

CHIN Governance Committee –

First, I want to thank you for the work you put into the process of selecting an HMIS administrator, especially Heather who had so many hours taking the lead on this. I know everyone put in time that took you away from your already large jobs, and I know you well enough to know that making the best decision possible was at the forefront of your mind while making difficult choices. I really appreciate the work you did and your support for a statewide HMIS.

Some of you may not be aware that officially, NC DHHS serves as the Lead Agency for the NC Balance of State CoC, and we contract with NCCEH to do the tasks related to facilitating the BoS activities. But for now, I'm the one who has to sign the ratification. My work unit also has an interest in this decision because of the connection with ESG.

Before signing, members of the BoS CoC and I have some comments, clarifications and questions to raise for the group. Many of these questions and comments, or similar ones, would be raised regardless of which applicant had been selected by the Governance Committee. Indeed, as strong as the RFP was, I don't think anyone could anticipate that the answers to some of those questions, and the selection of a statewide administrator, would call into question other decisions that people may not have thought were up for change. Please know this document is not about questioning decisions made. Instead, answers to the questions will help the BoS Steering Committee to make their decision about directing me to sign the ratification.

In general, most of these questions are about how the different staffing structure impacts the statewide HMIS in how it is paid for, how it is governed, how it is staffed, and the ability of CoCs to do some things differently will impact agencies that work in multiple CoCs. Also, by signing is the CoC ratifying MCAH as the statewide administrator, or is the CoC signing off on the proposal MCAH submitted? All of these questions are ultimately about how our communities move forward together.

Minor Technicality

A technicality – I think we need to be ratifying MCAH as the statewide administrator, rather than the Lead Agency. Lead Agency has a specific meaning to HUD, and it correlates to who can apply for funding, etc.

Budget

I think some of these will be the most difficult concerns to figure out. Last year's process for coming up with a payment structure, timeline, etc. was difficult for everyone involved. The information I have about the MCAH proposal leads me to believe that there will be many more conversations about budgets. Since CoCs are, rightfully, very sensitive to budget issues, I am wondering what is known about some of these specifics:

- The Regional System Administrator structure will, by default, change the way the budget plays out. My understanding is that each CoC will be responsible for paying for the System Administrator working in their region. What is known about how the other costs will be split among the CoC's? I'm hopeful that something can be named about that before all the CoC's sign the ratifications. My fear, which may not be warranted, is that a CoC will ratify, and then later say "I thought we were only responsible for our System Administrators – I didn't know we'd have to pay more than that. If I'd have known that I wouldn't have signed".
- I have heard that CoC's will be looking at no longer running their HUD grants through the statewide administrator, but bringing them back into local control by using a local lead agency that will contract with the statewide administrator. If that is so, the BoS CoC will be taking this issues into consideration
 - o That decision will change how match has been done in the past. This will affect the BoS CoC the most.
 - o Beyond match, usually there are some expenses that HUD won't cover, and therefore the match can't cover either. CoC's need to be ready to identify those funding sources also.
 - o BoS will have to figure out who would be the Lead Agency. I suspect MCAH is a possibility for that, but I'm not sure. And the BoS will have to think about implications of that choice. Even though DHHS is the official Lead for the BoS, I haven't heard anyone excited about DHHS receiving and administering those funds.
- The budget that I've seen shows that BoS CoC would contribute towards other CoC's costs. I know the BoS has not made a specific decision on that, but I have questions whichever way that decision might go.
 - o If BoS money is being given to other CoC's to cover their costs, who makes the decisions about how those funds are spent at the local level? Also, who is responsible for the tracking, compliance monitoring and gathering of information needed for reporting to HUD. Maybe MCAH would take on those responsibilities, but I suspect at least some of the work will need to be done locally within the CoCs.
 - o If BoS money is not being given to other CoC's, how is that hole in the proposed budget filled?
- I'm aware that the Governance Committee had already decided that it would be reviewing the fee structure agreed upon last year, but that structure also gave CoC's knowledge about how many licenses each region would have. Should CoC's assume they have that same number moving forward or might that be changing?

