Assessing Whether Your Community Has Achieved the Goal of Ending Family Homelessness

The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), and its member agencies, have adopted specific criteria and benchmarks for ending homelessness among families with children in order to guide communities as they take action to achieve the goal through a coordinated community response.

The following questions can help you begin to assess your community's progress. Our interagency review team will also ask for documentation that addresses these questions, if you choose to seek federal confirmation of your community's achievements. The questions proposed below reflect our best thinking at this time. We are continuing to solicit stakeholder input and assess available data to support recommendations for proposed indicators under the current benchmarks and will similarly refine these questions as necessary moving forward. Revised guidance, including definitions for key terms used throughout these resources, will be posted to the Family Criteria and Benchmarks webpage on the USICH website.

Please consult with one of your local federal representatives for guidance prior to submitting your responses.

>   Your HUD Field Office or Regional Office
>   Your HHS Regional Office
>   Your USICH Regional Coordinator

Questions that Assess Whether Your Community Has Achieved the Criteria

1. Has your community identified all families experiencing homelessness[1]?

a. Does your community use coordinated, comprehensive outreach, in-reach, multiple data sources, and other methods to identify and enumerate families experiencing homelessness, spanning the community's entire geographical area?

b. Does your community conduct outreach and in-reach on a regular basis, including at least weekly outreach to known locations or other areas where families who are living in unsheltered settings may be located?

c. Does your community's outreach and in-reach strategy involve proactively looking for families that are newly experiencing homelessness or new to your area?

d. Are your providers across the multiple systems and mainstream resource staff[2], as well as outreach and in-reach efforts, connected to the coordinated entry process?

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[1] These questions should take into account all families with children under the age of 18 experiencing homelessness who meet any federal definition of homelessness.

[2] For the purposes of this guidance, mainstream programs and partners include but are not limited to: Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grantees, workforce systems, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies, physical health care providers, behavioral health care providers, child care providers, victim service providers, law enforcement, prisons, jails, and hospitals.

e. Which provider partners are involved in identifying families experiencing homelessness in your community?

f. Has your community literally identified every family who is unsheltered, in shelter, or in transitional housing settings or other residential programs for families experiencing homelessness?

g. Can you describe how your community coordinates a comprehensive set of strategies across schools, the child welfare system, hotlines and 2-1-1, and other community-based programs, to identify families who are doubled up and identified as homeless under the Department of Education's definition?

h. Are your community's efforts tailored to the unique needs of particularly vulnerable families, including those fleeing domestic violence?

i. Does your community have a single data system (i.e., HMIS, active list) that identifies and tracks all families known to be experiencing homelessness, aside from those fleeing domestic violence?

j. Do all of the entities responsible for identifying families experiencing homelessness in your community collect data on all families they encounter? Is that data entered into HMIS or another comparable data system so that relevant data can be included on an active list?

k. Do victim service providers that offer housing have databases that are comparable to HMIS and comply with confidentiality requirements as outlined by federal law?

l. Does your community ensure that families being served by victim service providers, as well as others with confidentiality concerns, are accounted for on a by-name or active list while ensuring their personally identifiable information is confidential?

m. Is your active list updated on at least a biweekly basis and reviewed to make prioritization decisions?

n. Can you describe the written procedure or workflow for the active list including processes to protect the safety and confidentiality concerns of victims of domestic violence?

o. Is your community able to provide comprehensive and current responses to the following questions?

    i. How many families are experiencing homelessness in your community?

    ii. Of those families currently experiencing homelessness, how many are unsheltered; in emergency shelter; in transitional settings; in other residential programs for families experiencing homelessness; or, doubled up or otherwise identified as experiencing homelessness under the Department of Education's definition?

    iii. How many families, sheltered and unsheltered, were identified in the two most recent Point-in-Time counts?

    iv. How many families indicated that they became homeless due to fleeing or a previous history of experiencing domestic violence?

    v. How many children in families were identified as experiencing homelessness by local education agencies (LEAs) during the most recent school year? How is information about changes in families' homelessness status updated throughout the school year?

