

Engaging Faith-Based and Civic Partners in Homeless Response Systems

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**HOMELESS &
HOUSING
RESOURCE
CENTER**



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Purpose: This guide was developed by the Homeless and Housing Resource Center to strengthen the support for individuals and families who are homeless and have serious mental illness (SMI), substance use disorders (SUDs), or co-occurring disorders (CODs) by engaging faith-based and civic organizations in homeless response systems. The goal is to support people working within the homeless response system, including Continuum of Care (CoC) staff and leads, coordinated entry managers and navigators, behavioral health service providers, community planners, and local government liaisons. The aim is to deepen relationships, build partnerships based on understanding and trust, and improve coordination with critical community resources. In rural areas, faith-based and civic organizations often serve as the primary social infrastructure supporting people with SMI, SUD, and COD in obtaining stable housing.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized into sections that move sequentially, beginning with background information on the current context of homeless response systems and tips for getting started with engagement, followed by sections on understanding the landscape, building relationships, defining meaningful roles, formalizing commitments, and sustaining engagement to deepen impact. The guide also includes links to ready-to-use resources and examples. Although the strategies presented here apply broadly, the examples and considerations are grounded in rural and small-community contexts, where formal service networks are less common, and informal partnerships carry greater weight.

Background

Current Context

There are 356,642 congregations located in 3,141 of the 3,143 counties in the United States.¹ There are also approximately 1.5 million civic (e.g., nongovernmental) organizations nationwide.² Civic organizations form a nationwide, grassroots network that allows community members to “choose freely the aims, organizations, and causes they support.”³ These congregations and organizations have the potential to partner with the homeless response system to address homelessness.

Recent federal funding and actions provide additional context for the homeless response system to consider when engaging with faith-based and civic organizations. In early 2025, Executive Order 14205 established the White House Faith Office “...to assist faith-based entities, community organizations, and houses of worship



in their efforts to strengthen American families; and to engage and communicate with faith communities and grassroots organizations, ensuring that local institutions, which hold community trust, have up-to-date information regarding health and human service activities and resources in their area.”⁴ The Faith Office functions as a central hub, with multiple federal departments maintaining agency-level centers to carry out its mission. For example, at the time of this writing, both the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Housing and Urban Development each have their own Centers for Faith, which can be contacted to facilitate partnerships with faith-based and civic organizations.

Also in 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act⁵ authorized the Rural Health Transformation Program to strengthen rural communities by improving health care access through support for innovations that promote preventative health, address the root causes of disease, ensure sustainable access, attract and retain a highly skilled health care workforce, and advance innovative care models and technology-driven solutions for preventing and managing chronic diseases. Fifty percent of the \$50 billion allocated over five fiscal years will be distributed among approved states, and the remaining 50 percent will be allocated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). To receive program information and updates, CMS provides an email address (maharural@cms.hhs.gov) and an option to [sign up for email updates](#).

Executive Order 14379 established the Great American Recovery Initiative in 2026 to provide incentives and priorities to strengthen partnerships with faith-based and civic organizations.⁶ Through this executive order, faith-based organizations became eligible for addiction-related grants, opening new pathways for community-based recovery support.

Additionally, in 2026, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration released a publication related to Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), noting that “CCBHCs are required to serve anyone with a mental health and/or substance use condition regardless of age, ability to pay, or place of residence.”⁷ The publication highlights how CCBHCs in rural areas are leveraging the model to develop approaches tailored to the communities they serve, including establishing mobile crisis teams that offer same-day access and delivering services onsite at schools, colleges, or childcare settings. CCBHCs are required to conduct needs assessments to help “understand gaps and identify where additional staffing, outreach, services, or partnerships may be needed.”⁸ Needs assessment activities include conducting “coffee chats” with local farmworkers, partnering with local shooting ranges on suicide prevention and firearm storage safety initiatives, and providing services and outreach at libraries, banks, and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts. If your region has a CCBHC, it should be included in your homeless response system. Depending on the individual CCBHC, it may already have ties to local civic organizations that can provide resources and connections to support homeless individuals. Currently, more than 500 CCBHCs operate in 46 states. To determine whether one exists in your area, [visit the CCBHC locator](#) maintained by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing.

