

State Planning Advisory Committee Best Practices for Iowa's Homelessness System

April 2, 2014, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Iowa Finance Authority

Board Room

2015 Grand Ave.

Des Moines, IA

Meeting Summary

Committee Members Present

Julie Bockenstedt, Humility of Mary Housing, Inc. & Humility of Mary Shelter, Inc., Davenport

Michelle Brown, Opening Doors, Dubuque

Jim Cain, Family Promise of Greater Des Moines, Des Moines

Crissy Canganelli, Shelter House, Iowa City; Policy & Planning Committee Co-Chair, Iowa Council on Homelessness

Ronelle Clark, YWCA Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Resource Center and Transitional Housing Program, Clinton

Carrie Dunnwald, Cedar Valley Friends of the Family, Waverly

Heather Harney, HACAP, Hiawatha

Jeannie Kingery, Northern Lights Shelter for Men & Trinity House of Hope Shelter for Women, Mason City

Nicole Rethman, Domestic/Sexual Assault Outreach Center, Fort Dodge

Jan Rutledge, Iowa Legal Aid, Iowa City (substitute for Michelle Hoyt-Swanstrom)

Mark Sertterh, Shelter House, Iowa City

Tony Timm, Central Iowa Shelter & Services, Des Moines; Policy & Planning Committee Co-Chair, Iowa Council on Homelessness

Members Not Present:

Michelle Hoyt-Swanstrom, Iowa Legal Aid, Ottumwa

Iowa Finance Authority Staff

Carolann Jensen

Amber Lewis

SPPG Staff

Stacie Bendixen

Indira Blazevic

Arlinda McKeen

Welcome

Arlinda McKeen, SPPG facilitator, welcomed committee members and opened the floor to opening comments.

It was asked if a peer review would be conducted of the recommended standards. The time frame will not allow for a full formal review, but input from stakeholders around the state will be sought via an online questionnaire.

Standards Discussion – Review and Finalize (Operations and Services)

A small group worked through the drafted standards on operations and services between the last meeting and this one to determine which programs each standard applies to. Remaining questions they had were noted on a worksheet provided to the whole committee. These questions were discussed; notes from the discussion follow.

Operations

- Biennial report to Secretary of State
 - There was a question of whether this applies to churches that do outreach work. Yes, the standard to have records of filing a biennial report with the Secretary of State applies to nonprofits. Churches fall under the category of nonprofits so the standard should apply to church-sponsored programs as a whole to file any appropriate reports.
- DUNS number
 - Does having a DUNS number need to be a standard, since it is a grant requirement?
 - But even if you are not required to have one because you do not intend to seek public funding, is it a good idea to have a DUNS number as a standard because it speaks to the credibility of the organization? Getting one demonstrates that you are a responsible, reputable organization with a history. It indicates transparency and that an organization is active.
 - It would be helpful to provide information on the benefits of having a DUNS number to explain why an organization would want one if they are not required to have one.
 - “If required” will not be included in this standard. It will apply to all programs because having a DUNS number is seen as an indicator of a quality program.
- Written financial policies
 - What about “financial controls”? A basic description of an organization’s internal financial controls?
 - The items listed as part of financial policies will be reviewed in an audit, so is it redundant to list them out here?
 - Not everyone has an audit done.
 - “Internal controls” is added to the list of what should be included in written financial policies and procedures.
 - “Have written procedures in place for document retention based on best practices for that particular document” is confusing. Changed to “for each specific type of document.”
- Written employee manual or personnel policy and procedure manual
 - Remove “client” from the list of people who should sign confidentiality policies, because policies for clients to sign would be different and will be covered under Services.
- The word “client” will be used consistently throughout the standards to refer to a person being served.
- Insurance coverage
 - The small group wondered what insurance coverage is required versus necessary. What is required, and by whom?

