

# **Saratoga North Country Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedure Manual**

Implementation, Governance and Evaluation of the  
Coordinated Entry System in the Saratoga north  
Country Continuum of Care (CoC)

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## Saratoga North Country Coordinated Entry Policy and Procedure Manual

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## Overview

Saratoga North Country Continuum of Care (SNCC) Board has approved the following *Coordinated Entry (CE) Written Standards* for those agencies receiving HUD funding through the CoC, Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding, and those community-based agencies participating in the CE process. The following standards, procedures, and policies were collaboratively developed by the SNCC CE Committee, which is comprised of representatives from SNCC and community stakeholders.

SNCC is responsible for coordinating and implementing a CE system to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness within Saratoga and the North Country, which are comprised of Saratoga, Warren, Washington, and Hamilton Counties. The CE Process helps communities work with homeless populations to identify and assesses their needs, makes prioritization decisions based upon needs, and allows stakeholders to prioritize 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. CE also provides information about service needs and gaps to help communities plan their assistance and identify needed resources.

One of the main purposes of CE is to ensure that people with the most severe service needs and levels of vulnerability are prioritized for housing and homeless assistance. HUD's policy is that people experiencing chronic homelessness should be prioritized for permanent supportive housing.

The CE is expanding its system for those who are not just literally homeless but for those who need homeless prevention services. SNC CES has been developing a Prevention Process for CE that will prioritize those households who are considered most vulnerable. We have drafted a Prevention Screening Form for those agencies to use that provide Prevention Services. Once more guidance is received, the SNC CE will finalize this Prevention process.

CE 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.

HUD states that a Centralized/Coordinated Assessment System *"...is defined to mean a centralized or coordinated process designed to coordinate program participant intake, assessment, and provision of referrals. A centralized or coordinated assessment system covers the geographic area, is easily accessed by individuals and families seeking housing or services, is well advertised, and includes a comprehensive and standardized assessment tool."*

CE 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. When implemented effectively, CE systems:

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.

### **Purpose of Coordinated Entry**

These policies and procedures will direct the implementation, governance, and evaluation of the Coordinated Entry (CE) in SNCC. It is expected that the standards will adjust as programs evolve, members gain more experience, and HMIS data from programs and services is analyzed. These Policies and Procedures will serve as the guiding principles for partnering agencies of the SNCC, and other participating organizations, for CE procedures. These policies may only be changed by the approval of the SNCC Board based on recommendations from the CE Committee and its stakeholders through CE meetings.

Ensuring those in the community are aware of the CoC's CE process, SNC CE has developed a marketing plan. Participating agencies will add onto their website that they are an affiliate of the Saratoga County North Country Continuum of Care's CE System. SNC's plan includes outreach to all local DSS's and homeless agencies within the community to not only refer to the CE but to become a part of the CE as well. Each of the four counties (Saratoga, Hamilton, Warren, and Washington) Department of Social Services are the CE's first referral for emergency shelter and housing. Street Outreach is a large part of the CE System that includes reaching those who are homeless in the community that may not feel comfortable to present to an agency. SNC promotes efforts by its participating agencies to build relationships between street outreach workers and the homeless. Participating agencies also provide support services that aim to move people experiencing homelessness into stable housing and prepare them for independence. Those who are street homeless would be most vulnerable and prioritized as such.

Saratoga County North Country CoC does not and shall not discriminate based on race, color, religion (creed), gender, gender expression, age, national origin (ancestry), disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or military status, in any of its activities or operations. Saratoga North Country CE strives to ensure that people with disabilities have equal accessibility to the CE process and in the community at large. SNC is committed to identifying and removing barriers that impair the accessibility for those trying to access CE. The majority of the agency participants in the SNC CE are on a bus line for those with limited transportation. If necessary, the Point of Entry (POE) agency will use translation services or accessibility services to ensure the client has access to the CE system. SNC participating agencies will address accessibility issues to:

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- Enhance the quality of life for participants of our programs and services
- Implement nondiscriminatory employment practices
- Meet legal and regulatory requirements
- Meet the expectations of stakeholders and the general public

SNC recognizes the diversity of the population we serve including, but not limited to ethnicity, gender, age, language, socioeconomics, spiritual beliefs, and physical and communication challenges. Staff must be cognizant of how important accommodations are to effective service delivery. Creating an atmosphere of openness and equal opportunity requires a physical environment designed to eliminate potential barriers; ongoing staff training regarding the assessment of the need for specific accommodations; and the actual implementation of necessary modifications.

