SC-503 CoC Plan for Serving Individuals and Families Experiencing Homelessness with Severe Service Needs

P-1. Leveraging Housing Resources.

P-1. a. Leveraging Housing Commitment Attachment.

P-1. b. Development of New Units and Creation of Housing Opportunities Attachment.

P-1. c. Landlord Recruitment.

The CoC uses a coordinated approach for landlord recruitment in an effort to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing units for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The CoC leverages new and established relationships with landlords in the CoC region developed through rental assistance and leasing programs such as VA SSVF, HUD CoC (RRH, Joint TH-RRH, PSH), ESG, HOME TBRA, and SC Stay. With the U.S. Treasury Department's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funding the CoC was able to recruit additional landlords that historically may not have worked with a Federally funded subsidy program. This new program has allowed Eastern Carolina Homelessness Organization, Inc. (ECHO), who serves as the collaborative applicant for the CoC and administers the ERAP program in Horry County, SC, to recruit hundreds of new landlords that are now providing housing to participants in homeless housing programs. The CoC has 28 Housing Navigators that work with these established and new landlords on a daily basis in multiple grant funded programs. The Housing Navigators share and manage a comprehensive list of affordable housing and voucher/ Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) friendly properties within the CoC's region. The CoC feels that this is a comprehensive and effective strategy for landlord recruitment between multiple organizations. The CoC Housing Navigators regularly engage landlords, serve as a point-of-contact if concerns arise for these landlords, and offer tenancy supportive services for program participants. This coordinated strategy will continue to expand over the coming year; the VA SSVF program has hired a landlord engagement specialist that will work with CoC to further develop the affordable housing list and provide incentives for landlords that house homeless Veterans through the VA Special NOFO SSVF.

Over the last three years the CoC has recruited landlords through stakeholder engagements such as local Board of Realtors and local Chamber of Commerce affiliations on an ongoing basis. There are several agency Board members who are also realtors that assist the CoC in its landlord recruitment efforts. In 2022 ECHO, the CoC's Collaborative Applicant, had 7 Housing Navigators receive training and pass their exam to become a licensed Property Manager. ECHO's Chief Operating Officer was trained and received certification to be the Property Manager in Charge.

This allows the Housing Navigators to better network with professional property management companies and negotiate with landlords on more of a peer level. The CoC has been able to develop a comprehensive landlord mitigation fund as well as providing additional landlord incentives to aid in the recruitment of landlords. Many of these new efforts have been made available through the CARES Act and the Affordable Rescue Plan by way of flexible regulations and waivers pertaining to financial assistance to program participants and landlords. The landlord mitigation fund and the additional landlord incentives that are available has allowed the CoC to work with landlords and property management companies that have historically not accepted rental assistance. This has expanded the areas in which program participants may live. Increasing access to higher opportunity neighborhoods will increase participants' access to jobs, quality education, public transit, and other supportive services. A major lesson learned from some of these new practices has been realizing the CoC's limited scope of landlord recruitment, focusing owners and landlords that operate low-income housing or were already working with federally subsidized programs was not broad enough. These new strategies have increased the number of property management companies and landlords the CoC works with to provide safe and affordable rental to program participants enrolled in homeless permanent housing programs.

The CoC will be tracking exits to permanent housing, the average length of time from program enrollment to permanent housing placement, the number of total and new properties/landlords identified on the housing inventory list, and the location of properties that rent to participants of tenant based rental assistance and leasing programs. These data points will be used to inform and update the landlord recruitment strategy in terms of geographic targeting, scope of work for Housing Navigators, and stakeholder engagement.

P-2. Leveraging Health Care Resources Attachment.

P-3. Current Strategy to Identify, Shelter, and House Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.

P-3. a. Current Street Outreach Strategy.

The current evidence-based practices used by the CoC to conduct street outreach includes Motivational Interviewing, Trauma Informed Care, Housing First, and utilizing Certified Peer Support Specialists.

Utilizing data from CES broken out by counties, the CoC has strategically targeted resources for engagement (awareness, education, understanding, and virtual access) in a different way. The majority of the CoC geographic area is rural, with a few urban hubs. In addition to street outreach, the CoC engages in organizational, and community outreach-ensuring local agencies are able to target known people and locations experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

In rural areas the CoC employs outreach at the community level, leveraging resources already in the community targeting County level coalitions, councils, and or committees, along with organizations serving populations with severe service needs to provide online CES assessment

access to the homeless as they are identified in real time. Providing the CoC with location information, where street outreach workers can be deployed.

