

Standards for Homelessness Programs

**Recommended by the State Planning Advisory Committee
Iowa Council on Homelessness**

April 2014

Submitted by State Public Policy Group, Inc. (SPPG)

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Preface

People are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in all parts of Iowa. The array of Iowans requiring services is diverse. Homelessness is frequently a byproduct of economic hardship or health issues. There are rural, suburban, and urban homeless. Children and youth, families, veterans, people with behavioral health issues, people escaping relationship violence, and ex-offenders are among the temporary or chronically homeless.

In many cases, these individuals and families are invisible amid the overall activity of a community. Services, programs, and organizations have emerged over time to work locally in support of those who are homeless or facing homelessness in efforts to keep them safe and assist them to obtain permanent housing.

Like many other services and programs, homelessness has been addressed over the decades in Iowa as the need occurred. Informal programs were provided by service organizations and faith-based organizations. Local governments developed services as homeless populations increased in cities.

Understandably, as the issue of homelessness became visible, early local efforts sought to meet the immediate need. Those efforts often were provided independent of other efforts in the same community. Thus, a disconnected set of services naturally evolved over time. The more that homelessness was identified and discussed, the opportunities to link together for efficiencies, communication, and collaboration developed. Service providers remain largely independent in programs offered, with guidance provided by federal, state, and local funding regulations. Access to services is not equitable across the state. The public policy issues tied to homelessness have not typically been a high priority at the state or federal levels.

Over the years, housing, human services, mental health, and other disciplines have developed approaches and practices to apply in the services they provide to homeless populations. Homelessness spans complex sets of social, economic, and public policy issues. These issues are faced by a diverse provider network.

Funding for homelessness programs comes from federal, state, and local sources. Often nonprofit organizations provide charity services when they see an individual need. Over time there have been providers coming together in local or regional networks and councils to seek ways to better meet the needs and to best apply funds available to them. Local planning groups and funders alike are coping with meeting higher needs and expectations with fewer financial resources.

The natural shift toward collaboration and networks of service providers fits with the way federal funds now are granted for coordinated services. Emphasis is being placed on development of standards and achieving performance goals consistent with US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding requirements. Funders at all levels are focusing on ensuring quality programs and expecting standards to be developed as part of the Continuum of Care Program requirements and eligibility.

Introduction

The Iowa Council on Homelessness identified the need for consistent Iowa standards for operations, services, and performance. Driven by new HUD regulations and increased coordination among service providers, the Council continues to move toward system development for homelessness services. Central to a statewide system is working from a common set of expectations and standards.

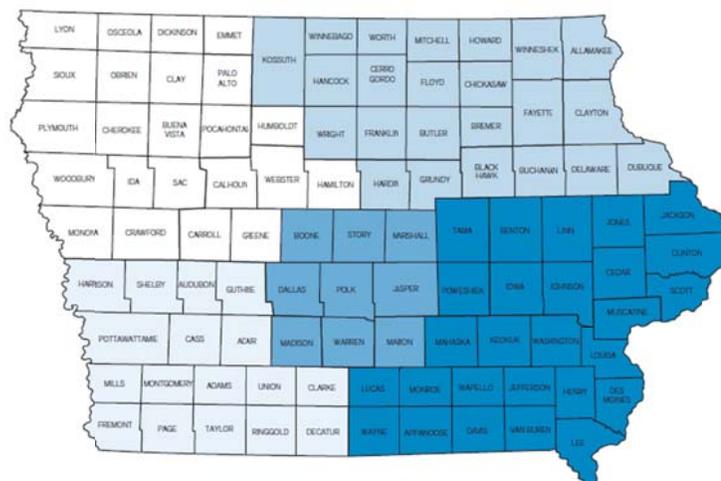
For the HUD Continuum of Care grants, the Iowa Council on Homelessness provides grant oversight for the Balance of State grants. Three areas are outside this region: Polk County and West Des Moines, Woodbury County, and Pottawattamie County, which is part of the Omaha-region Continuum of Care planning group.