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, such as Rapid Re-housing (RRH) dollar, will be accessed. Although Permanent Supportive Housing (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.

#### **Saratoga County Coordinated Entry System Core Elements**

**Access:** the engagement point for persons experiencing a housing crisis could look and function differently depending on the specific community. Persons (families, single adults, and youth) might initially access the crisis response system by calling a crisis hotline or other information and referral resource, walking into an access point facility, or being engaged through outreach efforts.

**Assessment:** upon initial access, CoC providers associated with CE will assess the person's housing needs, preferences, and vulnerability. This coordination entry element is referred to as assessment. It is progressive with multiple layers of sequential information being gathered at various phases in the CE process, for different purposes, by one or more staff.

**Prioritization:** during assessment, the person's needs and level of vulnerability will be documented for purposes of determining prioritization. Prioritization helps the CoC manage its inventory of community housing resources and services to ensure those persons with the greatest need and vulnerability receive the supports needed to resolve their housing crisis.

**Referral:** the final element is referral. Persons are referred to available CoC housing resources and services in accordance with the CoC's documented prioritization guidelines.

#### **Documentation of Homelessness or At-Risk of Homelessness**

Documentation proving homeless status is due at the time of application to the CE project. The order of priority for obtaining evidence of homelessness and / or at-risk of homelessness is the following:

- Third-party documentation
- Intake worker observations
- Self-certification

#### **Points to consider when prioritizing people for housing and homelessness assistance**

- Significant health or behavioral health challenges or functional impairments which require a significant level of support in order to maintain permanent housing;
- High utilization of crisis or emergency services, including emergency rooms, jails, and psychiatric facilities, to meet basic needs;
- The extent to which people, especially youth and children, are unsheltered;
- Vulnerability to illness or death;
- Risk of continued homelessness; vulnerability to victimization, including physical assault or engaging in trafficking or sex work.

### Coordinated Entry System Ensures

- **Low Barrier:** CE does not disqualify individuals 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.
- **Housing First orientation:** People are housed quickly without preconditions or service participation requirements.
- **Person-Centered:** CE incorporates participant choice, which includes location and type of housing, level of services, and other options about which households can participate in decisions.
- **Fair and Equal Access:** SNCC has chosen a “no wrong door” approach, as such all people have fair and equal access to CE, regardless of where or how they present for services.
- **Emergency services:** CE does not delay access to emergency services such as shelter through Department of Social Services.
- **Standardized Access and Assessment:** All CE process Point of Entry (POE) locations offer the same assessment approach, forms, and referral approach using uniform decision-making processes. A person presenting at a POE location is not steered towards any particular program or provider simply because they presented at that location. All locations and SNCC partners use the CE long form Version 12 for walk-in consumers and intakes, and the short form for crisis situations and phone intakes.
- **Inclusive:** CE includes all subpopulations, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families, youth, and survivors of domestic violence.
- **Referral to projects:** The POE agencies complete an intake/assessment and refer the household to a minimum of three (3) appropriate. All CE forms and associated referrals are forwarded to the Saratoga County and North Country CE Coordinators.
- **Referral protocols:** Programs that participate in the SNCC’s CE Process (CE) accept all eligible referrals unless the agency has documentation that would support rejecting a referral.
- **Ongoing planning and stakeholder consultation:** The SNCC engages in ongoing planning with all stakeholders participating CE. This planning includes evaluating and updating the process at least annually. Feedback from individuals and families experiencing homelessness or recently connected to housing through CE is regularly gathered through surveys, focus groups, and other means and is used to improve the process.
- **Informing local planning:** Information gathered through CE is used to guide homeless assistance planning and system change efforts in the community.
- **Safety planning:** CE 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 CE and domestic violence services, as well as any data collection adheres to the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). If a client chooses not to utilize one of the CE participating DV agencies, the CE POE agency will reach out to the Executive Director of WellSpring for an anonymous safety plan for the client.
- **Using HMIS and other systems for coordinated entry:** SNCC will use HMIS to collect and manage data associated CE and referrals through the *Wait List Program*, in addition to an Excel Workbook designed to track activity and produce reports for weekly communication.

