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MEMORANDUM

TO: Scott Morishige, Hawaii Coordinator on Homelessness
FROM: Flora Arabo and Akeiisa Coleman
SUBJECT: Best Practices for Interagency Councils on Homelessness
DATE: June 21, 2016
CC: Sandra Wilkniss

This memo responds to a request for information on best practices for effective state interagency councils on homelessness (ICH), including governance, structure, decision-making and staffing. The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has compiled best practices based on their work with councils nationwide, and we have summarized their key findings. In addition, we interviewed two states – Minnesota and Massachusetts – considered to be exemplary councils.

Best Practices

Each state ICH operates under unique guidelines and structure, yet all ICHs serve the purpose of leading the state response to homelessness. In particular, the role of the ICH is to create a state-level plan to end homelessness, efficiently manage state resources to achieve the goals of that plan, and create and leverage community partnerships to drive plan implementation. An ICH is a decision-making body tasked with making policy recommendations, gathering resources, setting and measuring goals, and ensuring accountability.

Some of the best practices highlighted by the USICH framework include:

- Diverse membership that include multiple stakeholders from a wide array of regions, offices, and providers such as: representatives from gubernatorial offices, cabinet-level officials, representatives from the judicial and legislative branches of government, grassroots community members, and federal regional offices;
- Strong participation and involvement from the governor or lieutenant governor's office;
- A chairperson appointed by the governor or elected by the ICH for a limited duration;
- Regular monthly or quarterly meetings, open to the public; and
- Responsibility for major tasks that include: creating a state plan, monitoring and evaluating the plan, disseminating information to stakeholders, and updating the executive and legislative branches annually on its progress.

While each state must consider its political environment, culture, and available resources in shaping an effective ICH, the USICH recognizes these characteristics as key elements of the most effective interagency councils.

State Example: Minnesota

Minnesota is recognized as having one of the most efficient and effective ICHs in the country. The ICH is unique in their structure which includes the ICH, a Senior Leadership Team and an Implementation Team. The ICH is entirely comprised of state commissioners and representation from the governor's office (the Lieutenant Governor and her staff fill this role). The ICH meets three to four times per year and is currently co-chaired by the Housing Commissioner and Human Services Commissioner. The Senior Leadership Team is composed of deputy commissioners who meet six or more times a year and are responsible for preparing the commissioners for the ICH meetings. The Implementation Team includes program staff from those state agencies who carry

out implementation and day-to-day activities. The Implementation Team meets regularly and advances the work of the ICH. Both the Implementation Team and Senior Leadership Team meet prior to the ICH and their input shapes the ICH agenda. This specific structure is not defined by statute or an executive order. The ICH operates under a [statute](#) that broadly defines the purpose of the ICH, giving the state and the ICH the ability to make changes and remain flexible as the landscape changes.

The ICH staff, led by the State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness, carry out the regular responsibilities of council staff such as preparing agendas, meeting minutes, and ensuring communication between the various teams and communities. There are six staff who support the ICH – three full-time staff and three part-time staff whose services are provided in-kind (2 from state agencies and 1 from a foundation) – and while most of the staff is embedded in different state agencies, there is an understanding that they support all the ICH members. The staff work very closely with the above-mentioned teams to solicit feedback on items that need to be brought to the attention of the ICH. They also meet monthly with coordinators for the continuae of care (there are 10 CoCs in the state) and act as liaisons between state agencies and the ICH. The vocal support of the governor has empowered the ICH and the ICH staff to do this work.

The ICH has benefited from philanthropic leaders who were interested in elevating housing stability in Minnesota. They formed a funders collaborative and have raised funds to be strategically invested to address housing and homelessness. For example, the funders collaborative paid the salary of the ICH project manager for one year, with the intent of the state taking on the full cost of the position in subsequent years.

State Example: Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) is composed of state secretaries, assistant secretaries, and commissioners in the executive branch. The complete list of members is available on the ICHH [website](#). The council meets quarterly and is currently co-chaired by the Secretary of the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) and the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). At this time, the ICHH operates through the authorization of an [executive order](#) from the previous administration.

There is one dedicated staff member to support the ICHH, an executive director appointed by the governor. The executive director position is paid for jointly by EOHED and EOHHS. The ICHH executive director works closely with secretaries and commissioners in the executive branch. While the executive director does not have direct authority, she has been able to leverage the support of senior leadership, specifically the governor and ICHH co-chairs. The core duties of the executive director are coordination, sending invitations, and drafting agendas. The executive director sets the agenda for the ICHH, and takes cues from the secretaries on identifying issues to address. Staff from participating state agencies also help to support the ICHH agenda, in addition to their other duties.

The ICHH incorporated legislatively mandated workgroups and committees into their structure. Under the current leadership, there are five committees, which are co-chaired by an ICHH member and the executive director. Historically, the ICHH has focused on a single initiative. This sometimes resulted in disengagement from agencies not directly involved in that initiative. The broad range of initiatives being pursued through the five committees may be a contributing factor for the current high level of participation from secretaries and deputy secretaries. The Committees meet every couple of months and may have workgroups. Workgroup participants include staff from state agencies, advocates, providers, consumers, and other stakeholders. There is also an ICHH Advisory Council that meets quarterly and is composed of state agencies, advocates, consumers, providers, and funders. Workgroup and advisory council members may also represent one of the 19 continuum of care (CoC) programs in Massachusetts.

For more information, please see:

<https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/developing-state-interagency-council-to-end-homelessness>
<http://www.headinghomeminnesota.org/our-plan>
www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/eohhs/cyf/ichh-initiativeoverview.pdf