The Council outlined its strategy for building a stronger system of homelessness services through linking local planning groups into regions, and linking the regions across the state for communication, coordination, and other efforts to be developed over time.

The Council contracted with State Public Policy Group, Inc. (SPPG) to facilitate a statewide stakeholder engagement and standards-development process consistent with the ICH strategy. Over six months, SPPG reached out to organizations across the state and convened the State Planning Advisory Committee to address questions of natural affinity regions and standards development. Details of the process are outlined in the final section of this report.

In support of statewide systems development, stakeholders were asked to provide input on a regional approach to statewide homelessness system development. Building upon their experience and practice, stakeholders ultimately identified five regions based upon natural affinities. Rather than drawing arbitrary county-line boundaries, these regions were identified after review and discussion among stakeholders of the other organizations they work with and where they normally work and reach out for collaboration.

Homelessness Services Planning Areas



With this initial perspective, a State Planning Advisory Committee was convened to focus statewide in recommending operations, services, and performance standards for homelessness programs.

State Planning Advisory Committee

A 12-member State Planning Advisory Committee worked steadily for four months to develop the recommended standards. Members represented the array of programs and provided geographic diversity.

- 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
- Michelle Hoyt-Swanstrom, Iowa Legal Aid, Ottumwa, and Jan Rutledge, Iowa Legal Aid, Iowa City
- 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
- Mark Sertterh, Shelter House, Iowa City
- Tony Timm, Central Iowa Shelter & Services, Des Moines; Policy & Planning Committee Co-Chair, Iowa Council on Homelessness

The Committee benefitted from additional support through the participation of two designated Iowa Finance Authority staff. Amber Lewis, Homeless Programs Coordinator, assisted with communication and coordination as well as technical support. Carolann Jensen, Chief Administrative Officer, provided insight into grant and financial considerations related to standards development.

CHARGE TO THE STATE PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Iowa Council on Homelessness (ICH) provided a Charge to the Committee to focus and guide its work:

The State Planning Advisory Committee will recommend standards for outreach programs, emergency shelters, transitional housing, and permanent housing (including permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, homelessness prevention, and Housing First). Standards will cover:

- Performance
- Service
- Operations

ACCOUNTABLE TO THE IOWA COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

The Iowa Council on Homelessness established this short-term committee to provide a strong focus on the transitions occurring in homelessness services programs and their funding requirements and accountability. Central to this process was analysis of and increased planning toward building a statewide system for homelessness programs that share common standards and work together

regionally to ensure Iowa programs meet the needs of those experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

The co-chairs of the ICH Policy and Planning Committee served on the State Planning Advisory Committee to provide direct links to the ICH. The process facilitators provided monthly updates to the ICH at its regular meetings. The report of the Committee includes recommendations that will be considered by the Policy and Planning Committee, the ICH Executive Committee, and the Iowa Council on Homelessness. Ultimately, the ICH will take action to transform to a system based upon common standards.

Standards in Operations, Services, and Performance

Strengthening Iowa's homelessness services system through a more regional and statewide perspective requires a "culture shift" from past years toward thinking beyond an individual organization to how a system can be improved overall. Establishing commonality and consistency in operational practices, services quality, and performance goals for organizations and programs with a focus on housing needs and services are means to improve the statewide homelessness services system.

The standards in operations, services, and performance are directed to individual organizations and their programs. By achieving these standards, each organization will contribute to the larger goal of systems improvement.

The State Planning Advisory Committee defined and explained the meaning of "standard" to guide their discussions:

A "standard" is an element of a homelessness program's operations, services, or performance that is necessary for a quality program and meets, at minimum, funder requirements.

The Iowa Council on Homelessness asked the Committee to develop standards that would apply to the array of homelessness services. Recommended standards encompass:

- Outreach Programs
- Emergency Shelters
- Transitional Housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing
- Rapid Rehousing
- Housing First
- Homelessness Prevention

The recommended standards apply at the organization level, not at a Continuum of Care or community level. The standards are clearly and simply stated, and are intentionally not extremely detailed or prescriptive. Recognizing this as the initial effort for developing organizational standards for all homelessness service providers statewide, the decision was made to present them in a practical, common-sense tone that would foster understanding of the intent of the standard.