### SNCC Coordinated Entry Target Population

- Chronically Homeless; Youth, Individuals, and Families.
- Veterans
- Domestic Violence
- Substance Abuse

- Mental Illness

**Designated Coordinated Entry agencies and programs**

The following agencies are CoC, ESG, and/or STEHP funded. These agencies are required to participation in the Coordinated Assessment.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAPTAIN Community Human Services</li> <li>• Shelters of Saratoga</li> <li>• Veterans &amp; Community Housing Coalition, Inc.</li> <li>• The Salvation Army</li> <li>• RISE</li> <li>• Legal Aid</li> <li>• Wellspring</li> <li>• Prevention Council/Healing Springs</li> <li>• Wait House</li> <li>• Saratoga Department of Social Services</li> <li>• Warren Washington Association for Mental Health</li> <li>• Warren County Department of Social Services</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adirondack Vet House</li> <li>• IPH Ahana House</li> <li>• Soldier On</li> <li>• Veterans Administration</li> <li>• Washington County Department of Social Services</li> <li>• Glens Falls Housing Authority</li> <li>• Saratoga County Mental Health SPOA</li> <li>• City of Saratoga Springs</li> <li>• Open Door Mission</li> <li>• Warren Washington County SPOA</li> <li>• Mother Susan Anderson Shelter</li> <li>• Glens Falls Salvation Army</li> <li>• Fort Hudson</li> <li>• Saratoga Community Health Center</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

All POE staff should receive training on the standardized assessment tool to ensure proper referral, prioritization procedures, and priority list management is taking place.

**The SNCC Coordinated Entry Program Committee Objectives**

No Wrong Door, the principles of this approach are:

- Consumers 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 in order 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 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.

## Operating the Coordinated Entry System (Figure 2)

Full implementation and operation of the CE Program includes:

- Coordination of the Wait List
- Secure Email System
- Timely meetings
- Regular, weekly communication to identify anticipated vacancies, current vacancies, and updating the Wait List
- Timely referrals to the CE Coordinators

### Procedures

**Phone Calls:** Agencies where there is a high volume of call from people who may or may not be experiencing imminent risk of homelessness must do the following:

- Identify if the caller is interested in being assessed or receiving homeless assistance services.
- All callers should be pre-screened using the pre-screening CE tool.
- If households are, currently, residing in, or trying to leave, a domestic violence situation they feel threatened or fearful, household should be referred to Wellspring, of Saratoga County, and the Domestic Violence Project, for the North Country.
- If household is a Veteran, household should be referred to Saratoga County Rural Preservation Company, Adirondack Vets, and or Solider on.

### Data Collection:

Data should be collected on everyone that is assessed through the CE process. Once a household is deemed eligible to be assessed, the POE staff member should have the household fill out the POE agencies most current agency release of information form. POE staff should go over all forms with the household and explain what data will be requested, how it will be shared, whom it will be shared with, and anything else important to the household understanding the process. There are some households that should not take part in a full coordinated assessment:

- Households who are in imminent danger and want domestic violence-specific services
- Households who do not agree to share their data

### Using HMIS and other systems for Coordinated Entry process:

- Saratoga North Country CE will use HMIS to collect and manage data associated with assessments, referrals, current living situations and discharges from the CE project.
- All persons enrolled in the CE System will be input into the local HMIS system.
- Data will include HUD required elements as well as information needed to improve the CE referral process.
- If a client indicates that they are a victim of violence, or fleeing violence, and are receiving services from a victim services provider, the victim services provider will not enter personally identifying client information in HMIS but in an HMIS-comparable database.
- All households, whether being served by a victim service provider or not, have the right to refuse to have their personally identifying information entered in HMIS and shared among CoC providers and still receive services.
- Agencies shall adhere to the CoC's HMIS data quality and timeliness standards for the input and updating of participant information in HMIS

## Referral Process

Referrals to permanent housing and transitional housing should be made SNC does have participants within the community that are a part of our CE System that are not CoC funded. There are several factors that a referral can be based on:

- The results of the full coordinated assessment;
- The established prioritization system and vulnerability index;
- Program eligibility.

