
ALBANY COUNTY COALITION ON HOMELESSNESS: 2019 RANK AND REVIEW PROCESS

Rationale

HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) homeless assistance programs serve as a source of funding for homeless services in the County of Albany, which together form the Albany County Coalition on Homelessness (ACCH). In the 2018 NOFA, the Albany CoC (ACCH) received \$5,630,872 from HUD to support 37 housing projects for homeless individuals and families. HUD awards homeless assistance grants through an annual application process known as the CoC Program Competition in response to the Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). In order for the CoC to prioritize programs which most effectively serve the community at the local level, a Rank and Review Process has been implemented for new and renewal projects. This process helps members of the CoC gain knowledge of project performance and effectiveness across the entire Continuum. On behalf of the Albany County Coalition on Homelessness (ACCH), the NOFA Committee is charged with overseeing the Rank & Review process. As stated in the ACCH bylaws, the NOFA Committee is responsible for "the design, operation, and following of a collaborative process for the development of funding applications, including funding priorities and the number and type of applications". Each year the NOFA Committee reviews the Rank and Review Process document and Application and makes any changes necessary to reflect changing priorities. The NOFA Committee is also responsible for establishing a Review Team for the Rank & Review Application. The written Process, Application and list of Review Team members are submitted annually during the first quarter of the calendar year to the Board for approval. The Board reviews the Process document and Tool no later than the mid-April Board meeting. Once Board-approved, the written Process document and Application are posted for review and comment by full Membership.

Review and Approval of the Rank & Review Application

After the CoC Application is submitted by the Collaborative Applicant, the NOFA Committee begins discussion of the prior year's Rank & Review application process, as well as feedback from reviewers and full Membership to develop proposed revisions. As mentioned above, the NOFA Committee also develops a list of Review Team members, considering the previous reviewers and potential new members. The revised drafts of the application, process and proposed Review Team are presented to the ACCH Board which may suggest additional edits to be made by the NOFA Committee. After the NOFA Committee updates the Board, the Application and Process document are posted for full Membership comment period of fourteen (14) days. The Committee considers any comments received from Membership to determine any further revisions. After the comment period and any subsequent changes made, the Rank & Review Application, Process document and Review Team are approved by the Board and shared with Membership.

Project Participation

Each renewal project completes a Rank & Review Application per project. The 2019 Rank & Review Application process will occur in three (3) phases, with the intent to allow agencies adequate time to complete the full Rank & Review Application.

- **Phase 1** focuses on project and system outcomes, using a prior calendar year project APR and HMIS System Performance data to “rate” projects. An application must be completed for each CoC project, including required attachments. *Late submissions of Rank & Review Applications will receive a 5-point penalty.*
- **Phase 2** includes narratives allowing staff to explain unique circumstances which may affect project performance. Part 2 of the Application must be submitted to CARES, Inc. by the stated deadline to be considered complete and passed on to the Review Team. *Late submissions will receive a 5-point penalty.* Upon submission, each agency/project is assigned an interview time with the Review Team.
- **Phase 3** of the Rank & Review Process includes project interviews with the Review Team. After release of the NOFA, the NOFA Committee will draft questions based on specific criteria mentioned within the Rank & Review Application to be asked during project interviews. Projects will receive these questions prior to the interview and may provide the Review Team with written answers prior to the interview. Interviews may assist the reviewers in awarding additional points.

Review Team

Reviewers must be individuals from the community (who are not members of the ACCH) or neighboring communities, and must be knowledgeable about the CoC process, services and providers. Suggested Review Team members are approached by the Collaborative Applicant and asked to participate. After reviewers agree to participate, one to two days are scheduled to conduct Rank & Review project interviews and for scoring to take place. Interviews will be scheduled for a date after the NOFA is released to allow for any HUD specific criteria to be incorporated into the interview process, as described above. Each reviewer is provided with a copy of each project’s full application and score forms. Once the Review Team convenes and conducts interviews with each project, the Review Team scores each application. These scores result in the project ranking. The Review Team provides any final comments to be shared with projects or the NOFA committee.

Project Ranking

The NOFA requires that the CoC conduct a transparent and objective process to review and rank all Rank & Review applications for both renewal and new projects. Using the CoC-approved Rank & Review tool, all projects seeking funding are scored and placed in numerical order by scores. All projects will receive their scores and offered the opportunity to debrief and review their project scores with the Collaborative Applicant. Following debriefing, projects may choose to submit an appeal of their score, within the allotted time frame (see the **Appeals Process** outlined below). After any debriefings and appeals, the project ranking is shared with the NOFA Committee, then presented to the Board for review/approval. Ranking is then shared with Membership.

Appeals Process

1. Who May Appeal?

An agency may appeal a decision concerning a project application submitted by that agency. If a project was submitted by a collaboration of agencies, only a joint appeal may be submitted.

2. What May Be Appealed?

The appeals process applies only to project scoring and ranking. *There is no appeal for project tiering.* An appeal may **not** be submitted if:

- all questions on the application were **not** completed
- all required attachments were **not** submitted with the application
- the application was **not** submitted by the required deadline

A mathematical error found by the project can be corrected and notice of the correction will be provided to the NOFA Committee and Board.

