Southern Tier Homeless Coalition (STHC)

Policies and Procedures Manual

Implementation, Governance and Evaluation of the Coordinated Entry System in the STHC CoC

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Introduction

Document Overview

To implement and maintain a multi-county Coordinated Entry (CE) System, CARES of NY as the CE 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 a representative 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.

Implementing Coordinated Entry is a requirement under the CoC program Interim Rule, all CoC funded and ESG funded agencies are required to participate. The Coordinated Entry process in NY-511 STHC is a necessary system for developing a systemic response to homelessness in the STHC community. The NY-511 Coordinated Entry System ensures that people experiencing homelessness are prioritized for and matched with the right intervention as quickly as possible. This process standardizes the access, assessment, prioritization, and referral process across all providers who are CoC and for some that are non-CoC funded.

The Coordinated Entry Policies and Procedures will:

- Assist with the coordination of service delivery across the STHC CoC 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 including outreach, Emergency shelters and homeless prevention services

The Policies 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 collaboration with programs that do not receive either of these sources of funds to provide comprehensive services to the community's homeless population.

Coordinated Entry works by establishing one process to assess the situation of all households who request help through the housing crisis response system. There are four core elements to the Coordinated Entry System Access, Assessment, Prioritization and Referral. This manual will provide details about each of these four system functions.

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 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:

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

Purpose of Coordinated Entry

Coordinated Entry is considered one of the many interventions in a community's united effort to prevent, reduce, and combat 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 NY-511 Coordinated Entry (CE) process is designed to identify, engage, and assist homeless individuals and families and ensure those who need assistance are connected to proper housing and services. The implementation of coordinated entry is considered a 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;
- 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 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 CoC and/or ESG funded fill all vacancies through referrals, while non-funded projects are strongly encouraged to accept referrals from the Coordinated entry process.

Roles and Responsibilities of Key Participants:

Responsibility of Lead Agency: CARES of NY, Inc. as the lead agency will be responsible for tracking client from initial CE assessment to outcome, managing client data in the HMIS system, managing updates received from participating providers, partnering with Collaborative Applicant to ensure program compliance, and conducting bi-weekly meetings.

Funded Agencies: Participation from all agencies funded through the STHC Continuum of Care (CoC) and agency recipients of the Emergency Solution Grant (ESG) is required. Funded agencies will be responsible for updating vacancies on the community vacancy report, making and accepting/denying referrals, serving as a "No Wrong Door" by collecting disability and homeless documentation on behalf of walk-in's seeking housing assistance, and attending bi-weekly Case Review meetings.

Agencies receiving other streams of assistance: Agencies receiving alternate funding are strongly encouraged to participate and submit CE applications to the CE Lead agency to refer all households effectively and efficiently to services.

Training: Prior to utilizing Coordinated Entry it is required to for all staff to receive Coordinated Entry Training. This training will take place virtually and review CE eligibility, definitions of homelessness and chronic homeless status, data entry into HMIS, review of the prioritization process, review of the referral process and allow staff ample time to ask any questions regarding Coordinated Entry.

Furthermore, it is required that a mandatory yearly Refresher Training be administered to all staff currently utilizing Coordinated Entry. This Refresher Training will be held in place of a NY 511 CE Case Review Meeting. This meeting is to review the criteria and process for CE, as well as reviewing any data quality issues that have been prevalent in the past year, and how to correct them in future data entry.

Operating procedures of the NY-511 Coordinated Entry System

Coordinated Entry is an evolving practice as new research, models and assessment tools are continually being created. A CoC's CE process must be flexible and responsive to new information about more effective approaches as the process evolves and other services are wrapped into coordinated Entry.

The target population for CE includes:

- Chronically Homeless
- Homeless
- Veterans
- Domestic Violence
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Illness
- Youth
- Physically Disabled
- Families
- HIV / AIDS
- Unstably housed

Full implementation and operation of the CE system includes the following Core Elements:

Access: The engagement point for persons experiencing a housing crisis.

- The NY-511 Coordinated Entry System has adopted a No Wrong Door approach whereby assessment can be conducted regardless of which community stakeholder and/or CoC provider the client presents. This ensures that Consumers should have equal access to information and advice about the housing assistance for which they are eligible and assist them in making informed choices about available services that best meet their needs regardless of language barriers or impairments.
- Examples of access points in NY-511 include private and publicly funded homeless shelters, Temporary Assistance (TA) staff, street outreach projects, PSH/RRH programs, and outpatient treatment clinics.

