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. It includes action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness."

HUD identifies four necessary parts of a continuum:

- Outreach, intake, and assessment in order to identify service and housing needs and provide a link to the appropriate level of both;
- Emergency shelter to provide an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the streets, especially for homeless families with children;
- Transitional housing with supportive services to allow for the development of skills that will be needed once permanently housed;
- Permanent and permanent supportive housing to provide individuals and families with an affordable place to live with services if needed.

Background

The Continuum of Care (CoC) system was first implemented in 1995 when HUD began to require communities to each submit a single application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants. This requirement was meant to streamline the funding application process, encourage coordination of housing and service providers on a local level, and promote the development of Continua of Care. Before the CoC system, agencies across the country applied for funding by submitting individual application directly to HUD. Now, all of these agencies are required to apply to HUD through their local CoC.

CoC Application

In order to apply for funding under the CoC Competitive Program, agencies must now be part of one comprehensive community application. Each CoC consolidates community-wide information into an Exhibit One for the annual application submission to HUD.

Reviewing the Exhibit One and accompanying Housing Inventory Chart is a great way to become familiar with your community's resources and plans for serving homeless individuals and families. These documents can be found on our website at www.ncceh.org/CoCApps.

The Exhibit One describes all of the agencies and services available in a CoC's community, including those agencies that are not applying for HUD funding. The Exhibit One includes: an outline of the CoC's goals

and priorities, a housing and services inventory, data on how many and what types of people are homeless, information on which community partners are participating in the process, and how local programs are performing. Even if an agency who serves the homeless is not interested in requesting HUD funding, it is still important for them to participate in the process. Not only are they needed to help design and implement a community action plan, but the CoC receives points in the competitive scoring process for their participation. CoCs must obtain a certain number of points in HUD's application scoring process in order to receive funding. This is why it's important for all agencies in the community, even those who don't apply for funding, to participate in these activities—the CoC loses points on its application if they don't. It's a highly competitive process and every point counts. A quarter of a point can make the difference between receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars of funding and receiving none.

Agencies apply for individual project funding through a separate portion of the application: the Exhibit Two. Although the project application is separate, whether or not a project is funded is dependent on the CoC's Exhibit One score. Points are awarded for five categories: CoC Housing Services and Structure; Homeless Needs and Data Collection; CoC Strategic Planning; CoC Performance; and Emphasis on Housing Activities.

One of the more daunting tasks for CoCs during the application process is deciding which agencies' project applications should be submitted to HUD. Each year, there is a set dollar amount that the CoC is eligible to apply for. There are often more requests than funding available. CoCs must balance addressing the community need, keeping HUD's priorities in mind, and selecting agencies that have proven performance and capacity. In order to make these decisions, most CoCs create a scorecard that is used by a local scoring committee to decide which project requests to include in the application.

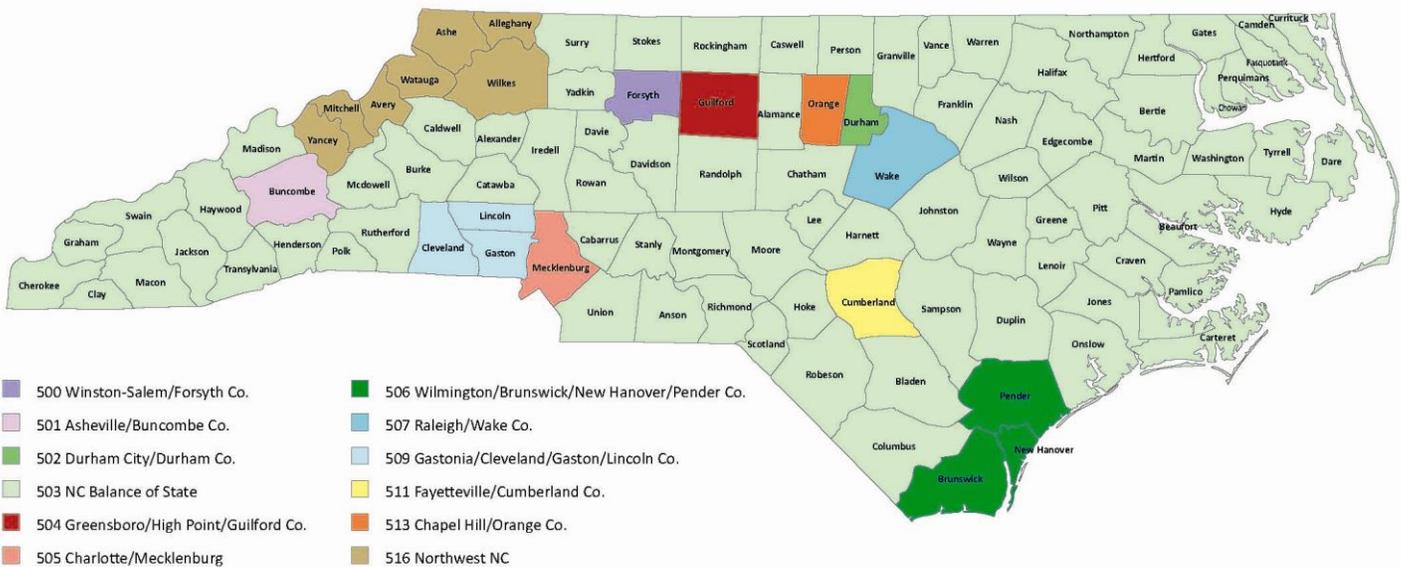
Beyond the Application

Coming together to apply for these federal funds is the most basic function of the CoC. Beyond working on the application for funding, CoCs also coordinate activities to meet the needs of individuals and families who are experiencing homelessness and play an important role in turning Ten-Year Plans to End Homelessness into reality.

For CoCs that wish to use a comprehensive approach and develop a long-range, collaborative, and strategic plan, HUD developed a five-step approach to planning a CoC:

- Organizing an annual CoC planning process that includes identifying desired outcomes and defining roles and responsibilities for the specific organizations and government bodies involved;
- Collecting needs data and completing an inventory of mainstream resources;
- Determining gaps in the current community process;
- Developing both short- and long-term strategies; and
- Establishing action steps and identifying a process for monitoring implementation of identified strategies.

2009 North Carolina Continuum of Care (CoC) Primary Areas



There are 12 Continua of Care in North Carolina. The structure of Continua varies amongst our communities. Some cities and counties assign staff to assist the Continuum while other communities ask organizations to volunteer their time. To find updated contact information for the CoC for your area, visit www.ncceh.org/coc

More resources on understanding Continua of Care can be found on our website at www.ncceh.org/CoC