These are minimum standards necessary for a quality program. Some organizations may exceed many of these standards, and that is to be commended. The same organizations may see that they fall short in some standards, which allows the organization to focus on areas in which improvements can be made.

The standards reflect minimum expectations that apply to the array of homelessness services organizations specifically related to typical funder requirements. An organization may have other operational, service, or performance practices and goals in addition to these.

Other types of programs provide services statewide to those at risk of homelessness or who are homeless that are not housing-focused services. These may include schools, food pantries, and Legal Aid. In these cases, there are existing guidelines in place within these organizations that direct how services will be provided and the standards to which those programs will be held. These are critical

elements of the overall homelessness services system in the state, and they have existing structures governing their programs and services. They are not covered by the new standards developed in this initiative to address housing-focused programs.

It is important for organizations to recognize that, because these minimum standards were constructed in a practical, inclusive framework, different types of programs may show they meet a specific standard differently than another type of program. These standards lead each organization to identify how best to demonstrate that they meet each standard.

The standard simply states what is expected in a quality program. This differs from a performance measure, which states how much of a specific variable must be achieved over a period of time to show change.

The recommendations cover three types of standards: operations, services, and performance. Following are the 32 Operations Standards, 11 Services Standards, and 8 Performance Standards recommended by the State Planning Advisory Committee.

OPERATIONS STANDARDS

Operations standards are those that nonprofits and other businesses typically need to have in place to establish and guide governance, infrastructure, personnel, and other policies, procedures, and safeguards. These are, essentially, good business practices that are documented, and many are required for any type of business to operate lawfully. These recommended standards were limited to those related to most homelessness services funder requirements; an organization may have additional internal expectations at their discretion.

These standards apply to the full range of programs covered by this project: Outreach Programs, Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, Housing First, and Homelessness Prevention.

1. An organization providing services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness should...

- 1.1. have articles of incorporation and by-laws.
- 1.2. have current documentation of Board of Directors structure and activity.
- 1.3. have an employer identification number (EIN).
- 1.4. have records of filing the Biennial Report to the Iowa Secretary of State.
- 1.5. have a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number.
- 1.6. have written financial policies and procedures. This includes the following:
 - Demonstrate compliance with grant requirements, if applicable
 - Track matched and leveraged funds, if applicable
 - Have written procedures in place for document retention based on best practices for each specific type of document
 - Internal controls

- 1.7. have a budget approved by the Board of Directors.
- 1.8. complete annual federal and state tax reporting (e.g. IRS 990 form).
- 1.9. have an audit or an independent review of financial statements by a CPA.
- 1.10. have a written employee manual or personnel policy and procedure manual. The manual should include, at minimum:
 - A conflict of interest policy that applies to Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers
 - A written policy for confidentiality and informed consent that is signed by each Board member, staff, volunteer, and client
- 1.11. comply with current human resources postings including federal, state, and other mandatory postings, including but not limited to:
 - Equal opportunity employer
 - Nondiscrimination
- 1.12. have a written policy promoting a drug-free workplace for all staff and volunteers.
 - The policy should include steps taken in circumstances when an individual is under suspicion of being under the influence during work hours.
- 1.13. provide required and/or necessary insurance coverage as determined by the Board or the Board's authorized representative. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Carry insurance coverage commensurate with the services provided by the organization.
 - Comply with Workers' Compensation Insurance requirements.
 - Unemployment Insurance
 - Liability Insurance
 - Directors and Officers coverage
 - Professional Liability
- 1.14. review insurance needs and coverage annually with the insurance agent.
- 1.15. have written policies and procedures for client information and record confidentiality, retention, and destruction.
- 1.16. have a written policy for use and handling of the information from background checks conducted on employees and volunteers.
- 1.17. complete background checks including criminal history, child abuse, dependent-adult abuse and sex offender registry for:
 - All employees
 - Volunteers who provide direct services
- 1.18. have written, determined minimum staffing requirements that are appropriate for the type of program and ensure a safe environment.
 - In an emergency shelter, at a minimum, one qualified staff person or trained volunteer should be present during hours of operation.
 - For other programs, at minimum, one staff person or trained volunteer should be available during the hours of operation.
- 1.19. provide training, at minimum, for all staff and for volunteers who provide direct services, in the following topics:

- Safety
 - Ethics
 - Confidentiality
 - First Aid (includes blood-borne pathogens), CPR and AED training, if applicable
 - Required OSHA trainings
- 1.20. provide additional training, if applicable, for staff and for volunteers who provide direct services, in the following topics:
- Healthy boundaries
 - Self-care
 - Mandatory reporting
 - De-escalation
 - Motivational interviewing
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Human trafficking
 - Substance abuse education
 - Mental Health First Aid
 - Poverty awareness, e.g. Bridges Out of Poverty
- 1.21. have a current emergency preparedness plan.
- 1.22. provide safety training for employees, volunteers and clients (if applicable), which includes, at minimum:
- Conducting regular drills
 - Maintaining written, documented, posted evacuation routes
- 1.23. have a Code of Ethics for staff and volunteers.
- 1.24. implement a reading level standard for materials provided to clients.
- 1.25. have a written and signed confidentiality and informed consent policy for Board members, staff, volunteers, and clients.
- 1.26. use ServicePoint or a similar reporting system.
- 1.27. notify clients in writing that their information will be aggregated and used for reporting purposes.
- 1.28. document and demonstrate compliance with grant requirements and funder policies.
- 1.29. comply with requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 1.30. comply with federal, state, and local rules and regulations regarding building codes, inspections, and certifications.
- 1.31. have a written whistleblower policy.
- 1.32. have written notices of client rights available, explained, and signed by the client. Client rights include but are not limited to:
- Grievance procedure
 - Right to informed consent

- Dignity and respect
- Review of services
- Termination policy
- Discharge
- Allow, limit, or refuse release of personal information
- Allow or refuse use of identity and images for publicity purposes

SERVICES STANDARDS

Services standards are those that demonstrate an organization's approach to, documentation of, and delivery of homelessness services, including how clients are engaged. Again, these are minimum standards that apply to service-providing organizations; an organization is likely to have additional internal requirements at their discretion.

These standards apply to the full range of programs covered by this project: Outreach Programs, Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, Housing First, and Homelessness Prevention.

2. An organization providing services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness should...

- 2.1. recognize diversity of culture, language, and ability, and have a plan to meet individual needs should it be necessary.
- 2.2. have regular, published, and consistent hours of operation and/or a reliable point of contact.
- 2.3. clearly identify the services provided and the populations served.
- 2.4. have a written and publicly available policy specifying that program eligibility is not restricted by age, race, creed, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, or disability.
- 2.5. have written and publicly available eligibility criteria for each program offered that ensure safety and comply with grant requirements.
- 2.6. have a written policy that is shared with clients identifying the type, amount, and duration of assistance.
- 2.7. have a written and publicly available policy describing how assistance is prioritized within each program.
- 2.8. have a written, Board-approved policy that clearly explains the appeal process for denial, removal, or termination of services.
- 2.9. make each client aware of and provide client access to the appeal, denial, removal, and termination of services process in advance of providing services.
- 2.10. participate in the coordinated intake approved by the local Continuum of Care.
- 2.11. work formally and informally with other community resources, agencies, and networks to appropriately coordinate services and/or refer a client.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Performance standards are a bit different from the operations and services standards. Performance standards look at the outcomes for clients. These are a bit trickier to conceptualize, but they reflect, in the end, what outcomes all programs hope to see for clients.

The performance standards indicate those intended outcomes. Different types of programs may impact those outcomes through different services. How one type of program might measure performance depends on the services they provide to impact that outcome. It is expected that the majority of data used to measure performance standards is likely already being gathered through existing reporting systems.

These standards apply to the full range of programs covered by this project, with several exceptions. Standards 3.1-3.5 apply to all types of programs: Outreach Programs, Emergency Shelters, Transitional Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Rehousing, Housing First, and Homelessness Prevention.

