
RENSSELAER COUNTY HOMELESS SERVICES COLLABORATIVE: 2021 RANK AND REVIEW PROCESS

Background

HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) homeless assistance program serves as a source of funding for homeless services in Rensselaer County, and the planning body coordinating these services is the Rensselaer County Homeless Services Collaborative (RCHSC). Working with the CoC (RCHSC) and providing support and technical assistance is CARES of NY, Inc., the Collaborative Applicant.

In 2020, Rensselaer CoC (RCHSC) received \$3,788,987 from HUD to support 14 housing projects for homeless individuals and families. Through the CoC, HUD awards homeless assistance grants through an annual application process known as the CoC Program Competition.

HUD requires that the CoC (RCHSC) prioritize programs which most effectively serve the community at the local level. To reach this goal, a Rank and Review Process has been implemented for applicants who wish to renew their project/s and for new and/or bonus projects, if bonus funding is available. The process of ranking and reviewing projects is designed to help the CoC (RCHSC) learn about each project's performance and effectiveness.

The Rensselaer County Homeless Services Collaborative (RCHSC) NOFA Committee is charged with overseeing the Rank and Review process. As stated in the RCHSC Governance Charter, the NOFA Committee is responsible for "assisting the Collaborative Applicant in preparing and submitting the Continuum of Care application" including the design and operation of a collaborative process for developing and approving the submission of applications. Each year the Rank & Review Application Tool (Renewal and New/Bonus) and a Review Team is established by the Committee, which is then reviewed and approved by both the Board and full Membership.

CoC Transparency

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

FY 2021 Rank and Review Application

The RCHSC emphasizes the importance and impact of using the Rank & Review Application as the primary basis for determining the ranking within 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, incorporating both national and local priorities, balancing objective performance measures with subjective narrative descriptions of project operations.

Review and Approval of the Rank & Review Application

After the annual CoC Application is submitted to HUD by the Collaborative Applicant, the NOFA Committee begins discussing that year's Rank and Review Written Process and Application, based on feedback from reviewers and applicants. The NOFA Committee:

1. Establishes a tentative timeline annually for the Rank and Review Process, working around the NOFA release.
2. Discusses the prior year's Rank & Review Application Tools, Written Process, and feedback from reviewers and applicants.

3. Revises the Applications based on information gained on behalf of the CoC in the past year.
4. Recommends 3-5 Review Team members, considering previous and potential new reviewers.
5. Presents the revised draft of the Written Process, Reviewers and Application Tools (Renewal, New/Bonus) to the RCHSC Board in phases. Any subsequent recommendations for changing the Written Process, Reviewers and/or Application Tools from the Board (majority vote) will be made by the Committee.
6. Presents the revised Written Process, Application Tools and Review Team to full Membership for review, allowing for a one-week comment period per HUD NOFA guidance after each phase. Any comments from Membership are considered by the Committee and any further revisions are determined and accepted by the Board.
7. Finalizes and distributes the Rank & Review Application Tools with Membership for agencies to complete.
8. Opportunities for New/Bonus Projects are discussed with CoC Membership.

Project Participation

Renewal Projects

Each Renewal project completes a Rank and Review Application. The 2021 Rank & Review Application process will occur in two (2) phases, with the intent to allow agencies adequate time to complete the full Rank & Review Application.

- o Phase 1 focuses on quantitative project and system outcome data using the Federal Fiscal year 2020 project APR and HMIS System Performance data to “prioritize” projects. **Projects will have 2 weeks to review and sign off on their agency data. If sign off is not received the data becomes final. No changes to data will be made after the 2-week review period.**
- o Phase 2 focuses on qualitative project and system outcome data; allowing staff to explain in narrative unique circumstances that affect project performance and answer questions related to local priorities.

The following renewal project types are exempt from the requirement to complete the Rank & Review Renewal Application: projects which fund only HMIS, Coordinated Entry, or Planning activities; as well as any newly created project which was not operational on January 1, 2020. See Project Tiering below for more information on how these projects are included in the final tiering.

New Project Proposals

A separate application is required for Bonus and Reallocated project proposals. The CoC will create this application for new projects proposals. New proposals will be scored and ranked against other.

Reallocated Projects: Reallocation is the process by which the CoC shifts funds, in whole or in part, from existing eligible renewal grant(s) in order to create new projects which will meet unmet local need/s. CoC agencies which voluntarily choose to reallocate funds will receive priority in the Ranking Process (also overseen by the Review Team). Project types that can be developed through reallocation are decided annually by HUD.