The referral process should be standard for all partnering agencies of the SNCC, and other participating organizations. The CE Coordinators will ensure this process stay consistent. Referrals will be based on each program's admission eligibility criteria, including populations served. For example, programs that serve only single adult females will only receive single adult female referrals. **Agencies participating in CE should have submitted and/or verified all of their eligibility criteria to the CE Committee.** Any changes to a programs eligibility criteria or target population must be submitted to the appropriate Coordinator.

### Referral Denials

There may be rare instances where a PSH/TH provider decides not to accept a referred household. Refusals are acceptable only in certain situations, including:

- The person does not meet the program's eligibility criteria;
- The person would be a danger to others or themselves if allowed to stay at this particular program; and
- The person has previously caused serious conflicts within the program (e.g. was violent and threatened to burn down the organization).

If the program determines a household is not eligible for their program after they have received the referral and application materials, the household should be sent back to their initial POE staff to determine a better PSH/TH option. Within 48 hours of denial, the CE Coordinator(s) and initial POE agency staff should come together to determine the best next step for the household. Any cases that are unable to be resolved to the household satisfaction will be referred to the CE Committee to be dealt with as soon as possible. If a program is consistently refusing referrals (more than 1 out of every 4) they will need to meet with the CE Committee to discuss the issue that is causing the refusals.

### **Coordinated Entry Coordinators**

There will be one Coordinator for Warren/Washington/Hamilton Counties and one Coordinator for Saratoga County. Coordinators will ensure prioritization for households with the most intensive service needs and housing barriers (e.g. chronically homeless household and household with multiple episodes of homelessness).

Coordinators will:

- Oversee the referral process and track all referrals.
- Monitor and manage the *Wait List* and adjust as necessary.
- Have regular contact with referring agencies to ensure follow-through on all referrals.
- Ensure households do not fall through the cracks.
- Send out notification of program openings.
- Coordinators will also monitor vacancies and anticipated vacancies as reported by participating SNCC agencies on a regular basis or as vacancies become open.
- Document and report back to the CE Committee on housing and service gaps within the SNCC.

All participating SNCC CE agencies and POE staff are required to funnel homeless applicants to the centralized *Waiting List*. SNCC provider agencies (Permanent Supportive Housing/Transitional Housing/Rapid Re-Housing/Others) will take applications from the *Wait List* and housing will be provided based upon an agreed upon order of priority as dictated by the vulnerability index and the CE Committee initiatives. CE Coordinators will monitor and administer this process.

### **Appeals**

Households involved in the CE process, or agencies acting on behalf of a household, may file an appeal of a denial for services with the CE Committee in writing no later than 60 days after receipt of a denial decision. The CE Committee will meet within 10 days of receipt of an appeal to review the case and provide a written determination on the appeal.

## Grievance Policy

It is the Saratoga North Country CE's policy to make every effort to settle difficulties and problems which may occur in the CE process. Every client who participates in the CE process is entitled to file a grievance if they have a complaint about the services they receive from any participating CE Agency. Every client would be encouraged to first attempt to resolve problems directly with the Agency that they are working with in the housing process.

**If after addressing concerns with the Agency, the client is not satisfied with the outcome, then the client should proceed with the grievance procedure.** The *Saratoga North Country CE Grievance Form (Figure 2)* will be available at each participating COC Agency.

### There are two levels of review available for each grievance filed:

#### Level 1:

- The first person to review the grievance will be the CE Lead
- Once the grievance is received, the CE Lead will contact and meet with the client within (3) business days.
- After the meeting, the CE lead will complete part II of the grievance form and inform the client of the outcome.
- The client will complete Part III and sign and date the form.
- If Client agrees with the outcome, the process ends and the resolution is implemented
- If Client disagrees they move to the next level of grievance.