Assessment: Upon access CoC providers associated with the Coordinated Entry Process will begin assessing the person's housing needs.

- A universal intake and assessment form will be utilized for all consumers. 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, reduce length of time homeless and improve communication among agencies.

Prioritization: One of the main purposes of coordinated entry is to ensure that people with the most severe service needs and longest length of time homeless are prioritized for housing and homeless assistance.

- People experiencing chronic homelessness are prioritized within the CE priority list 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.
- If it happens that the current NY-511 Coordinated Entry priority list shows no suitable chronically homeless households, with HUD guidance, a non-chronically homeless household may be approved for a vacant unit. It is expected that efforts have been undertaken to locate persons that would be considered the highest priority and a form documenting this action must be completed by agency accepting non-chronic household and approved by the lead CE agency.
  - **Documentation of Homelessness or At-Risk of Homelessness**
    - All staff utilizing Coordinated Entry are to inquire if a prospective CE participant is in possession of/has access to obtaining documentation regarding their current homeless status at 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 households for housing and homelessness assistance: Based on Vulnerability Scoring from CE Application**
  - Chronically homeless households are prioritized within the Coordinated Entry priority list; applications are given a prioritization score. See attached Assessment Tool for PSH and RRH referrals.

Referral: When a program is in need of a referral for any TH, RRH or PSH program, a Referral Request Form is to be completed for each individual program which indicates the following information:

- Number of vacancies needed to be filled by referrals through Coordinated Entry
- Contact information of referring agency
- Type of program in need of referrals
- Household type able to be assisted through program
- Unit size (Only applicable for site-based programs)

- Location (Scattered or site-based program)
- Specific populations/criteria for program as required by funder

Once the referral request form is received by the CE Lead, the referrals will be selected based on prioritization and eligibility criteria, as indicated in the referral request form. Once the referrals have been indicated, the CE Lead will send a completed referral form and a copy of the NY 511 CE Assessment to the agency point of contact. The NY 511 CE Referral Form contains the following information:

- Date of referral
- Head of household's name
- Agency being referred to
- Project being referred to
- Primary contact number (As indicated in Coordinated Entry Assessment)
- Name and AWARDS username of point of entry
- Additional notes (I.e. Current living situation, special conditions, etc.)

After receiving the referrals from the CE Lead, the agency will begin attempting to reach the household whom was referred. A minimum of three attempts will be made within five business days by the receiving program before moving on to the next eligible applicant. Possible forms of outreach to contact a referral may include but are not limited to the following:

- Contact primary number
- Contact alternate contact number, if provided
- Contact point of entry into CE
- Contact or visit last known location, if applicable
- Contact care manager/DSS case manager, if applicable
- Contact local street outreach programs to verify involvement, if applicable

After no less than three unsuccessful attempts of outreach without making contact with the household, or if the household is unable to be served by the program for any reason, a referral denial form is to be completed and submitted to the CE Lead. The referral denial form captures the following information:

- Agency
- Program
- Contact information for individual completing form
- Name of head of household
- Date of denial
- Reason for denial (with further explanation); the options as follows:
    - Is this due to policy or procedure created by a funder, board, staff, property management, landlord or other entity?
    - If you were unable to contact client regarding this referral, please indicate the dates of attempted communication, to whom, and in what form (phone, email, etc.)
    - If you feel this was an inappropriate referral, please indicate below with an explanation

Once the referral is completed, it is to be submitted to the CE Lead, the referral will be logged in HMIS and a new referral for the same vacancy will be sent within 1 business day.

If a referral is successful, the CE Lead ought to be notified with the following information:

- Date household was accepted to program/approved to apartment search
- Move in date to new unit

If household moves into a PSH program they will be discharged after successfully moving into this new unit, if household moves into TH or RRH program, they could remain on the CE Prioritization List, as they are still eligible for referrals to PSH programs, if they have the needed documentation for PSH programs.

Coordinated Entry System Ensures:

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, etc.

Emergency Services:

- The coordinated entry process does not delay access to emergency services such as shelter placement.
- Emergency Shelter providers attend the coordinated entry case review meetings.

Prevention Services:

- Referral to Homeless Prevention Service Providers is made through the Coordinated Entry system.
- Individuals eligible for prevention services will be referred accordingly

Inclusive:

- A CE process includes all subpopulations, including people experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, families, youth, and survivors of domestic violence.
- All subpopulations including chronically homeless individuals and families, veterans, youth, persons and households fleeing domestic violence, transgendered persons, refugees and new immigrants must be provided equal access to the CoCs Coordinated Entry System services regardless of the characteristics and attributes of their specific subpopulations.