The CoC is part of a coordinated effort in one urban hub and will look to replicate based on this pilot. The Myrtle Beach Area Coordinated Effort meets monthly as a group to discuss homeless outreach and connection to housing and supportive services. The group also has a regular outreach event called "Outreach Wednesday" that takes place in Myrtle Beach, SC (Horry County). The effort includes monthly street outreach with outreach workers from a homeless housing provider, emergency shelter, FQHC, law enforcement, substance use agency, mental health organization, and community members targeting known locations. Horry County has had the largest unsheltered homeless population in the state of South Carolina for many years. This particular event and the monthly resource coordination group that meets is making a tremendous difference in the efforts to address unsheltered homelessness in the area.

Street outreach is conducted daily during times based on the local need. For example, street outreach can and does occur early in the morning, throughout the day, and into the evening not just during business hours. Culturally responsive training is provided to deliver culturally appropriate strategies.

To help people exit homelessness and unsheltered homelessness, outreach teams engage with individuals and families, listen to their needs, offer referrals to identified needs (e.g., emergency shelter, substance use program, mainstream benefits, etc.) and complete a CES assessment if desired. Essentially, outreach serves as an entry way into CES and the housing prioritization list.

The CoC continuously updates encampment lists, deploys street outreach workers, and conducts outreach to unsheltered individuals and families where they reside to maximize the number of people connected to shelter and housing.

Engaging the unsheltered homeless population requires specific skill sets and a level of understanding that many people who have lived experience with homelessness, severe mental illness, and/ or chronic substance use disorder are able utilize to make a connection with someone experiencing homelessness and connect them to appropriate available resources. The lead agency hires people with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness to conduct street outreach, along with managing these services. Approximately 58% of their entire staff and 80% of their management have lived experience of unsheltered homelessness including the CEO and COO.

P-3. b. Current Strategy to Provide Immediate Access to Low-Barrier Shelter and Temporary Housing for Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.

The CoC's current strategy to provide immediate access to low-barrier shelter and temporary housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness incorporates identification and engagement through outreach.

Individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness are identified through street outreach and then connected to low barrier shelter and temporary housing opportunities in the CoC. CES assessments are administered, along with referrals and connections to a person's self-identified needs. Staff are trained on community resources such as shelter, food, clothing, medical,

mental health, substance use, mainstream benefits, and employment resources. If there is not an immediate housing opportunity, the focus is on the individual or families immediate shelter needs. They are then connected to available low barrier shelter resources, if available at the time. Due to the CoC's lack of true low-barrier emergency shelter and temporary housing options the CoC has made invaluable use of non-congregate emergency hotel funding through Annual ESG, ESG-CV, Emergency Food and Shelter Program, Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) , and private funding. The CoC also has ten Transitional (crisis) houses, six for Domestic violence and four for substance use disorder that provide temporary housing for these vulnerable populations.

The CoC's current strategy performs well with the inventory of low- barrier emergency and/or temporary housing beds in the region. This is evidenced by a high utilization rate for these low barrier temporary accommodations. For example, ECHO the Collaborative Applicant has provided 74,000 emergency bed nights in the past two years mostly consisting of non-congregate hotels stays and bridge housing.

The CoC learned during the COVID pandemic that there is a lack of low barrier shelter and temporary housing programs across the region. When there was a surge of need for these types of programs the CoC was unable to utilize all of the beds in the CoC's inventory due to people not being eligible for shelter programs, being kicked out for breaking the "rules" of the shelter, or the shelter being closed. This created the need for the CoC to have a separate funding source to pay for non-congregate hotel stays when a person experiencing homelessness is unable to access emergency shelter or other temporary housing options in their community.

P-3. c. Current Strategy to Provide Immediate Access to Low Barrier Permanent Housing for Individuals and Families Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness.