3. Timing of an Appeal

Formal appeals may only be submitted by a project within **three (3) business days** of debriefing. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Collaborative Applicant, which will then forward to the Review Team. The written appeal must consist of a brief statement no longer than one page, and can be in the form of a letter, memo or email. Any appeal via email must be sent to MWatson@caresny.org and the ACCH NOFA Committee Chair.

4. Appeals Decisions

The Review Team for the Rank & Review also serves as the Appeals Review Team. Appeals are decided by majority vote of the Appeals Team, and once decided, all appeals are final and may not be overturned by the NOFA Committee, Board or Membership.

Project Tiering

HUD requires that the CoC ranks projects into two tiers based on the funding allocation released in the NOFA. Using the project ranking, the Collaborative Applicant tiers projects and presents the results to the NOFA Committee. When the NOFA is released, the priorities outlined in the application are strategically applied by the CoC to the project ranking (which may also affect tiering). Tiering results are presented to the Board for approval, then to Membership for a vote. Membership votes on the full application, including tiering.

New Projects

A separate RFP is required for new project proposals which may be created through bonus or reallocated funds. If, after the ranking process, additional money becomes available through reallocation, and if all new projects have been approved, the new project RFP will re-open for submission in efforts to utilize all available funding. RFPs submitted during the second application process will automatically be ranked below projects from the first round.

Bonus Projects

Each year, HUD may offer bonus funding, and guidance is provided within the NOFA as to how the funds may be spent. Bonus projects compete nationally against other bonus project proposals. Bonus project proposals must fill an unmet need as noted within the Strategic Plan. Applications for bonus projects are accepted at the same time renewal applications are submitted for Rank & Review. Agencies interested in applying for bonus funding will be given the opportunity to present their proposals to the CoC Membership and interview with the Review Team. Bonus applications will be ranked, and the final ranking will be presented within the full ranking to CoC Membership for approval. When the NOFA is released, the Review Team will decide which, if any, proposals fit the criteria outlined within, and

agencies will have the opportunity to resubmit their proposals to meet HUD's criteria for bonus funding. The community's goal is to apply for the maximum amount of available funds. The same appeals process that applies to renewal applications also applies to bonus project applications.

Reallocation

Reallocation is the process by which the CoC shifts funds, in whole or in part, from existing eligible renewal grants to create new projects that fill an unmet need within the community, as noted within the Albany Strategic Plan and the HMIS Quarterly Report. Reallocation is one of the most important tools by which communities can make strategic improvements to their homeless services system.

Projects that can be flagged for reallocation consideration include those which have displayed inadequate financial management, a history of expending funds on ineligible activities, a lack of full expenditure of funds, and those which consistently score low on the Rank & Review. Additionally, funds from any project *not* participating in Coordinated Entry, Point-in-Time, HMIS, or operated by an agency that is *not* a member in good standing of the ACCH may *not* be considered for reallocation. Further, agencies may voluntarily choose to reallocate funds from their own projects. New projects developed by agencies through reallocation of their own funds will be prioritized during the ranking process. This prioritization allows agencies to apply for a new project with reallocated funds. All other proposed projects using reallocated funds will be ranked according to general ranking procedures.

As noted above, projects developed with reallocated funds must fill an unmet need and complete a separate application. Applications for these projects are due at the same time renewal applications are submitted for Rank & Review. Agencies interested in applying for reallocated funds are offered opportunities to present their proposals to the CoC Membership and to interview with the Review Team. Applications for new projects will be ranked separately from renewal projects, and the final ranking will be presented to CoC Membership for approval. As sources of funding, projects created from reallocated funds are ranked independently from bonus projects.

Redirected Funding

As a Continuum with UFA designation, funds may be shifted or 'redirected' from one project (unable to utilize current fiscal year monies) to another (with a stated and approved plan for use of said funds) at any point during a single fiscal year. Because any unspent CoC funds are lost to the community at the close of each fiscal year, the ability to redirect otherwise unspent funds enables the Continuum to utilize the maximum amount of available funds each year. CoC-funded agencies are eligible to apply for redirected funds if the agency is:

- A CoC member in good standing
- Operating without monitoring sanctions imposed by the ACCH Board or Fiscal Advisory Committee

Through the *Request for Redirected Funding Form*, the eligible agency may request additional funds for a project currently:

- Meeting or exceeding spending thresholds as outlined in the *Expenditure Timeline and Threshold Policy*
- Administering the project component for which funding is requested

Agencies must submit *Requests for Redirected Funding* according to the stated Rank and Review deadline. Requests will be reviewed and ranked by the Review Team (Rank & Review) and approved by the ACCH Board. Approved requests will be held until redirected funds become available.

CoC Transparency

The Rank and Review process is conducted by the CoC in a transparent manner to ensure a fair and consistent process for prioritizing projects. Each year, feedback is solicited on the process. The process is publicly announced by the CoC, distributed in writing to the full CoC Membership, and posted publicly on the CARES website for all community members to review and comment.

FY 2019 Rank and Review Application

The ACCH emphasizes the importance and impact of using the Rank & Review Application as the primary basis for determining the Project Listing submitted as part of the CoC Consolidated Application. The Rank & Review Application is thoughtfully revised each year to include both HUD and CoC standards, incorporate both national and local priorities, and balance objective performance measures with subjective narrative description of project operations.