- Should recommended types of coverage be listed in the standard?
- The list is “including but not limited to,” but not comprehensive, and is intended to get providers thinking about what they need.
- It is not a good idea to list specific types of coverage.
- An organization should consult with their insurance providers about what they need.
- Should types of coverage needed “at minimum” be listed? That may set it up for organizations to only do the minimum.
- Beyond what is required by state law (worker’s compensation and unemployment insurance), organizations should have liability, directors and officers, and professional liability. Other types, such as property and vehicle insurance, are covered by the standard of having insurance commensurate with the services provided by the organization.
- Include that the organization should review its insurance coverage annually with its insurance provider.
- Abuse
 - Child abuse and dependent adult abuse should be specified in order to define what is meant by “abuse.”
- Staffing requirements
 - There are complications with this standard related to non-residential programs.
 - In an emergency shelter, at minimum, a qualified person should be present during hours of operation. For other programs, at minimum one staff person should be available during hours of operation.
- Training
 - This is a long list of specific trainings.
 - For volunteers, the intention is for the standard on training to apply to volunteers providing direct service to clients.
 - These apply to all staff, whether providing direct service or not.
 - Some of these are too case-management specific for non-direct service staff. Others disagree; it depends on the clientele.
 - “Applicable” trainings?
 - What does “substance abuse” training entail? It seems too broad to put before other organizations. Does it involve recognizing, coping, education?
 - Is there a statewide “Bridges Out of Poverty” training? That should be required or recommended. It is offered by colleges, municipalities, etc. Make the reference more general, e.g.: poverty awareness training such as “Bridges Out of Poverty.”
 - The phrase “if applicable” takes care of any exceptions for domestic violence providers.
 - Human trafficking training should be suggested.
 - Motivational interviewing training should be suggested.
- Safety training
 - Do all of these points belong under the safety training point above?
 - Have a current emergency preparedness plan and provide safety training to all.
 - These are two standards – having a plan and providing training. They should be broken into two.
 - Conduct regular drills and maintain written evacuation plans.
- Code of ethics
 - “Code of ethics” is preferred over “code of conduct.”
- ServicePoint
 - Use ServicePoint or a similar reporting system.

- Notify clients that their information will be reported in aggregate, and provide notice about the use of ServicePoint.
 - DV providers use a different system but are still required to report data.
 - Programs that use ServicePoint are required to post notification that client data is reported through ServicePoint; should DV providers that use ALICE have to post similar notification? Yes.
 - Notify clients in writing that their information will be aggregated and used for reporting purposes. Since a particular system is not named, it applies to all programs.
 - Should it include a notice that clients can decline to provide any of their information? It is part of releases that clients sign.
 - Obtain written permission from clients for data to be collected?
 - Some areas have information-sharing agreements that may call for getting special permissions.
 - The standard should be general enough to allow for evolving systems.
 - Notify clients that their information will be aggregated and shared within the local services system.
 - That phrasing loses the “reporting” function and does not cover reporting outside of the local system, such as for grants.
 - Does this fit into the standard about written notices of client rights? Yes, it can be added that clients have a right to share or refuse to share information.
 - ...added back in “for reporting purposes.”
- Client rights
 - Add: limit or allow use of personal information to be shared with other providers.
 - Concern about this: I would not want other providers to assume that information will be shared as a common practice. Looking at it as someone who does not have formal training and is perhaps working through their church and wants to utilize standards, this could create an assumption that it is okay to share information.
 - There are MOU procedures.
 - Should it be specified that the information sharing refers to within homelessness services systems?
 - However, we connect clients with other kinds of services, not just homelessness services.
 - Will an outside person understand that this refers to sharing information with other providers under shared agreements, not just anyone?
 - Specify that this refers to agencies sharing information under shared confidentiality agreements?
 - Does this belong under client rights? Yes, this is about a client’s right to allow, limit or refuse to have their information used, period.
 - There are also laws about mental health and substance abuse.
 - We cannot make this a misinterpretation-proof document.
 - Clients have to give us some information, or we can’t help them.
 - Change the word “use” to “release”? Or “collection and release”?
 - The client’s right is to allow or deny use of their personal information for any reason. Period – that’s all we need.
 - Add a provision about permission to allow the provider to use a client’s story, picture, etc. in publications and publicity. Sometimes they will sign it and their situation will change and they want to revoke permission.
- Removed the draft standard about minimum client file contents.

Services

- Recognizing diversity of culture, language, and ability
 - You do not have to ask about disability (and you cannot), but this is about recognizing differences and having a plan to serve them.
 - The example about disability was removed.
- Eligibility criteria
 - It is an education opportunity to list the categories listed in state law that it is illegal to discriminate based upon.
 - Add “at minimum.”
 - Having written eligibility criteria should be a separate standard from non-discrimination. It is important that programs have written criteria beyond stating that they will not discriminate. It should be clear who they serve.
- Policies and notification of process for removal, appeal, etc.
 - The small group thought that having a written policy and notifying clients can be combined into one standard.
 - It also may be important to keep them as two because they are separate steps carried out by different people. The board approves the policy, and staff carry out notifying clients.
 - Does having a written policy belong in the operations section? However, this is a services-related decision, even if the board makes it.
 - It was decided to keep them separate.
 - Have a board-approved policy.
 - Provide clients access to the policies.
- Protocol on client discharge
 - What does “discharge” mean?
 - “Removal” or “termination” means the services were ended for some reason other than a client completing a program – it has a more negative connotation. Discharge refers to a client leaving because they completed the program or found success or achieved the goals set and no longer need the services.
 - Unsure how or if this applies to outreach services, because they are less likely to be programs with defined length or have processes for coming in and out.
 - Protocol means spelling out the steps of how to do something.
 - This is included elsewhere and can be omitted.
- The last three were not written out as standards and the last meeting, and the small group recommends deleting them because they are program-specific. This was agreed to.