The CoC utilizes a Housing First Approach in its current strategy to provide immediate access to low barrier permanent housing for individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness. While the CoC does not impose any barriers on individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness for referrals within CES, the CoC relies on housing agencies accepting referrals from the Prioritization list to be fully implementing Housing First principles. The CoC monitors CoC funded recipients to ensure they are utilizing a Housing First Approach in their programs and performs an assessment to measure a project's progress in aligning with Housing First best practice standards. CoC funded agencies participate in Housing First training on an annual basis to ensure that they are effectively employing Housing First principles in their shelter, temporary housing, and permanent housing programs. The State of South Carolina has been granted HUD technical assistance on implementing Housing First programs and how the CoC can monitor programs for adherence to Housing First principles.

The CoC collaborates with housing providers across the CoC services area to leverage all available housing resources, including newly developed affordable housing units, agencies that manage Permanent Supportive Housing and Transitional Housing, Public Housing Agencies, Low Income Housing Tax Credits properties, and HOME funded projects. Individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness are referred to these programs through CES or by direct referral. The most vulnerable individuals and families are prioritized and are matched with these housing resources using the Housing First approach.

The CoC's current strategy starts with the staff from street outreach programs, emergency shelters, transitional housing providers, and other homeless service providers ensuring that individuals and families identified who are currently experiencing unsheltered homelessness and/ or have histories of unsheltered homelessness are immediately assessed for permanent housing resources using the CoC's Coordinated Entry Assessment. If immediate permanent housing resources are not available, the individual or family will be placed on the CoC's prioritization lists until housing resources become available or permanent housing is achieved through another avenue. Staff administering CES assessments throughout the CoC region are trained to assess immediate needs like shelter, food, water, medical/ mental health crises, etc. If there is not an immediate placement into permanent housing the goal is to ensure the individual or family is connected to emergency shelter or transitional housing whether grant funded or available through family or friends. Once enrolled in an emergency shelter or a transitional housing program the individual or family can be provided supportive services and work with a case manager to identify permanent housing options they may have available to them, for example: family members/ friends or other community resources for permanent housing outside of the CoC's Coordinated Entry process. All of the CoC funded housing organizations utilize a low-barrier Housing First Approach. The CoC also promotes the low-barrier Housing First Approach for all homeless assistance programs throughout the CoC, including programs that are not CoC funded.

The CoC has seen a decrease in the average length of time a household remains homeless before receiving a referral to a housing program. Staff make regular contact with individuals and families on the Prioritization List and if a household is unable to be reached after three attempts the person is removed. CoC staff actively managing the CES Prioritization lists has led to a reduction in coordinated entry referrals that are denied due to no contact. This new strategy has drastically reduced the amount of time a household remains on lists waiting on housing. Outreach workers are notified of open referrals, specifically for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), and are able to connect the hardest to reach individuals to housing providers. The CoC has learned that utilizing non-congregate hotel sheltering for the most vulnerable has led to more rapid placements into permanent housing due to the focus on housing these programs emphasize because of the finite resources available for hotel funding.

P-4. Updating the CoC's Strategy to Identify, Shelter, and House Individuals Experiencing Unsheltered Homelessness with Data and Performance.

The CoC is continuously updating its strategy to identify, shelter, and house individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness using data, performance, and best practices to improve the performance of the homeless system.

The CoC uses data points such as length of time homeless, the CoC's CES acuity scores, exits to positive destinations (emergency shelter, transitional housing, or other permanent housing resource) to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of the CoC's outreach efforts. All outreach activities conducted in the CoC are entered into HMIS and utilize the Coordinated Entry System. The CoC will continue to incorporate new partners in the CoC outreach strategies such as faith based organizations, soup kitchens, local coalitions, law enforcement agencies, correctional facilities, substance use/ behavioral health, chambers of commerce, local United Ways, units of local government, EMS, etc by inviting them to the regularly scheduled regional CoC meetings

and community outreach events. The CoC also attends the meetings of these partner organizations and shares valuable information on best practices and new ideas for street outreach and outreach coordination.