2. Does your community use prevention and diversion strategies whenever possible, and provide immediate access to low-barrier shelter to any family experiencing homelessness who needs and wants it?

a. Are you implementing comprehensive prevention and diversion strategies to help families experiencing homelessness avoid the need to enter shelter whenever possible?

b. Are providers across the multiple systems and mainstream resource staff in your community familiar with the prevention and diversion strategies and protocols?

    c.   Does your community have the capacity to immediately provide a form of shelter (emergency shelter, bridge or transitional housing, or other temporary settings) to any family experiencing unsheltered homelessness or an otherwise unsafe situation, including fleeing domestic violence or trafficking, who needs such assistance?

    d.   Does your community provide access to such shelter that is not contingent on sobriety, minimum income requirements, lack of criminal history, or other unnecessary conditions?

    e.   Are family members — regardless of family structure — able to stay together (i.e., they are not required to separate from one another) in order to access shelter?

    f.   Are any families turned away from shelter without a safe alternative?

    g.   Are there adequate crisis response services available in your community to families fleeing domestic violence or trafficking, or who otherwise have concerns regarding their safety and confidentiality?

3. Does your community use coordinated entry processes to effectively link families experiencing homelessness to housing and services solutions that are tailored to the needs of all family members?

    a.   Can you describe how your community has implemented coordinated entry processes that:

        i.   Operate in close coordination with mainstream systems;

        ii.   Use assessment tools for families that take into consideration the unique needs and characteristics of all adult and child members of the household, including those fleeing domestic violence; and

        iii.   Streamline access and referrals to appropriate housing and supportive services aligned with families' needs and strengths, and informed by household choice?

    b.   Does the community have a process in place to connect families identified by local education agencies and other mainstream programs to the coordinated entry process, if the family indicates a desire to do so?

    c.   Does the community have processes and partnerships in place to ensure that victims of domestic violence have access to housing supports and services outside of those available through victim service providers?

    d.   Do coordinated entry processes reflect trauma-informed approaches for both adults and children, and take the safety and confidentiality needs of victims of domestic violence into account?

4. Does your community assist families to move swiftly into permanent or non-time-limited housing options with appropriate services and supports?

    a.   How does your community use Housing First and low-barrier approaches to quickly connect families experiencing homelessness to safe, affordable, and sustainable permanent housing, complemented by ongoing services that are aligned, whenever possible, with their choice?

    b.   Do solutions include appropriate strategies for addressing the safety concerns and service needs of families experiencing homelessness who are impacted by domestic violence?

    c.   How does your community swiftly connect families living in time-limited housing programs, such as transitional housing or recovery housing, to a permanent or non-time-limited housing opportunity when that family expresses a desire to do so?

    d.   What processes and protocols are in place to prevent unnecessary delays in connecting families to housing and services?

e. How does your community use the active list to manage and prioritize waitlists for permanent housing supports and programs?

f. How are families experiencing homelessness connected to income supports, health and behavioral health care, social supports, employment opportunities, workforce programs, and other supportive services that promote long-term housing stability and self-sufficiency?

5. Does your community have resources, plans, and system capacity in place to continue to prevent and quickly end future experiences of homelessness among families?

a. Has your community projected the number of families who may need shelter and services, and dedicated sufficient resources to ensure those needs are met and that future experiences of homelessness among families are rare and brief?

b. Does your community have comprehensive plans in place, as well as the system capacity to continue to:

    i. Provide appropriate services that will, whenever possible, prevent homelessness among families;

    ii. Provide immediate access to low-barrier shelter;

    iii. Connect families experiencing homelessness to appropriate services and permanent housing; and

    iv. Promote long-term housing stability?

c. Are there sufficient permanent housing assistance options that are currently available or will become available over the next twelve months to ensure that families that experience homelessness in the future can be swiftly connected to permanent housing?

d. Does the community have capacity to provide non-housing crisis response options, including emergency financial assistance, safety services, transportation, health and oral health services, behavioral health, and legal services?

e. How does your community leverage connections to, and engage with, the following community partners?

i. Legal services providers	vii. Early childhood programs
ii. Safety services	viii. Child care providers
iii. Workforce systems (such as local Workforce Development Boards and American Job Centers)	ix. Child welfare agencies
	x. Local education agencies, GED providers, and institutions of higher learning
iv. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) agencies	
	xi. Victim service providers
v. Physical health care providers	xii. Transportation
vi. Behavioral health care providers	xiii. Food assistance programs

Specifications to Measure Whether Your Community Has Achieved the Benchmarks

As mentioned above, federal partners are continuing to solicit stakeholder input and assess available data to support recommendations for one or more of the proposed indicators. Revised guidance will be posted to the Family Criteria and Benchmarks webpage on the USICH website. We will continue to review and clarify the questions to assess and specifications as needed.