Standards 3.6-3.9 apply to all programs with exceptions as specified.

3. An organization providing services to those experiencing or at risk of homelessness should...

- 3.1. ensure that people in need have the opportunity to choose to be off the street.
- 3.2. ensure that clients have the opportunity to have basic needs met, e.g. food, shelter, clothing, safety.
- 3.3. ensure that clients have the opportunity to connect with mainstream resources, health care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment, and legal services.
- 3.4. ensure that clients have the opportunity to connect with resources to increase income.
- 3.5. ensure that clients have the opportunity to pursue earned income through employment, if appropriate.
- 3.6. support clients in progress toward their identified goals. (Except outreach programs)
- 3.7. assist clients in managing identified barriers. (Except outreach programs)
- 3.8. support clients in increasing financial and housing stability. (Except outreach and emergency shelter programs)
- 3.9. support clients in making informed choice in housing. (Only applies to outreach, emergency shelter, and prevention programs)

Implementation

The work of the State Planning Advisory Committee was undertaken by a dozen professionals who volunteered their time and expertise to this effort. Working under a defined four-month time frame, members willingly completed additional work between meetings and communicated among their colleagues and planning groups about the work on standards development. The Committee reported optimism and enthusiasm from those they spoke with and brought additional ideas and questions to the discussion. They built upon statewide outreach and the experiences shared by others to develop recommendations that fit Iowa's system as well as federal funders' requirements. The Advisory Committee approached this work with the perspective that their recommendations will be implemented and yield results in improving and strengthening Iowa's system of services for those experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless.

Developed to be practical, the recommended standards are common to all types of programs, and establish a minimum standard for operations, services, and performance. The intent was not to create an undue burden of tracking to the extent possible. The Advisory Committee also realizes that these standards are a starting point for Iowa, and expects that, with experience, there will be adjustments made in the future.

Though the Iowa Council on Homelessness did not specifically ask the Advisory Committee to recommend strategies and steps for implementation, the group feels strongly that activities to see this effort through are important to the stated goal of building a strong statewide system.

The State Planning Advisory Council recommends the following.

1. The Iowa Council on Homelessness should take prompt action to implement the recommended standards for operations, services, and performance.
2. Strategies adopted by the Iowa Council on Homelessness should encourage and facilitate the means for homelessness services programs to seek to work toward meeting the standards.
3. The Iowa Council on Homelessness should implement a plan to sustain and expand the communication and sense of common direction created through this process.

An implementation plan might include elements addressing ICH decision-making, statewide awareness and outreach, impacts of system of standards, and reporting and tracking. The Advisory Committee suggests strategies to mark progress toward a statewide system of homelessness services over a one-year period.

Strategy	Time Frame	Explanation
ICH takes action to accept the recommendations and commit to implementation	Spring 2014	Early action will communicate the value of the standards in strengthening the system
ICH makes decisions on implementation, such as:	Spring 2014	Determines the scope and direction of remaining activities

Strategy	Time Frame	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt all three types of standards? • Mandatory or voluntary? • Phase in or all at once? • Time frame? 		
<p>ICH reviews standards and develops clarifications and guidance to aid understanding of intent and application of the standards</p>	Summer 2014	<p>Ensures a novice reader understands the intent and meaning of each standard</p>
<p>ICH determines how each standard could be tracked and reported for each type of program</p>	Summer 2014	<p>What are the best indicators of meeting each standard; what systems/tools exist to do this</p>
<p>ICH determines requirements, if any, for tracking and reporting</p>	Summer 2014	<p>Will need to set up a system</p>
<p>Determine oversight of the process and recognition of meeting standards</p>	Summer 2014	<p>Formalizing the communications and accountability for meeting standards</p>
<p>ICH determines value of a pre-assessment or start-up self-assessment</p>	Summer 2014	<p>Would allow measure of progress pre- and post-standards</p>
<p>ICH determines whether to issue a state certificate to recognize organizations that meet standards</p>	Summer 2014	<p>Programs state they would benefit from the certificate recognizing the achievement</p>
<p>Make programs statewide aware of the organization-level standards and goals for statewide system; e.g., conduct outreach in person statewide</p>	Fall 20104	<p>Develop a communications plan; provide inspiration for participation through messages</p>
<p>Provide training, tools, and technical assistance to programs</p>	Fall 2014	<p>Utilize existing gatherings; create templates</p>
<p>Conduct regional efforts to support broader networking, workshops, professional development</p>	Fall 2014 and quarterly	<p>Encourage regional outreach to increase collaboration and awareness across the state</p>
<p>Establish opportunities for statewide networking and information sharing on programs, standards, and systems issues</p>	Fall 2014 and ongoing	<p>Could be in person, wiki, listserv, peer support calls, webinar, newsletter and more</p>
<p>Identify additional elements of a statewide system of homelessness services</p>	Winter 2014	<p>How do statewide standards support system; what other elements are necessary</p>
<p>Assess implications/impacts of utilization of standards on:</p>	Winter 2014	<p>Ensure all providers have opportunities to participate;</p>