Before You Start: Necessary Ingredients for Successful Change

Before developing connections with faith-based and civic organizations, take the time to consider whether you are fully prepared to engage and cultivate partnerships because doing so requires ongoing commitment and resources. Consider starting by answering the following questions:

- What are you hoping to achieve? What is your vision?
- What problem(s) are you trying to solve by partnering with faith-based and civic organizations?



- How would partnering with faith-based and civic organizations improve outcomes for the people your homeless response system serves?
- How will you know when your vision has been achieved?
- Does your staff or team have the skills needed to establish and maintain collaborations with faith-based and civic organizations?
- Have you articulated the interest and benefits of a partnership for both faith-based and civic organizations and your homeless response system?
- Do you have the resources, including time and budget, to carry out this work?
- Do you have an action plan or template in place or that you have started? Have you identified the person responsible for sharing and updating the plan as steps are completed?

For any change effort such as this to be successful, the following ingredients are recommended:⁹

- **Vision:** Make sure you are clear about the goal you are working toward.
- **Skills:** Ensure your team has the skills needed to cultivate and sustain partnerships.
- **Incentives:** Articulate why various partners would be interested in participating.
- **Resources:** Confirm the time, budget, staff, and facilities needed for the work.
- **Action Plan:** Develop a plan for implementation and ongoing monitoring.

Section 1: Understanding the Landscape— Who Are Your Potential Partners?

Start by getting to know your community. Consider completing an asset-mapping exercise to obtain a complete picture of the faith-based and civic groups in your community, including the following:

- **Faith communities:** congregations, faith-based nonprofits, interfaith councils, and religious initiatives (e.g., Catholic Charities and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul)
- **Civic organizations:** service clubs (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, and Lions Clubs), neighborhood associations, fraternal organizations and trade guilds (e.g., Freemasons and Elks), veterans groups, women's clubs, farmers' markets, sportsmen's clubs
- **Local organizations:** libraries, general stores, and community cooperatives
- **Rural businesses:** diners, pharmacies, gas stations, feed and grain stores, discount retailers (e.g., Dollar General and Family Dollar), and other businesses that serve as key gathering places
- **Mutual-help programs:** programs with spiritual elements (e.g., AA, SMART Recovery) and programs without spiritual elements (e.g., The Phoenix)

The goal of the exercise is to develop an inventory of current faith-based and civic groups in your community, along with the types of services and supports they provide and the initiatives and causes they support. As you develop your inventory, it is also important to note which organizations already provide or support



behavioral health services. This will help you deepen your understanding of your community's existing strengths and resources, identify gaps, and generate ideas for collaboration before contacting and engaging with faith-based and civic groups.

Steps to Create an Asset Map

In 2024, the Wyoming Department of Health completed an asset-mapping process to develop a *Recovery Support Services Manual*. The department used the following steps to create the asset map, describing asset mapping as a strengths-based process rather than one focused on deficits, recognizing that many solutions already exist within each community. Detailed subtasks for each step are included in the manual.¹⁰ The following is an excerpt from the manual:

1. **Define the purpose.** The first step in creating a community asset map is to determine your goals for the map. What types of assets do you want to focus on? What do you hope to accomplish? Defining the objectives will guide the development of your map and help keep you on target.
2. **Determine map boundaries.** Next, decide which areas you will include as part of the community you are mapping. Will you focus on one neighborhood or a wider community, such as an entire town or county? Perhaps you will focus on specific ZIP codes or school districts. Determining the boundaries of your map will help focus your efforts on identifying relevant and accessible assets.
3. **Decide on assets.** Keeping your ultimate purpose in mind, determine which types of assets will help you meet your objectives. As previously mentioned, a community asset, or resource, is anything that improves the quality of life for community members. Assets can include the following:
 - The capacities, skills, and abilities of community members
 - Citizen groups, clubs, and associations (e.g., PTA, Girl Scouts, and 12-step groups)
 - Public institutions and services (e.g., libraries, schools, parks, and fire departments)
 - Private and nonprofit organizations (e.g., faith communities and social service providers)
 - Funding sources (e.g., local credit unions, charitable foundations, philanthropists, and fundraisers)
4. **Gather asset information.** Once you have identified which assets to include in your map, the next step is to collect, record, and inventory them for easy access and review. You can identify community assets through various methods and resources, including the following:
 - Search engines and Yellow Pages
 - Local newspapers or community websites
 - Community bulletin boards in shared spaces, such as local parks, houses of worship, laundromats, post offices, and libraries
 - Social media
 - 211 or other community resource guides



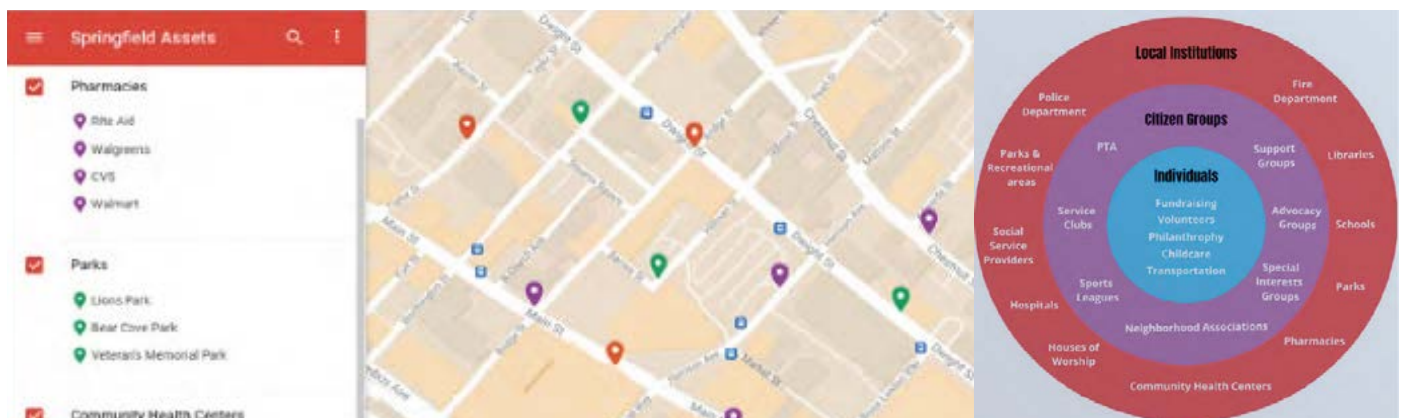


Figure 1. Asset Map Examples (Physical Map, Visual Model)

- Faith-based communities
- Community members, who may be the greatest source of information

5. **Organize your assets.** The next step is to organize your assets in a way that makes them accessible and increases your understanding of what is available, where service overlaps and gaps may exist, and which relationships could be formed. There is no right or wrong way to do this. Organize your community assets in the way that works best for your needs. Several options are available for organizing your assets meaningfully, including the following:

- **Physical map.** Request a map of your community from your local city hall or print one from websites such as MapQuest or Google Maps. Create a legend and use colored dot stickers or pushpins to identify the location and types of assets found through your mapping project.
- **Online map.** Online maps can be easily accessed and shared, and multiple users can contribute to the same map. Although many software programs are available, Google My Maps is an affordable and user-friendly starting point.
- **Comprehensive list or database.** Another way to organize your assets is to create a comprehensive list of available resources. You can arrange the list alphabetically or by resource type, or you can create a searchable document, such as an Excel spreadsheet. Excel can organize your assets and related information in one easy-to-use document that allows you to search using various criteria. Google Sheets is a free alternative to Excel.
- **Visual model.** A final option is to use a visual model to present your assets and the relationships among them. Examples include a Venn diagram, brainstorming cloud, or a concentric-circle model, as shown in Figure 1.