- When will decisions be made about when fees will be paid? I know that's part of the transition process. If, however, the transition needs also mean that fees will need to be paid in a timeline that doesn't mesh well with HUD's grants schedule, when would CoC's know about that?
- I've seen two budgets with about a \$200K difference. When will there be a chance for the Governance Committee to talk with the COC's about those budgets?

Staffing

Since CHIN actually used regional staffing in the past, some of these questions and comments are born out of experience.

- MCAH does have great experience and expertise related to running a statewide HMIS. This particular question is about how NC will be maximizing its access to that expertise. The document I saw was very clear that the Project Manager will be in Michigan, and that the part time admin position will be in NC. The written proposal didn't specify if the Liaison position will be housed in NC or in Michigan. I'm also not clear about whether it is a Michigan staff person who will come to NC, or if it will be someone hired in NC.
 - o If it's someone from Michigan, is that person already identified? Is that person planning on residing in North Carolina? Do we know who that person is and does the Governance Committee feel good about that person?
 - o If it's someone that is hired from NC, how does that person bring the Michigan expertise to us?
- I am unclear about whether the Regional System Administrator positions are MCAH employees or are hired by local agencies. Along that line, I am not sure who makes the hiring decision. Who actually hires staff, and who those staff report to may be significant. I suspect some CoC's are intending to hire staff they already work with and the Governance Committee may want to think about how this decision impacts those existing staff (employer, benefits, etc.)
- One of the challenges of hiring staff who are responsible for every local task is identifying staff who have the diverse skill set needed for tasks that range from answering help desk type questions, creating reports, training users, and doing all the technical data work. Depending on each staff person's strengths the Governance Committee and MCAH may want to have some strategies identified to make sure all CoC's end up with the same capacity and quality.
- The staffing plan I see lists several part-time positions. I suspect most of us are aware that part-time staff may be more likely to take a position as a temporary option while continuing to look for full-time work. Also, with part-time positions communities will also need to be savvy about the intersection with rules about overtime, etc. The HMIS

work flow tends to have some ebbs and flows – especially around application, grant reporting, CAPER and AHAR reporting times. Many part-time positions can't accommodate putting in extra hours during those times, so CoC's need to be prepared. I suspect MCAH has some strategies identified for that, but what those strategies are may be important to CoCs in their planning.

- Are the Regional System Administrators the ones who are responsible for the “reorganize existing data structure” task?
- MCAH's proposal talks about a local researcher. Is that Focus Strategies?
- I am assuming that the breakdown of which CoC's would share a staff person is something that could be changed? For example, I believe the proposal has Wake, Cumberland and New Hanover sharing a staff person. I don't think that is a viable option because of the political sensitivities and the organizational culture of those communities. However, if these break outs are up for change, I would want all the CoC's to know that now. One of the reasons DHHS has invested in the BoS CoC is to help develop more capacity in our rural areas. Yet, if a rural area with less capacity is sharing a staff person with an urban, more sophisticated region, I hope there will be intentional protocols put in place to make sure the developing community gets the attention from the staff person it needs to continue to develop. Those decisions may reflect back on the budget, as well, but until we know which CoC's and regions will be sharing staff it may be hard to predict and I assume may not be as written in the current documents.

Governance Committee

- What will be the relationship between MCAH and the Governance Committee?
 - The proposal says that Michigan assumes NC has developed contracts, agreements, policies and procedures – though obviously those will be changing now. The proposal says they will seek help from NC in revising these as needed. I'm assuming that the Governance Committee will be filling that function?
- What is the anticipated relationship between the System Administrators and the Governance Committee?
- What decisions will be made by local CoC's and what types of decisions will still be made by the Governance Committee?
- The significant de-centralization could potentially make it easier for CoCs to opt-out of the statewide HMIS network. I understand that keeping a statewide network was at the forefront of the Committee's mind while making these decisions and that right now all are committed to a statewide network. But are there any protections that can be put in place to continue to encourage a statewide network when a local CoC gets frustrated with their statewide partners, leadership changes and/or new people who may not have had time to learn of the pros and cons of a statewide system contemplate other structures?

