
RENSSELAER COUNTY HOMELESS SERVICES COLLABORATIVE: 2023 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 2022, the Rensselaer County CoC (RCHSC) received \$4,068,189 from HUD to support 10 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 2023 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 Renewal Application

After the annual CoC Application is submitted to HUD by the Collaborative Applicant, the NOFA Committee begins discussing that prior 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 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.
6. 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.
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 2023 Rank & Review Application process will occur in two (2) parts, with the intent to allow agencies adequate time to complete the full Rank & Review Application.

* Please Note: Coordinated Entry, Planning, and HMIS projects are not required to fill out a renewal application.

*Renewal projects should have one federal fiscal years' worth of data (10/1-9/30) so should be in operation for one full federal fiscal year. See Project Tiering below for more information on how these projects are included in the final tiering.

- **Part 1** focuses on project and system outcomes, using project data entered in HMIS and objective questions to "rate" projects. The HMIS data used in Part 1 is from the previous HUD Fiscal Year (Oct 1 - Sep 30). This HMIS data used in Part 1 has been cleaned and reviewed for data quality errors when submitted to HUD for the Longitudinal Systems Analysis (LSA) report. Agencies must confirm Part 1 Data Attachment accuracy within five business days of receipt. During the Part 1/Data Training Session, agencies will be instructed on how to confirm the accuracy of the Data Attachment values.

If errors are identified on the Data Attachment, the agency must submit the Data Correction Form on the CARES Website. CARES staff will review the Data Correction Form submission to determine if the requested change is a calculation error. If the request is a calculation error, CARES staff will correct the error and resubmit the Data Attachments for the agency's review. After receiving the corrected Data Attachments, agency staff will review the changes and if no additional errors are identified, then agency staff will submit the Data Confirmation Form on the CARES website. If the request for Data Correction Form is determined to not be a calculation error, CARES staff will notify the agency of the decision and request the agency to submit the Data Confirmation Form.

If no errors are identified on the Data Attachment, the agency will submit the Data Confirmation Form on the CARES website. If an agency does not submit a Data Correction

Form or Data Confirmation Form after five business days following the Part 1/Data Training Session, then the data will be considered accurate and confirmed.

- **Part 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.

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 others. New project proposals will automatically be ranked below renewal projects. The Review Team reviews and scores all New/Bonus project applications submitted. The community's goal is to apply for the maximum amount of available funds. The same appeals process that applies to Renewal applications applies to New/Bonus project applications.

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.

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.

Data Sign-Off for Phase 1

Applicants must review data attachments provided by the Collaborative Applicant, and sign-off (within a one-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 one-week timeframe, those edits will be reviewed and made, if applicable, by the Collaborative Applicant. If edits to the data are made after the one-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 one-week period in order to ensure maximum number of points are awarded based on accurate data.

Debriefings

At the end of each part, 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. HMIS and CE projects are placed at the bottom of Tier 1. 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 (hschmidhamer@caresny.org) 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 October 1, 2022, 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.

RENEWAL