Bonus Projects: Bonus funds may be available each year. The CoC is permitted to apply for Bonus Projects which will compete nationally against other Bonus Project Applications based on a HUD scoring system set forth in the NOFA. HUD notifies the CoC if Bonus Funds are available annually and how funds may be used. Proposed Bonus Projects must complement and fulfill unmet need/s in the community. The CoC will create a separate application for new projects proposals (separate RFP), and new proposals will be scored and ranked against other. The CoC will issue public notification of the amount of Bonus

funding available, if any, along with a deadline to respond to the Request for Proposals. Bonus Projects will be selected in order to apply for all available funds.

Data Sign-Off for Phase 1

Applicants must review data attachments provided by the Collaborative Applicant, and sign-off (within a two-week period) stating the data is correct. *If the data sign-off form is not completed by the provided date, it will be assumed the data is correct.* If edits to the data are noted within the two-week timeframe, those edits will be reviewed and made, if applicable, by the Collaborative Applicant. If edits to the data are made after the two-week timeframe, those edits will not be made by the Collaborative Applicant. The agency may present any proposed errors to the Review Team during the Appeals Process (see below), the Review Team will then decide on awarding additional points based on the new data. All agencies should review and confirm their data within the two-week period in order to ensure maximum number of points are awarded based on accurate data.

Debriefings

At the end of each phase, Renewal Projects and New/Bonus Projects will receive a scorecard from the Collaborative Applicant and will have an opportunity to request a debriefing of their scores with the Collaborative Applicant.

Review Team

Members of the Review Team include individuals from the Continuum who are not CoC funded or from neighboring communities knowledgeable about the CoC process, services, and its providers. Reviewers are non-funded, objective individuals who may be members and non-members of the CoC. The Collaborative Applicant invites potential Review Team members to participate in the CoC's Rank & Review process. Each reviewer is provided a copy of project applications and score card forms. The Review Team convenes to score each application which results in the CoC ranking from highest to lowest points. In the event project applications receive the same score it is the responsibility of the Review Team to reconsider scoring in order to break the tie. The Review Team provides any final comments to CARES to be shared with projects or the NOFA Committee, and will also serve as the Appeals Committee if an appeal is submitted by a project.

Project Ranking

Using the CoC-approved Rank and Review Tool, all Renewal projects seeking funding are scored and placed in numerical order by scores. New/Bonus projects are scored and placed in numerical order beneath Renewal Projects. Project scores and ranking are first shared with the projects falling in Tier 2, the Board, and then each agency receives a copy of their individual project score/s and an invitation to debrief with the Collaborative Applicant (within two days of notification). If a mathematical error is found during the review or debriefing, the score will be corrected. After any appeals are processed (see below) the NOFA Committee will adjust scores and ranking per Review Team determinations. The final ranking is first shared with agencies whose project/s fall into Tier 2, the Board, and finally shared with full Membership.

Appeals Process

Formal appeals can be submitted by an agency only after debriefings occur. Appeals must be submitted to CARES within five business days after debriefing. The Appeals Process applies only to project scoring and ranking; there is no appeal for project tiering. An appeal may not be based on the following:

- 1) failure to answer required question/s;
- 2) failure to submit the application with all required attachments, or
- 3) failure to submit by the required deadline.

The Review Team also serves as the Appeals Committee. Representatives from each project have 15 minutes to present their appeal either via written materials and/or oral argument. After presentations, the Appeals Committee determines if project/s will receive any additional points and projects will be notified within 24 hours.

Threshold Review

In addition to scoring criteria, all projects must meet a minimum threshold of 100 points. A Threshold Review will occur after the Rank and Review process is complete and final scores tallied. If the threshold is not met, the Rank and Review Team may recommend possible reallocation/s or significant amendments to the contract/s to the CoC Board. Projects that may be automatically flagged for reallocation consideration:

- Projects with inadequate financial management
- Projects with a history of expending funds on ineligible activities or not expending funds at all
- Projects not participating in Coordinated Entry, Point-in-Time, or Homeless Management Information System.

Project Tiering

When the NOFA is released, the national priorities and tiering outlined are strategically applied to project ranking by the CoC. Due to the essential nature of HMIS and Coordinated Entry projects, these projects are automatically placed at the bottom of Tier 1. Projects that were not yet operational on January 1, 2020 will be placed at the bottom of Tier 1 with the HMIS and Coordinated Entry projects. Reallocated and Bonus Projects are placed below all Renewal Projects. Per HUD guidelines, Planning Projects do not appear in the Tiering. The Board reviews and approves project tiering, then shares with Membership for a final vote. Membership votes on the tiering, which is submitted as the Project Listing in the CoC Application.