



**ALBANY COUNTY
COORDINATED ENTRY POLICY
AND PROCEDURE MANUAL**

DRAFT

Introduction

Document Overview

To implement and maintain a County-wide Coordinated Entry System (CE), HATAS, as the lead agency has developed the following Policies and Procedures Manual to outline and define the goals and objectives of the CE program. This document delineates the roles and responsibilities of each agency and user involved in the program while establishing protocol for program assessment, referral acceptance, client privacy, and consumer disclosure. Each participating agency must have the Director of that agency sign the Agency Agreement at the end of this document, indicating that the agency has reviewed these policies and procedures and will comply with them. Additionally, all users are required to sign the User Agreement (also at the end of this document) indicating that they have reviewed and will abide by these policies and procedures as well.

These policies and procedures will govern the implementation, governance, and evaluation of the Coordinated Entry (CE) in Albany's CoC. It is expected that the standards will adjust as programs evolve, members gain more experience, and Homeless Management Information System data from programs and services is analyzed. This Policy and Procedure will serve as the guiding principles for funding ESG and CoC programs. These policies may only be changed by the approval of the CoC HSPB based on recommendations from the Coordinated Entry stakeholders through CE meetings.

History and Purpose of Coordinated Entry

Coordinated Entry is defined as: A standardized access, assessment, and referral process for housing and other services across agencies in a community.

Coordinated Entry is considered one of the many interventions in a community's united effort to end and prevent homelessness. The process works best and provides the greatest value if it is driven by "What does the client need" rather than by provider eligibility. Coordinated entry refers to the process used to assess and assist in meeting the housing needs of people at-risk of homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. The implementation of coordinated assessment is considered national best practice. When implemented effectively, coordinated assessment can:

- Reduce the amount of research and the number of phone calls people experiencing homelessness must make before finding crisis housing or services;
- Reduce new entries into homelessness through coordinated system wide diversion and prevention efforts;
- Prevent people experiencing homelessness from entering and exiting multiple programs before getting their needs met;
- Reduce or erase entirely the need for individual provider wait lists for services;
- Foster increased collaboration between homelessness assistance providers; and
- Improve a community's ability to perform well on Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act outcomes and make progress on ending homelessness.

The coordinated entry process makes referrals to all projects receiving Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) and CoC Program funds, including emergency shelter (ES), Rapid Re-housing (RRH), Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), and transitional housing (TH), as well as other housing and homelessness projects. Projects in the community that are dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness fill all vacancies through referrals, while other housing and services projects determine the extent to which they rely on referrals from the coordinated entry process.

Coordinated Entry System Assumptions:

- **Prioritization:**
 - Coordinated entry process ensures that people with the greatest needs receive priority for any type of housing and homeless assistance available in the CoC, including PSH, Rapid Rehousing (RRH), and other services.
- **Low Barrier:**
 - The coordinated entry process does not screen people out for assistance because of perceived barriers to housing or services, including, but not limited to, lack of employment or income, drug or alcohol use, or having a criminal record.
- **Person-Centered:**
 - The coordinated entry process incorporates participant choice, which may be facilitated by questions in the assessment tool or through other methods. Choice can include location and type of housing, level of services, and other options about which households can participate in decisions
- **Housing First Oriented:**
 - people are housed quickly without preconditions or service participation requirements.
- **Fair and Equal Access:**
 - Albany CoC has chosen a “no wrong door” approach, as such all people in the CoC’s geographic area have fair and equal access to the coordinated entry process, regardless of where or how they present for services. Fair and equal access means that people can easily access the coordinated entry process, whether in person, by phone, or some other method
- **Emergency services:**
 - The coordinated entry process does not delay access to emergency services such as shelter through Albany County DSS.
- **Standardized Access and Assessment:**
 - All coordinated entry Point of Entry (POE) locations offer the same assessment approach and referrals using uniform decision-making processes. A person presenting at a coordinated entry location is not steered towards any program or provider simply because they presented at that location.
- **Inclusive:**
 - A coordinated entry process includes all subpopulations, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, Veterans, families, youth, and survivors of domestic violence. It is linked to the HAC Outreach Vans efforts so that people sleeping on the streets are prioritized for assistance in the same manner as any other person assessed through the coordinated entry process.
- **Referral to projects:**
 - The POE agency completes an intake and assessment and refers the individual or family to three (3) appropriate agencies and the CE Lead.
- **Referral protocols:**
 - Programs that participate in the CoC’s coordinated entry process accept all eligible referrals unless the agency has documentation that would support rejecting a referral.