Discussion on Legal Services

Jan Rutledge was asked to discuss examples of ways Legal Aid is different from homelessness providers in terms of how these standards would or would not apply. There was discussion on how to handle legal services in the standards document. It could be discussed in the narrative preceding the recommended standards in this committee’s report that Legal Aid was involved in outreach and discussions for this work, and they have sets of standards that apply to their work, but these standards are not designed to fit with all of their services.

Are there other types of organizations that are also special cases? Perhaps situations like when a client is seen at a community health clinic. But that relates to completely different services – medical services. No others were offered. The group agreed to address how legal services relate to these standards in the narrative of the report, separate from the recommended standards, as discussed above. Carolann Jensen of IFA noted that these standards are not

intended to be held out as applying to Legal Aid – similar to medical services, legal services provided to all kinds of people (homeless or not) are distinct from homelessness services and these standards are not meant to apply. It has been valuable to have Legal Aid participate in these discussions because they serve many homeless people or people in danger of becoming homeless, but Legal Aid does not provide primarily homelessness services, so it is not meant to fall under the standards being developed.

Standards Discussion – Performance

The committee next began the work of drafting standards on performance. Notes from the discussion follow.

- We are not tracking what we really need to know. For example, the average length of stay in a shelter is artificially low – the average is brought down by people in certain situations, which does not reflect the actual trends. Another example is people who cannot work for a particular reason bringing down the statistics about clients finding work. For a significant portion of the population we work with, work is not feasible.
- At the same time, data is needed for the purposes of people who try to look at the big picture of the homelessness services system. How can standards be approached that reflect addressing what is realistic?
- There needs to be a systems-approach standard that involves networking and partnerships to meet families' needs, and also provider-level standards. Standards for performance as a whole (a community, the state, etc.) are important. Our performance cannot be so individualized; it has to be broader.
- There should be a few systems-level, big picture standards, but also provider- or program-level standards that demonstrate how the provider is contributing to the overall performance goals (such as reducing the length of time people are homeless).
- These performance standards will not get as specific as, for example, "There will be a 25% reduction in..."
- Crissy Canganelli, as a Council on Homelessness member, said that the Council has just recently taken program performance in any of these areas into consideration in funding decisions. Historically, providers have not had to meet specific performance expectations as a condition of funding. Looking at performance in relation to funding decisions is a new practice.
- Tony Timm, a Council member, noted the differences among providers in terms of number of people served and amount of funding, and that some will need an investment of resources in order to meet standards that others are closer to.
- HUD has set performance measures and charged local areas with creating standards. Can there be some overarching standards and some that are more specific and vary by program type?
- We are not talking about standards for a local planning group, but instead standards for an organization.

Committee members suggested and discussed concepts and content for standards on performance:

- For example, for emergency shelter, a standard might be: "Provide people with safe shelter off the street and connect them with resources." Or, "Clients are provided the opportunity to connect with resources." That would apply to emergency shelter, transitional, prevention, permanent supportive housing, and rapid rehousing.
- For outreach programs a standard could be: Ensure clients have basic needs and the opportunity to connect with resources.

- Being a support for someone. Some of these people have no support system. Knowing someone is there and cares makes a difference for some.
- Meeting the client where they are.
 - How do you demonstrate that?
 - We use a “client-driven” concept – they set their own goals and decide what services they want. It’s self-disclosure.
 - Other providers have higher or different expectations because the types of clients are different.
- Provide assistance in identifying appropriate goals.
- Much is out of the control of providers.
- What is our goal and our mission? Out standards should come out of that. We want people to be stabilized; to be in stable, safe housing.
- A standard could start with, “Clients will show progress toward...” less restrictive housing, for example. This would be a standard about working with clients toward gaining housing stability.
- There are people who are shelter-hopping, but I have no way to know that.
- There are some people I work with who are okay with that.
- From a rural perspective, there are a lot of little towns that have no housing policies, building codes, written regarding habitability, and no restrictions or regulation for landlords. In the small towns I work in it’s very difficult to try to get people adequate housing.
- Those clients should be referred to Legal Aid because it’s state law that landlords maintain habitability.