Strategy	Time Frame	Explanation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased collaboration • Coordinated intake • Statewide communication and links • Funding opportunities 		address consistent data issues; support regions and statewide efforts
Assess the standards and recommend any adjustments and improvements	Spring 2015 and annually	As utilization increases and experience provides data, the system may be updated

Process to Develop the Recommended Standards

The Iowa Council on Homelessness sought to develop and strengthen a statewide system of homelessness service providers. The standards recommended to the Iowa Council on Homelessness were developed as the culmination of a broad, statewide outreach effort to inform, engage, and hear from stakeholders toward that strategic end.

The scope of the standards-development process was identified by the Iowa Council on Homelessness: identify planning regions for the state, conduct meetings in regions, and convene a State Planning Advisory Committee to develop common standards in operations, services, and performance. In addition, State Public Policy Group, Inc. (SPPG), the contractor, was also charged with working with Iowa's HMIS provider to develop a strategy for tracking and reporting on the performance standards.

A priority for the process was to provide opportunity for all interested parties to be informed and participate as they chose. To promote transparency, all materials were posted on the Iowa Council on Homelessness website and distributed to ICH lists and others assembled by SPPG. SPPG provided regular updates at the ICH and Executive Committee meetings as well as providing a monthly written progress report.

The standards-development process included activities that built toward development of the common standards. The work was cumulative, beginning with a November 22 webinar open to all interested stakeholders across the state. This introduced the Council's initiative and provided information about the outreach and Advisory Committee process to come. More than 40 individuals representing homeless-serving organizations of all types participated in the webinar.

The webinar was followed by five outreach meetings in Sioux City, Council Bluffs, Iowa City, Waverly, and Des Moines, held between December 5 and December 18, 2013. These sessions were open to any interested homelessness services provider or other stakeholder. Scheduled for 2½ hours each, the meetings followed a common agenda and were facilitated discussions to elicit information about regional needs, characteristics of homeless populations served, the strengths/weaknesses, and opportunities/threats in the region based upon participants' experience. The outreach sessions included consensus agreement on five regions statewide based upon natural affinities. A summary report was developed and utilized in Advisory Committee discussions of possible standards.

From participants in the outreach meetings and additional emailed requests, suggestions were sought statewide for participation on the State Planning Advisory Committee. From the suggestions received, the Committee co-chairs and ICH staff worked with SPPG to identify statewide representation of all types of homelessness services organizations.

In January 2014, the State Planning Advisory Committee held the first of four day-long work sessions. This group of 12 continued its work through April when this report of recommendations was submitted. Meetings consisted of facilitated discussions leading to development of draft standards for operations, services, and performance.

Prior to finalizing the recommendations, additional statewide engagement and feedback was sought through a questionnaire distributed broadly to homelessness services organizations and other

stakeholders. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide examples of the standards to inform the stakeholders as well as to learn how organizations may already be meeting them.

The Advisory Committee completed its work by April 30, 2014. Its report was submitted to the Iowa Council on Homelessness for its consideration and further action.