6. **Utilize your asset map.** The last and perhaps most important step is to ensure that the assets you have identified are used and leveraged for the community's benefit. Making assets easily identifiable and accessible is an important function of a community asset map, but the map can also provide other valuable information. Look for patterns and consider the following questions:

- Where is the community excelling?
- Are there underused assets that could be expanded?



- Are there versatile assets that could be used in nontraditional ways?
- Are there relationships or alliances that could be developed to support the community's health and well-being?
- Are there any obvious gaps in services or resources where needs are not being met?
- Are there overlaps in services where resources could be allocated more effectively?

Additionally, create a dissemination plan to place your map in the hands of community members, providers, and other important partners, including community leaders and legislators who are frequently involved in community planning and decision-making.

Types of Faith-Based and Civic Organizations

Faith-based and civic groups center on connection, community, a sense of belonging, and purpose—all elements that can complement the services and resources provided through a CoC and help alleviate the effects of various behavioral health conditions. Brief descriptions of several faith-based and civic organizations are included below. This list is not exhaustive; its purpose is to provide a sense of the types of organizations to consider. We encourage you to identify and connect with all faith-based and civic groups in your community and region.

THE SALVATION ARMY

The [Salvation Army](#) has been part of the social and faith-based infrastructure in many communities for decades. Founded in 1865, it currently serves more than 27 million people annually at more than 7,400 locations across the United States, providing services tailored to local communities' needs. In addition to services and supports, The Salvation Army offers hope, community, and opportunities for connection to combat isolation and loneliness. More than 1.5 million people volunteered with The Salvation Army in 2025. Locations are led by officers who joined The Salvation Army Corps because of "a call to serve" and are regularly rotated across regions.

If your homeless response system is not already collaborating with a local Salvation Army corps, consider contacting it to determine whether it offers behavioral health services or supports. Depending on the community, The Salvation Army offers recovery supports, behavioral health support, shelter, food programs, heat relief, utility assistance, disaster aid, and housing supported by federal, state, and private funding, including transitional, permanent supportive, and faith-based housing. Salvation Army headquarters recommends contacting your local Salvation Army directly because the organization prioritizes local needs. Salvation Army headquarters also recommends that any collaboration with a local CoC or homeless response system include a discussion of referrals to establish a mutual understanding of the "right fit" for Salvation Army services and housing.

Ministries That Support Homeless People

Some local ministries are already integral to a community's homeless response system. For example, [Firehouse Ministries](#) in Birmingham, Alabama, has "dedicated itself to strengthening programs and services for Birmingham's homeless." Firehouse Ministries, a nonprofit agency, developed a micro-continuum of services within the organization while working closely with other local behavioral health and homeless



providers and the local CoC. Its programs include emergency and day shelters, case management, low-income housing, permanent supportive housing, medical respite care, meal programs, resilience and well-being workshops, art therapy, medication assistance, transportation, and opportunities for spiritual growth within a faith-based community.

NATIONAL FAITH COALITION TO END HOMELESSNESS

The [National Faith Coalition to End Homelessness](#) is a new coalition “sharing resources and building power to end homelessness in the U.S.” It formed partly in recognition that churches are “often poor in coordination.” The coalition focuses on bringing faith communities together for shared learning and impact so that interested faith communities can move from “isolated efforts to coordinated impact.”

CHURCH HOUSING MOVEMENT

Faith communities are leveraging underused land and buildings to develop housing, and faith-based organizations are key partners in ending homelessness. A 2026 report from Rutgers University’s Ralph W. Voorhees Center for Civic Engagement analyzed “200 affordable housing developments and shelters built on faith land for a total of 9,727 units of housing and 122 shelter spaces from 2015–2025.”¹¹ These projects span 46 states and the District of Columbia. Congregations are building new housing on underutilized property, such as parking lots and open space near a sanctuary, and adaptively reusing historic religious buildings, including convents, motherhouses, rectories, and orphanages.