The committee agreed on the main elements of what a high-performing organization that provides homelessness services will do or strive for:

A high-performing organization will...

- Ensure that people are off the street, safe and provided the opportunity to connect with resources.
- Provide for basic needs and the opportunity to connect with resources.
- Meet the client where they are; assist in identifying basic needs.
- Work with the client toward gaining housing stability.
- Work to sustain the stable status (whatever that is for that individual).

The committee broke into small groups to draft standards for performance. After coming back together, each group reported on its discussions on the standards drafted so far and suggested additional elements that high-performing providers will have or do. Notes from their reports follow.

Group 1

- We agreed with the standards already written.
- Partnering with other providers in your community.
- Successful discharge vs. termination of services.

Group 2

- For transitional and longer-term housing, identification of barriers is important. It would lead to a good outcome if all of these are addressed: social isolation, substance abuse, mental health problems, debt, criminal history, domestic violence, literacy, others.
- Motivational interviewing – clients have more information about themselves than we ever will; they may feel a disincentive to share everything.

- Get past initial survival skill some clients exercise of agreeing to everything put in front of them, and get to what their goals actually are and how to progress toward them.
- A standard would be to identify barriers, including but not limited to... (include some examples).
 - Design a procedure that overcomes those.

Group 3

- Quality of the shelter, such as a family having a private room, etc. – both physical and interactive qualities; people being treated with dignity and respect.
- Practicing case management.
- How self-directed the case management is.
- What the family needs to be successful. But how do you define success?
- Clients have greater knowledge of resources available to them and how to access them.
- Trained, qualified staff who are knowledgeable about the resources available.

Notes from additional discussion follow.

- A challenge is making standards doable for everyone, so the expectations of meeting standards does not force providers to cherry-pick who they serve so they have high outcomes and can get funding. We don't want to leave out those clients.
- We don't want it to be that all providers have to meet all of these, because then it means nothing. Some may be considered "meeting threshold" but not high-performing.
- But not all providers start on a level playing field in terms of the needs of the clients they serve. An organization may be high-performing for the level of clients they work with, but not necessarily in terms of all of these standards.
- If an organization complies with all the standards that apply to them, does that mean they are a high-performing organization?
 - Regardless of performance?
 - You could still be meeting all the standards but providing poor-quality services.
- Standards are client-outcome-oriented. Even though they are provider-level standards, their measure is in the progress of the clients.
- As organizations we're not all technically serving the same kinds of people.

The group was asked and agreed that the essence of the content that should be covered in performance standards had been captured in the overarching elements of what a high-performing homelessness service provider will do. SPPG will revise the wording drafted so far to reflect the group's discussions and shape language for standards, and submit to the group for consideration.

Report to Submit to IFA

As the product of this committee's work, a report containing the committee's recommended standards and a recommended implementation plan will be submitted to the Iowa Finance Authority. SPPG provided the committee a draft annotated list of contents for the report. The report will provide enough context so that a reader who was not part of these discussions will be able to understand the reasons for this work, the process, and the resulting recommendations.

Next Steps

Dave Eberbach, one of the staff of the organization that manages the state's HMIS (homelessness management information system), will be at the committee's next meeting for discussion on how the performance standards would relate with HMIS.

Before the committee's next and final meeting on April 17, an electronic questionnaire will be sent to homelessness providers around the state to update them on this work, provide an idea of the kinds of standards being developed, and ask them to provide input on whether their organization already meets each example standard, is on its way to meeting it, or has not addressed it. The intent of the questionnaire is to provide information and to show providers that many of the recommended standards will be things many of them are already doing. The questionnaire will be sent to everyone on the list compiled so far for outreach in this project, and all are encouraged to forward it to others. The questionnaire will be sent and responses collected and analyzed by the committee's final meeting.

The committee was shown a draft of the questionnaire. It was suggested and agreed to leave the answer choice "This doesn't apply to my organization because..." open-ended and have the respondent enter a comment about why, rather than allowing only the specific answer "because my primary mission is domestic violence/sexual assault," because there may be other kinds of providers who feel a standard does not apply to them.

Upcoming Meeting:

Thursday, April 17, 2014, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m., West Des Moines Learning Resource Center, 3500 Mills Civic Parkway, West Des Moines, IA 50266