The CoC uses the following data, performance metrics, and best practices to improve the CoC's ability to provide/ expand low-barrier shelter and temporary accommodations for unsheltered individuals and families: the utilization rates of shelters and transitional housing, exits to permanent housing destination funded or non-funded, the number CES assessments completed at these locations, the average length of time participants are in these programs, and best practice models to evaluate the performance of our shelter and transitional housing programs in an effort to improve access to these programs. This data is reviewed by the CoC to determine GAPS in these services throughout the CoC and to identify programs that may be under-utilized. The CoC then can review the under-utilized programs to determine why they have low utilization rates. This information has led to the CoC utilizing non-congregate emergency shelter at hotels as a best practice model which will be continued due to its effectiveness in expanding the CoC emergency and temporary housing accommodations. In this funding competition the CoC applied for a HMIS expansion grant, CoC Planning, and a portion of the rural set aside for capacity building. This funding will allow us to hire additional HMIS staff and provide additional database licenses to support more thorough data entry and analysis. It will also allow for the CoC to develop greater capacity in rural communities by providing training on low barrier emergency and temporary housing best practices.

The CoC uses the following data, performance metrics, and best practices to improve the CoC's ability to rapidly rehouse unsheltered individuals and families in permanent housing: average length of time from program entry to housing move-in, utilization rates of Rapid Rehousing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and other permanent housing programs, percentage of clients exiting to or remaining in permanent housing, and connection to employment and non-employment income. This data is analyzed by the CoC to identify programs that are effectively utilizing housing resources and best practices. The CoC promotes the best practices of these high performing programs and encourages other permanent housing programs to incorporate these practices into their own programming. Analyzing this data also allows the CoC to determine the amount of resources needed for different housing interventions to meet the needs of the homeless population. This review also identifies any GAPS in the homeless system for specific subpopulations and/ or populations with severe service needs. This information can then be used by the CoC and housing providers to expand the CoC's ability to rapidly house more people with increased funding, if available.

P-5. Identify and Prioritize Households Experiencing or with Histories of Unsheltered Homelessness.

Resources provided under this Special NOFO will allow the CoC and its partner agencies to prioritize unsheltered homeless individuals and families through expansion of its coordinated entry and street outreach services. Increased funding for Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Supportive Housing will increase participants' access in the Coordinated Entry system to permanent housing units and in turn will allow the CoC to identify and reach more unsheltered homeless individuals and families and improve access to permanent housing and supportive services. Threshold requirements for project applications applying for these funds include Low-Barrier and Housing

First Implementation and participation in the Coordinated Entry System, as well as additional points for applications involving people with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness in the development of the projects.

The CoC's current referral process prioritizes unsheltered individuals and families over those that are sheltered to address their immediate needs for shelter, housing, and supportive services. Likewise, the CoC's coordinated entry processes and staff reduce unsheltered homelessness by identifying encampments, coordinating, and deploying service providers to those encampments, and assessing the needs of the individuals, entering them into the CES prioritization List for the type of housing resource that most meets their needs. The CoC implemented an outreach policy that has improved coordination for connecting unsheltered individuals and families to housing resources. Unsheltered homeless individuals and families are identified by street outreach teams coordinated by the CoC through direct contact. Street outreach case workers meet with individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness to discuss their particular needs, complete a formal assessment, and add them to the CES. When a housing program has an opening, they request a referral from the CoC's CES. CES refers individuals and families to housing units based on their identified needs and position on the Prioritization List. Position on the Prioritization List is based on length of time homeless and the acuity score and the type of housing program that the individual or family qualifies for. Unsheltered individuals and families are prioritized over sheltered in the case of a tied score.

Staff administering CES assessments throughout the CoC region are trained to assess immediate needs like shelter, food, water, medical/ mental health crises, etc. If an immediate placement into permanent housing is not available, the goal is to ensure the individual or family has a safe place to stay either in an emergency shelter or other temporary accommodation. Once in emergency shelter or a transitional housing program, the individual or family works with a case manager who provides supportive services and works to identify permanent housing options they may have available to them, for example: family members/ friends or other community resources for permanent housing outside of the CoC's Coordinated Entry process. The CoC encourages partner agencies to provide direct housing search and navigation services to the participants of their programs. This includes active involvement from staff with assessing, identifying, and connecting participants to permanent housing that meets the needs of the person. The CoC will continue to provide and expand access to funding for partner agencies that provide housing navigation services, especially those who provide housing navigation to unsheltered individuals and families through their street outreach. The CoC will continue to partner with FQHCs and other healthcare agencies to ensure that unsheltered individuals and families have access to essential physical and mental health care. We will also continue to coordinate with partner agencies who provide supportive services, including food and nutrition support, assistance with vital records and identification, access to hygiene services, housing navigation services, substance use disorder treatment, rent and utility assistance, case management and other essential services.