#### Level 2:

- The Saratoga North Country CE Committee (if member is employed by agency involved in grievance member will excuse him/herself) will review grievance and complete part IV of grievance form.
- After this meeting the CE lead will contact the client to convey possible resolutions.
- The client will complete Part V of the *Saratoga North Country CE Grievance Form*.
- If Client agrees the process ends and the resolution is implemented
- If Client disagrees Client may bring grievance to the Saratoga North Country Executive Board

### Evaluation/Oversight

Successful implementation and operation of CE require policy oversight and ongoing system-level management. The SNC CE project has designated the following entities to oversee the policy, management and evaluation of their CE process.

- **The Evaluation Entity-** The SNC Board will assume the responsibility of Planning an annual CE evaluation, collecting data, evaluating the CE implementation process for effectiveness and efficiency and identifying policy and process improvements.
- **The Policy Oversight Entity-** The CE Committee will assume the responsibility of establishing participation expectations, determining local data collection and data quality expectations, defining data sharing protocols and selecting a Data System for CE.
- **The Management Entity-** The CE lead with HMIS participation will be responsible for establishing day-to-day management structures, establishing a clear, accessible communication plan, promoting standardized screening and assessment processes, developing and delivering training and conducting monitoring.

**Evaluation process**

The SNC Board is named as the Evaluation Entity for the SNC CE Project. The Evaluation Entity will be tasked with conducting an annual evaluation of the CE Project. The evaluation entity will evaluate the CoC's CE project using the methods detailed below. To ensure that each CoC is competitive in the annual CoC competition CARES as the Collaborative Applicant will support the CoC's to facilitate the implementation of this process. CARES will work with the CE lead agencies to draft the survey tools, pull together evaluation entity members for each CoC and assist with facilitating the evaluation process.

**Desired outcomes of the Evaluation are to**

- Identify opportunities for improvement of the CE project
- Demonstrate to CoC leadership a way to evaluate the CE project in a collaborative, transparent, improvement-focused manner
- This Evaluation will not:
  - Evaluate the Lead Agency individually
  - Evaluate individual agencies within the CE project

**Multiple methods to gather data and elicit comprehensive feedback on the CE Project include**

- A comprehensive review of the CE policies and Procedures including geographic coverage, assessment methods and prioritization and referral processes.
- Phone Surveys gathering information from formerly homeless individuals housed through the CE project and those currently on the priority list receiving services through the CE project.
- An online Survey collecting information from CE participating providers within the CoC to gather feedback on the structure of the CE project as well as strengths and barriers.
- Review of HMIS data to ensure CE compliance

**Questions**

Questions regarding the CE process should be directed to the co-chairs of the CE Committee and/or the CE Coordinators.

**Policy and Procedure Manual Acknowledgement**

I have received the Policy and Procedures Manual for the Saratoga North Country Coordinated Entry System and I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in this Manual and any revisions made to it.