- **Ongoing planning and stakeholder consultation:**
 - The CoC engages in ongoing planning with all stakeholders participating in the coordinated entry process. This planning includes evaluating and updating the coordinated entry process at least annually. Feedback from individuals and families experiencing homelessness or recently connected to housing through the coordinated entry process is regularly gathered through surveys, focus groups, and other means and is used to improve the process.
- **Informing local planning:**
 - Information gathered through the coordinated entry process is used to guide homeless assistance planning and system change efforts in the community.
- **Safety planning:**
 - The coordinated entry process has protocols in place to ensure the safety of the individuals seeking assistance. These protocols ensure that people fleeing domestic violence have safe and confidential access to the coordinated entry process and domestic violence services, and that any data collection adheres to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).
- **Using HMIS and other systems for coordinated entry.**
 - Schenectady County will use HMIS to collect and manage data associated with assessments and referrals in addition to an Excel Workbook designed to track activity and produce reports for weekly communication.

Prioritizing people who are most vulnerable or have the most severe service needs

One of the main purposes of coordinated entry is to ensure that people with the most severe service needs and levels of vulnerability are prioritized for housing and homeless assistance. People experiencing chronic homelessness should be prioritized for permanent supportive housing. In addition to prioritizing people experiencing chronic homelessness, the coordinated entry process prioritizes people who are more likely to need some form of assistance to end their homelessness or who are more vulnerable to the effects of homelessness.

Points to consider when prioritizing people for housing and homelessness assistance: Based on Vulnerability Scoring from Coordinated Entry Application

- Homelessness (1 Point)
- Veterans (1 point)
- Age 60+ (1 point)
- Pregnant Women (1 point)
- Youth (1 point)
- More than one disabling condition (1 point)
- 2 or more disabling conditions (2 points)
- No income or only DSS assistance (1 point)
- Limitations on where they can live due to sex offender status (1 point)
- Indicates homeless due to utility shut off, eviction or code enforcement 3 or more times in 2 years (1 point)
- Recent involvement with CPS, Adult protective, Juvenile justice, family court or foster care (1 point)

Goals of Coordinated Entry

CE is intended to increase and streamline access to housing and services for households experiencing homelessness, match appropriate levels of housing and services based on their needs, and prioritize persons with severe service needs for the most intensive interventions. It helps communities prioritize assistance based upon vulnerability and severity of service needs to ensure that people who need assistance the most can receive it in a timely manner. CE also provides information about service needs and gaps to help communities plan their assistance and identify needed resources.

Primary goals for the coordinated entry processes are:

- Assistance will be allocated as effectively as possible,
- Assistance is easily accessible no matter where or how people present

The CoC identified the following goals for the Coordinated Entry:

- No Wrong Door, the principles of this approach are:
 - A consumer can seek housing assistance through any of the participating homeless services providers and will receive integrated services;
 - Consumers should have equal access to information and advice about the housing assistance for which they are eligible to assist them in making informed choices about available services that best meet their needs;
 - Participating providers have a responsibility to respond to the range of consumer needs and act as the primary contact for consumer who apply for assistance through their service unless or until another provider assumes that role;
 - Participating providers will provide a proactive service that facilitates the consumer applying for assistance or accessing services from another provider regardless of whether the original provider delivers the specific housing services required by a presenting consumer; and
 - Participating housing providers will work collaboratively to achieve responsive and streamlined access services and cooperate to use available resources to achieve the best possible housing outcomes for consumer, particularly for those with high, complex or urgent needs
- Universal intake and assessment form
- POE agency will complete appropriate paperwork and refer to three (3) agencies in addition to the CE lead Agency
- CE lead Agency will enter client data on Excel spreadsheet and track client activity
- Recipient will lead bi-weekly meetings
- Clients will be prioritized based on vulnerability score
- The process will be easy on the client, and provide quick and seamless entry into homelessness services
- Individuals and families will be referred to the most appropriate resource(s) for their individual situation
- The process will prevent duplication of services
- The process will reduce length of homelessness
- The process will improve communication among agencies

Operating the Coordinated Entry System

2014-15 and 2015-16 were implementation and pilot years for the Coordinated Entry program. During this time a path for establishing the system-wide coordinated entry was discussed, tested, and modified. Full implementation and operation of the CE Program includes:

- Secure Email System
- Timely meetings
- Regular, weekly communication to identify anticipated vacancies, current vacancies, waiting lists
- Timely referrals to the CE Lead
- CE Lead will:
 - Enter client data in excel spreadsheet
 - Track client activity
 - Share report data at regular CE meetings

Albany County CoC is responsible for coordinating and implementing a system to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness within the County of Albany. The primary goals for coordinated entry processes are that assistance be allocated as effectively as possible and that it be easily accessible no matter where or how people present. The coordinated entry process is designed to facilitate prioritizing assistance based on vulnerability and severity of service needs to ensure that people who need assistance the most, can receive it in a timely manner. In addition, the coordinated entry process provides information about service needs and gaps which in turn provides a path to plan to identify and address needed resources.

Addressing waiting times through coordinated entry:

Often there is a discrepancy between the number of people in need of housing and the lack of available beds. When there is a waiting list due to a lack of available beds, other community resources will be accessed, such as rapid re-housing dollars. Although PSH is almost always the most effective resource for people with high levels of vulnerability and high service needs, including those experiencing chronic homelessness, the lack of available PSH should not result in people languishing in shelters or on the streets without further assistance.

Homeless assistance organizations:

All homeless assistance organizations should be involved in the coordinated entry process by helping people access the system and receiving referrals. Emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing programs should only receive referrals through the coordinated entry process.

Mainstream housing and services:

Affordable housing and mainstream services are crucial tools for ending homelessness and should be involved in the coordinated entry process. For instance, sources of referrals could include mental health service providers, substance abuse service providers, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Centers, jails, or emergency rooms.

The Coordinated Entry Policy and Procedures will:

- Assist with the coordination of service delivery across Albany County and will be the foundation of the coordinated entry system;
- Assist in assessing individuals and families consistently to determine program eligibility;

- Assist in administering programs fairly and methodically;
- Establish common performance measurements for all CoC components; and

The Policy and Procedures have been established to ensure that persons experiencing homelessness who enter programs throughout the CoC will be given similar information and support to access and maintain permanent housing. All programs that receive ESG or CoC funding are required to abide by the Policy and Procedure guidelines. Agency program procedure should reflect the policy and procedures described in this document. The CoC strongly encourages the collaboration with programs that do not receive either of these sources of funds in order to provide comprehensive services to the community's homeless population.

This Document

These policies and procedures will govern the implementation, governance, and evaluation of the Coordinated Entry (CE) in Albany's CoC. It is expected that the standards will adjust as programs evolve, members gain more experience, and HMIS data from programs and services is analyzed. This Policy and Procedure will serve as the guiding principles for funding ESG and CoC programs. These policies may only be changed by the approval of the CoC ACCH board based on recommendations from the Coordinated Entry stakeholders through CE meetings.

Purpose:

Schenectady County CoC Coordinated Entry (CE) process is designed to identify, engage, and assist homeless individuals and families that will ensure those who request or need assistance are connected to proper housing and services.