P-6. Involving Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Decision Making – Meaningful Outreach.

The CoC has a working group that is comprised solely of individuals with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness. Most of these individuals also have substance use disorder and/or mental illness and are people in recovery and many are Certified Peer Support Specialists. ECHO,

the CoC Collaborative Applicant has a staff comprised of over 58% of people with lived experience. The CEO serves on the CoC Board and The South Carolina Interagency Council on Homelessness Board of Directors. There are several others in the CoC membership that are also people with lived experience, as well as several members of the CoCs Youth Advisory Board. ECHO as well as other agencies in the CoC are always actively seeking people with lived experience to add to their staff or as volunteers. The CoC Board Chair is also a person with lived experience in unsheltered homelessness. All of these individuals and groups are fully integrated into the CoC decision making process and play absolutely invaluable roles in the strategies and decision making. The working group is headed by ECHOs CEO and all members have equal input and vote on the decisions and strategies developed in their work. The CoC Board also with its 2 members (Board Chair and Past President) puts a strong emphasis on the lived experience, not only in strategies and decision making on policies and procedure, but also in project development and implementation. The CoC and ECHO, the Collaborative Applicant are always seeking new hires that have lived experience. ECHO has found that this is an invaluable resource in its hiring of staff to deliver these services including, planning, outreach, housing search and placement, delivering direct supportive services or connecting participants to other mainstream resources, etc. The CoC encouraged agencies submitting projects in this NOFO to involve individuals with lived experience in unsheltered homelessness in the program development and decision-making process. This was rewarded by the CoCs Scoring Tool awarding additional points for the lived experience involvement.

P-6. a. Involving Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness in Decision Making – Letter of Support from Working Group Comprised of Individuals with Lived Experience of Homelessness Attachment.

P-7. Supporting Underserved Communities and Supporting Equitable Community Development.

The CoC identifies populations in our region that have not been served or engaged by the homeless system at the same rate they are experiencing homelessness by conducting an annual GAPS Analysis analyzing data from the HMIS/CES database and data from the American Community Survey among other sources. The CoC has also previously conducted a racial disparities/housing study to help identify the disparities in housing and services for these populations and underserved communities. The CoC has identified the following populations as being underserved: LGBTQ+, victims of domestic violence, persons with chronic mental illness and/ or substance use disorder, and hispanic/ latino. The CoC has divided its general membership meetings and efforts into 3 seperate localized regions that coincide with the State of South Carolina's Regional Council of Governments to aid in the identification and coordination to engage and serve the populations that have otherwise not received or even engaged with the homeless systems of the CoC. Since the new meeting format has been implemented participation at the separate regional meetings has increased and brought additional stakeholders not previously involved with the CoC to the table. These additional stakeholders have provided invaluable information that is being utilized to further identify and serve these historically underserved populations.

Underserved communities throughout our CoC historically interact with the homeless system through the annual point in time count and through faith based organizations and community most of whom have an outreach ministry that targets more underserved communities. The CoC actively engages the faith based community and includes them in quarterly regional CoC meetings. In many areas the faith based community may be the only resource available due to the lack of non-profit service provider in the more rural counties of the CoC.

The CoC has worked with ECHO, the Collaborative Applicant who administers 10 HUD CoC Grants, VA SSVF Grant, VA GPD and VA Healthcare for the Homeless Contract Bed Programs, 2 ESG Grants, the CoC HMIS System and the CoC CES to open offices in each of the CoC's regions staffed with housing navigators, case managers, and outreach workers to outreach, engage, and provide housing interventions to these underserved populations experiencing unsheltered homelessness. ECHO has appointed a Chief Community Development Officer that is responsible for educating, coordinating and planning with organizations that target the underserved communities identified in the CoC. The development and strengthening of these community partnerships provides these populations greater access to the resources provided by the homeless system. The CoC encourages these organizations to participate in CES by conducting CES assessments or at a minimum referring individuals and families to an organization that can.