CONGREGATIONS THAT SUPPORT RECOVERY

In addition to entire ministries that support individuals and families who are homeless, congregations carry out several distinct faith-based initiatives.

Celebrate Recovery was founded in 1991 to “help people find freedom and healing from their hurts, hang-ups, and habits through a relationship with Jesus Christ.” There are currently 35,000 churches with a Celebrate Recovery ministry, the vast majority of which are in the United States. To use the Celebrate Recovery name, congregations must agree to use its curriculum and group guidelines. In addition to churches, Celebrate Recovery groups can be found in recovery houses, rescue missions, universities, and prisons. To determine whether a Celebrate Recovery ministry is available in your region, [visit its locator site](#).

Recovery Congregations are faith-based institutions that provide recovery support services or recovery-friendly environments where healing can begin. Although there is no single national model, several states, statewide agencies, and faith-based organizations offer certification programs, including the following:

- **State of Tennessee:** Any religious entity can become a [certified recovery congregation](#) or certified recovery community of faith by agreeing to implement a Best Practice Model that includes eight domains and completing a process through the Tennessee Department of Mental and Substance Abuse Services. Some Certified Recovery Congregations offer various types of housing. Currently, this model exists only in Tennessee, where more than 1,200 congregations have been certified.
- **Illinois Faith and Recovery Collaborative:** The [collaborative](#) certifies recovery congregations, promotes them publicly, and provides materials, technical assistance, and program development.
- **Foundation for Recovery:** The organization operates a statewide [Interfaith Recovery Initiative](#) in Nevada that provides free education, resources, and support to faith leaders to help address substance use and mental health conditions.



- **Recovery Church Movement:** The organization offers a 9-month certification program that combines biblical principles with the recovery journey and the 12-step process. According to its website, it is a church “...created by the recovery community for the recovery community.”
- **Recovery ministries:** These church-based programs support individuals struggling with addiction or other life challenges and help them find healing and spiritual growth through faith-based principles and community support. These ministries often incorporate elements of the twelve-step recovery model and aim to bridge the gap between secular recovery programs and the church community.

CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS

Nongovernmental and civic groups contribute to the rich tapestry of social infrastructure across the country. Many have existed for seventy-five years or more and are best contacted through local chapters. The following is an overview, rather than an exhaustive list, of several existing civic groups:

- **Kiwanis Clubs:** Approximately 450,000 members across 15,000 clubs devote 7 million hours to service each year.
- **Rotary International, Rotary Clubs, and The Rotary Foundation:** More than 1.2 million members worldwide, with more than \$273 million awarded in FY2025 for global service initiatives.
- **General Federation of Women’s Clubs:** Dedicated to community improvement through volunteer services, with more than 60,000 members in 2,300 clubs across all fifty states and the District of Columbia.
- **Freemasons:** A “...brotherhood of men committed to ...become the best version of themselves while working to better their communities and our world.” More than eighty recognized Freemason Grand Lodges in the United States oversee numerous local lodges, with an estimated 2 million active Freemasons involved in activities, such as fellowship and philanthropy, as of 2021.
- **Lions Club:** More than 1 million people belong to 50,000 clubs worldwide, with an estimated 46,000 clubs in the United States. Local clubs provide donations and identify priorities based on local needs and global causes, including hunger, youth, and humanitarian aid.
- **Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW):** The organization’s mission is to foster camaraderie among veterans and serve and advocate for them. The VFW was instrumental in establishing the agency that became today’s U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and currently focuses on educating separating service members about their earned VA benefits and providing financial assistance to military families, including assistance with basic housing needs and scholarships. The VFW donates approximately \$43 million annually.
- **American Legion:** The largest US veterans organization, with more than 1.5 million members and 12,000 local posts worldwide, as well as programs, services, and advocacy for veterans, youth, and local communities. The American Legion helped secure benefits, such as the GI Bill and the establishment of the VA health care system. It is organized into fifty-five departments across fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and other countries.