- What do we know about how and when System Administrators, MCAH, the Liaison and/or the Governance Committee interact with Bowman Systems?

Focus Strategies

- We have put a fair amount of money and trust into Focus Strategies identifying strategies for NC to improve its HMIS system. How will MCAH and the Governance Committee work with Focus, or towards implementing those strategies. Or does that work not make any sense with this change? I would be worried about tossing out the Focus Strategies report and recommendations because they know our state and our HMIS needs so well. So far I'm having a hard time seeing how it all works together.

Other

- The idea of each CoC setting its data sharing criteria – can MCAH tell us about how that works with agencies that cross CoC boundaries with their services; with consumers that cross CoC boundaries. How might those decisions limit what a user in one CoC can see about services in another CoC if the individual has given permission for the user to see all? Will users have to keep a list of what the various policies are for each CoC?
- As a point for consideration, sometimes the best way for a rural community to increase capacity is to have a more experienced agency from a nearby larger community expand its geographic reach. Therefore, it is very important to the BoS CoC that as decisions are made the Governance Committee be sensitive to not putting policies and procedures in place that will make it hard for willing, effective agencies to expand their reach into these rural areas and provide services in more than one CoC.
- The proposal says that local CoCs will be responsible for selecting and recruiting local agencies to participate. Will MCAH help? If so, how? I have experienced that sometimes it helps to have someone from outside the region assisting with that recruitment.
- The proposal says that MCAH will help with submission of IDIS information for ESG. I'm not sure what that means. Does that mean the CAPER data?
- The proposal names the partnership between BoS and the Independent Jurisdictions. I'm not sure what MCAH's relationship to the Michigan BoS CoC is, and how that relates to NC's BoS CoC. I'm interested in what is known about that at this time.
- What are thoughts about branding? It may not make sense to continue to call our HMIS CHIN. Even if we do, CHIN won't be hosted on the NCHC website anymore. Will it be on the MCAH website? I was assuming (but should be careful about that) that the website and communication materials will have a NC centric format, and not reference Michigan very often? Having NC specific branding will reduce confusion about stakeholders.

- Who will own the data in the system?
- Who will analyze and publish statewide data? Is my assumption that each CoC will publish and analyze its own work accurate?
- MCAH's work is outcome focused, which is a great strength. From the materials I've seen I'm not sure which outcomes they have emphasized and focused on, and how they've done that in their work. This area may be one of the places where the answers about Focus Strategies comes into play. I am interested in more specifics about MCAH's outcome focused work.
- How will custom Coordinated Assessment work be treated? Will there be options for each CoC to have their own assessment /prevention and diversion screen/wait list in the system?

Again, I know these are a lot of questions and I hope they can be heard in the spirit they are intended. Some of them may have obvious answers yet I have named to discourage my or others temptation to jump to conclusions. At the same time, right now it's hard to know what the BoS CoC, or anyone, is agreeing to by affirming the choice for statewide administrator. I know all of us want to proceed strategically and respectfully. I do appreciate your willingness to review these questions. Although I've sent this email to the Governance Committee and my own 10 Year Plan/CoC leadership email list, I am very fine with it being shared with MCAH. I didn't want to do it directly. I do think it's important that all hear the same answers to these questions, however. I hope that any response can be shared with all, and if there's value to a conference call that all will be invited to that as well.

As far as the BoS CoC timeline, the Balance of State Steering Committee meets the first Tuesday of every month. That group does not anticipate the questions being answered before our August meeting and might want time to discuss with local regions even if the questions are answered by then. The earliest the BoS could consider ratifying is at our September 2nd meeting.

As Mark Twain once said - I'm sorry for the length of this letter, I didn't have time to write a short one! Thank you for the work you have done. I look forward to talking with you more about this project!

Martha

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