Overview of Coordinated Entry/ Assessment

Coordinated Entry is considered one of the many interventions in a community's united effort to end and prevent homelessness. The process works best and provides the greatest value if it is driven by "What does the client need" rather than by provider eligibility. Coordinated entry refers to the process used to assess and assist in meeting the housing needs of people at-risk of homelessness and people experiencing homelessness. The implementation of coordinated assessment is considered national best practice. When implemented effectively, coordinated assessment can:

- Reduce the amount of research and the number of phone calls people experiencing homelessness must make before finding crisis housing or services;
- Reduce new entries into homelessness through coordinated system wide diversion and prevention efforts;
- Prevent people experiencing homelessness from entering and exiting multiple programs before getting their needs met;
- Reduce or erase entirely the need for individual provider wait lists for services;
- Foster increased collaboration between homelessness assistance providers; and
- Improve a community's ability to perform well on Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act outcomes and make progress on ending homelessness.

Geographic Area: Albany County

Target Population:

- Chronically Homeless

- Homeless
- Veterans
- Domestic Violence
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Illness
- Youth

Coordinated Entry Specific Process:

Assessment of Housing Need:

- No Wrong Door Approach
 - A no wrong door approach has been chosen; whereby assessment can be conducted regardless of which community stakeholder and or CoC provider the client presents.
- The Point of Entry (POE) Agency determines Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) eligibility
- The client has a choice to participate in the coordinate entry process, if they choose positively:
 - The client is asked to sign the release of information form
 - The client can refuse to work with one or more agency
- After agreeing to participate, the POE completes the universal intake/assessment form
- The POE selects three of the most appropriate PSH opportunities with the client
- The POE places the vulnerability score on the client's application

Referral Process:

- The POE forwards the application and disability documentation to the three housing agencies and the Coordinated Entry Lead
- The PSH agencies will determine if the client qualifies for their vacant unit or waiting list
 - The PSH will make this decision and notify the Coordinated Entry Lead within 14 days of receiving the referral
- The PSH options will notify the CE Lead whether the client is eligible for their program
- The Coordinated Entry Facilitator will record referrals on the approved excel spreadsheet used to track each client activity from initial notification to discharge
- The Coordinated Entry Lead will keep track of waiting lists

CoC PSH Agencies Responsibilities:

- PSH agencies will report weekly to the Coordinated Entry Facilitator:
 - Vacancies
 - Application Status Reports
- PSH agencies will actively participate in bi-weekly telephone calls and provide:
 - Vacancy updates
 - Waitlist priorities
- PSH agencies will actively participate in bi-weekly meetings to discuss:
 - Vacancy updates
 - Pending, accepted, and denied applications
 - Housed application
 - Six (6) month ~ no response, no show clients

Evaluation/Oversight:

- **Grievance/Appeal process:** There will be formal grievance and appeals process managed by the coordinated entry committee. Consumer choice is central to coordinated entry and the appeals process will embrace that same person centered and easily navigable model. If a participant feels they did not receive fair treatment, they were denied resources or given an inappropriate referral, the participant may appeal these decisions or actions.
- The coordinated entry committee will engage in regular evaluations. The committee will recommend changes to the process after these evaluations. Changes will be recommended to and approved by the HSPB.
- Coordinated Entry formal meetings will occur biweekly. This meeting should serve as a space for agency representatives to discuss participants' progress and referral status, troubleshoot any issues, and coordinate outreach. The agency representatives can make recommendations on suggested changes to the coordinated entry system.
- Programs will be evaluated on their level of participation in coordinated entry including having coordinated entry staff, participating in the bi-weekly calls and meetings, taking referrals from coordinated entry, and regular updates on vacancies and waiting list. Participation in coordinated entry will be tracked through HMIS for quality, and agencies will be given the opportunity to submit their feedback on the process.

All components of the Coordinated Entry System will be reviewed and assessed monthly by the Lead Agencies and the CoC Collaborative Applicant. Recommendations for policy change will be presented to the ACCH Board.