Tips for Partnering with Faith-based and Civic Organizations

In North Carolina, the Burke County Health Department approached a faith-based nonprofit that already provided a range of services for homeless women to test the use of a mobile clinic bus in its parking lot to provide health services to women. Staff contacted the nonprofit to offer additional resources that could be made accessible at a location where women already received support, using the following approach:

“We have to come together and agree that as a community, we want to tackle it.”

Section 2: Building the Foundation—Relationships Before Programming

Developing long-term relationships should be the primary goal of your homeless response system because it engages faith-based and civic groups. Nothing is more important than mutually beneficial relationships, which require intentionality. This means committing to understanding how a civic or faith-based group can benefit the homeless response system and how the homeless response system can benefit the faith-based or civic group. It is also important to invest in relationships so that they do not become transactional by getting to know people and what they care about.

Ways to approach faith-based and civic groups include the following:

- Warm introductions through trusted intermediaries, such as clergy, civic leaders, elected officials, neighbors, and colleagues who are members of faith-based or civic groups
- Participation in community events and meetings hosted by faith-based and civic groups rather than extending invitations only when you have a need

As you consider relationship building, note that residents in many rural communities serve in more than one role. The local feed and grain store owner may also be the mayor and a member of the sportsmen’s club. A county commissioner may be part of a congregation as well as a volunteer firefighter and farmer. Organizations in rural communities will benefit from asset mapping and identifying people who serve in multiple roles. Before meeting with civic and faith-based organizations, you may also want to prepare a list of potential projects that may interest them in case they ask about the homeless response system’s needs and goals. This list is not intended for use at the beginning of the conversation; instead, it can help you prepare a response in advance.

During this initial discovery phase, your goals are the following:

- **Lead with listening.** Conduct “get-to-know-you” meetings to expand your understanding of what motivates each faith-based and civic organization before making any requests. For example, religious traditions vary widely in their theology of poverty and service. Understanding these motivations will help you better tailor how you can be of value to them and frame your request later. Ask questions that will help you learn the following:
 - What are their priorities and passion projects?
 - What is their “why” regarding their current focus areas? Consider asking, “What are your current ministry priorities?”



- **Learn about their services and initiatives first.** What work have they undertaken that makes them proud? What behavioral health needs do they support? Are they already involved in addressing the needs of homeless communities? If so, what activities do they undertake? Many faith-based organizations and civic groups provide resources that address homelessness but may not be known to the public homeless response system.
 - ✎ For example, in a case study in *Faith and Community Roadmap to Recovery Support: Getting Back to Work*,¹² the Bible Center Church in West Virginia documented its existing talents, resources, and assets and then proactively contacted the business community, social service agencies, and public offices to introduce the church as a “viable and well-equipped partner.” As a result, the church learned that job readiness and reentry into the workplace for people in recovery were priorities for the city. The Bible Center Church then partnered with the Charleston Housing Authority to conduct a needs assessment, created a transportation program to drive people who needed rides to support meetings or new jobs, and developed and maintained an active list of freelance jobs for people in recovery.
- **Be ready to share what you do.** Some faith-based organizations may not understand what the public homeless response system does or how to engage with it.
- **Explore the following questions together:**
 - ✎ Do the missions and values of the faith-based or civic entity align with the goals of your homeless response system or agency?
 - ✎ What advantages is the organization uniquely placed to offer?
 - ✎ Is the organization concerned about its community reputation, depending on the type of support or partnership you may be seeking?
 - ✎ What are its capacity and knowledge base?
 - ✎ Does it want to be involved in the short term or long term?
 - ✎ How could partnering with the homeless response system benefit the organization?
- **Consider and be prepared to discuss and address the following:**
 - ✎ Common barriers and concerns
 - ✎ Questions about participant privacy and Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data sharing
 - ✎ Past experiences of being asked to “fill gaps” without meaningful partnership
 - ✎ The organization’s role in the overall homeless response system
 - ✎ Theological or ideological tensions regarding specific populations
 - ✎ Capacity constraints, because most faith-based and civic organizations are volunteer-run