On-going 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 ensures the safety of the individuals seeking assistance. This ensures 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). The CoC coordinates with victim/ non-victim providers to ensure DV survivors are provided housing services that uphold safety by prioritizing programs that collaborate to offer victims a wide range of options. Households presenting at non-victim providers are linked with DV services via a phone assessment. Households are given options including VAWA and CoC services to guard personally identifiable information. If a client is eligible and elects DV services the provider will end intake, void electronic record and connect victim with DV service provider. If client elects for non DV services, the Client is referred to a nonvictim provider to fulfill CoC CE process. VAWA compliant informed consent is required to provide information to other providers.

Street Outreach:

- Programs that are staffed by outreach workers will address homeless individual and families housing by offering ongoing engagement with those not able or willing to access housing services on their own. Street outreach services will complete coordinated Entry application and provide follow up with the client while the client transitions to being housed. Unsheltered persons will be engaged to provide immediate support, intervention and connections with homeless assistance programs, social services and housing programs including permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing programs. Street outreach efforts are linked to the coordinated entry process and participate in SPOA meetings. Through the street

outreach efforts NY-511 Coordinated Entry ensures that people on the streets are prioritized for assistance in the same manner as any other person assessed through the Coordinated Entry process.

Using HMIS and other systems for Coordinated Entry purposes:

- NY-511 will use HMIS to collect and manage data associated with assessments, referrals, current living situations and discharges from the coordinated entry project.
- All persons enrolled in the Coordinated Entry System will be input into the local HMIS system.
- Data will include HUD required elements as well as information needed to improve the Coordinated Entry 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 or anonymously integrated into the mainstream CE system at the discretion of the HH and VSP.
- All households, whether being served by a victim service provider or not, have the right to refuse to have their personally identifying information entered into 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.

Fair and Equal Access:

- The Coordinated Entry system in STHC will ensure fair and equal access so that all people can easily access the Coordinated Entry process and the process for accessing help is well known.
- All programs will ensure fair and equal access to CE system programs and services for all clients regardless of actual or perceived race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender identity, pregnancy, citizenship, familial status, household composition, disability, veteran status, sexual
- orientation, or domestic violence status To ensure fair access by individuals with disabilities, physical and communication accessibility barriers must be addressed by appropriate accommodation within the CE System.
- If an individual's self-identified gender or household composition creates challenging dynamics among residents within a facility, the host program should make every effort to accommodate the individual or assist in locating alternative accommodation that is appropriate and responsive to the individual's needs.

Marketing: CoC's and recipients of HUD CoC Program and ESG Program funding are required to affirmatively market their housing and supportive services projects to eligible persons who are least likely to apply in the absence of special outreach. Marketing strategies may include participating

agencies utilizing their websites to advertise that they are a point of access and a brochure outlining the coordinated entry process as well as where individuals can go to apply for housing assistance through the CoC. This brochure will be available at community organizations such as health centers, churches and libraries.

Evaluation/Oversight: Successful implementation and operation of coordinated entry requires policy oversight and day-to-day system-level management. The STHC Coordinated Entry project has designated the following entities to oversee the policy, management and evaluation of their Coordinated Entry process.

- The Evaluation Entity- The 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 Advisory 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 assume the responsibility of 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.

The Board was named as the Evaluation Entity for the STHC Coordinated Entry Project. The Evaluation Entity will be tasked with conducting an annual evaluation of the Coordinated Entry Project. This Committee will evaluate the CoC's Coordinated Entry 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 Coordinated Entry 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 Coordinated Entry 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

Grievance/Appeal process:

- There will be formal grievance and appeals process overseen by the Advisory 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. It is Coordinated Entry policy to make every effort to settle difficulties and problems which may occur in the Coordinated Entry process.
- Every client who participates in the Coordinated Entry process is entitled to file a grievance if they have a complaint about the services they receive from any participating Coordinated Entry Agency. We would encourage every client 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.
- NY-511 Coordinated Entry Grievance Form will be available at each participating agency.

I have received the Policy and Procedure Manual for the NY-511 STHC 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: _____

Signature of Designated Agency Representative: _____

Date: _____

Please return this page to your Coordinated Entry Lead Agency:

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