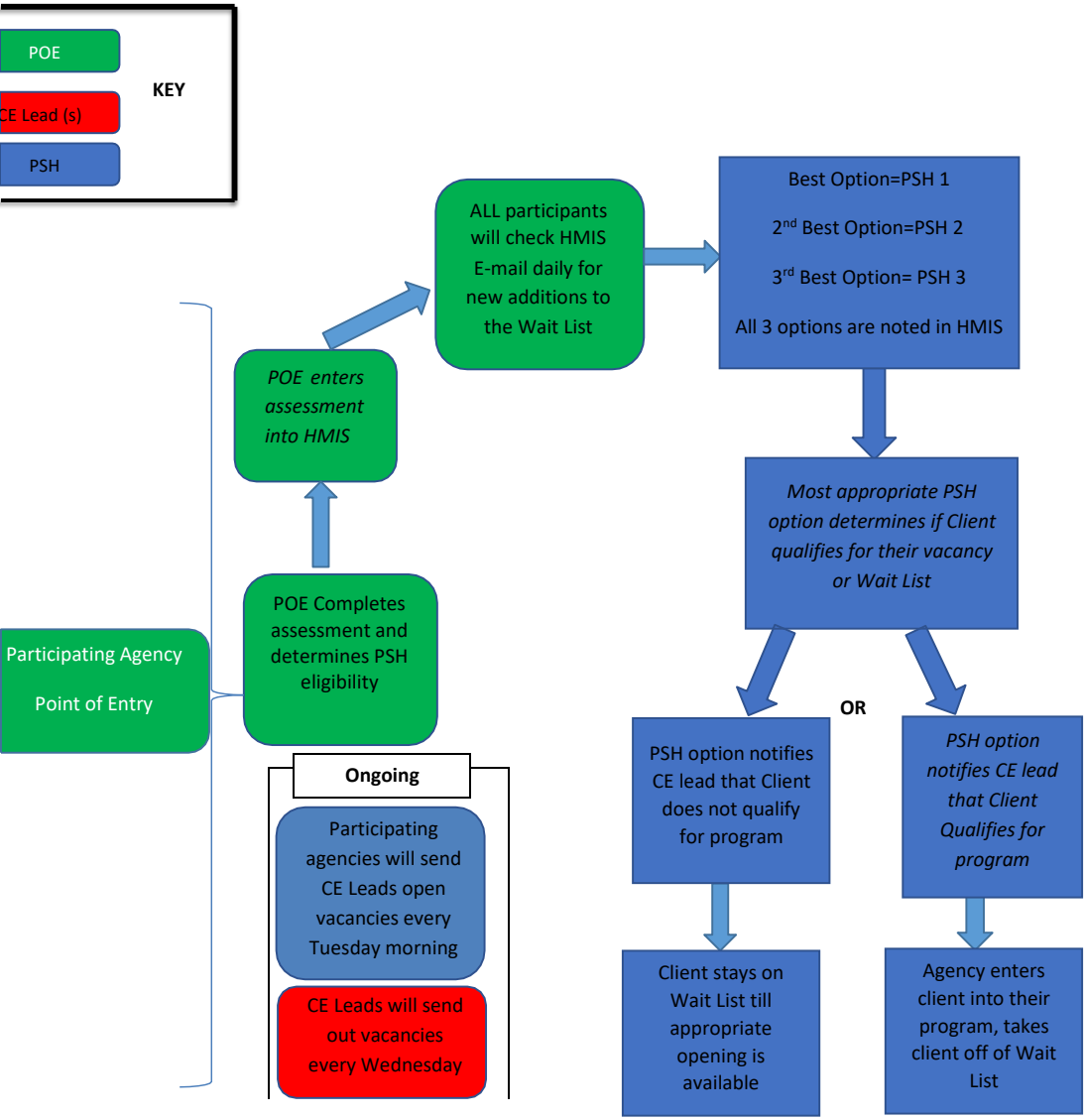
Name of Participating Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Designated Agency Representative authorized to sign: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Designated Agency Representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 1



**Saratoga North Country Coordinated Entry Grievance Form**

**Figure 2**

<b>Part I:</b>	
<b>Your Name (Please Print):</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Agency Name:</b>	
<b>Please state your concern (use back of form, if necessary):</b>	
<b>What action would you suggest?</b>	
<b>Your Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Part II:</b>	
<b>To Be Completed by Coordinated Entry Lead</b>	
<b>CE Lead Name</b>	
<b>Date Grievance Received:</b>	
<b>Recommended Grievance Solution:</b>	
<b>CE Lead Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Part III:</b>	
<b>To be completed by client, name above:</b>	
_____ I am satisfied with the recommended grievance solution.	
_____ I am not satisfied with the recommended grievance solution.	
<b>Signature of Client:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

<b>Part IV:</b>	
<b>To Be Completed by Coordinated Entry Committee</b>	
<b>Name:</b>	
<b>Date Grievance Received:</b>	
<b>Date of Committee Review:</b>	
<b>Final Grievance Solution:</b>	
<b>Date Discussed with Client:</b>	
<b>Panel Facilitator Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Part V:</b>	
<b>To be completed by client:</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am satisfied with the recommended grievance solution.	
<input type="checkbox"/> I am not satisfied with the recommended grievance solution.	