Language and Terminology

As you begin outreach to and discussions with organizations, remember that, as in any field, people working in the homeless response system use language and terminology that others may not understand. Even



the term “homeless response system” will be new to many people. Be prepared to explain these terms, sometimes frequently, and recognize that many people will be unfamiliar with the nuances of each phrase. Organizations should consider developing resources for new partners that explain terms such as “homeless response system,” “coordinated entry,” and “continuum of care.” Each organization will need to consider how systems operate in its community because communities are structured differently.

HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEM

The term “homeless response system” refers to the organizations and entities within a geographic area that serve homeless individuals and families. These service providers may include nonprofit organizations, housing authorities, local and federal government agencies, faith-based organizations, local VA offices, and shelter providers.^{13,14}

Coordinated entry, also known as coordinated assessment or coordinated intake, is a process designed to quickly identify, assess, refer, and connect people in crisis with housing and assistance, regardless of where they seek help. It can help create more efficient homeless assistance systems.¹⁵

A CoC is the regional or local planning body that coordinates funding for housing and services for homeless individuals and families within a defined geographic area. CoCs bring together nonprofit providers and state and local governments to plan and deliver housing and services that help people exit homelessness.

Throughout the process of building relationships and laying the foundation for a partnership, remain committed to trust-building practices. This phase focuses on developing long-term relationships. To support that work, do the following:

- Be transparent about what the homeless response system can and cannot do.
- Acknowledge the expertise and existing work of community partners.
- Honor partner autonomy. Some congregations may be outspoken about not wanting to participate in a public response system.
- Reiterate how other partners are involved.
- Establish regular touchpoints to deepen relationships.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS’ INVOLVEMENT

Potential barriers to faith-based organizations’ involvement include not understanding what rural homelessness looks like, where homeless people gather, or how they can help. Other barriers may include difficulty transforming initial excitement into a long-term commitment, limited awareness of how each partner’s resources and activities fit into the overall homeless response system, and a lack of clear models or blueprints for doing the work well.



Section 3: Defining Roles—From Transactional to Transformational

As you develop rapport and relationships with faith-based and civic organizations, document the roles they currently occupy and the roles they may be able to assume in the future. During this phase, document how various organizations are involved, along with ideas for how they could become involved to address the gaps identified during the asset-mapping process. It may help to think of this process as stitching together a quilt for your community that depicts the resources available to individuals and families to overcome homelessness.

As you develop your ideas and potential requests, remember to frame each request so that it benefits each partner and the people who will be served. Also, prioritize the input of homeless people when designing solutions before presenting them. If your homeless response system or CoC already has a community advisory board, ask its members to help identify needs and barriers and generate recommendations.

The following list of potential roles for faith-based and civic organizations is based on conversations with community leaders around the country who have experience with these types of partnerships. As you engage with people in your community, additional roles will likely emerge.

- **Community:** Isolation often makes substance use and mental health conditions more difficult to manage. Community members can help by inviting and supporting homeless individuals and families to participate in civic groups and faith-based organizations. As you work with local organizations, consider whether they see this as a role they can fulfill.
- **Emergency support:** Food, clothing, shelter, and hygiene products are critical during emergencies. Would your local Kiwanis or Rotary Club be interested in coleading a campaign to secure additional resources and funding for extreme weather emergencies?
- **Navigation and outreach:** Some faith-based and civic organizations are already involved in outreach and may want to partner in deploying outreach teams. A contact at the local interfaith council may also be able to provide warm introductions to congregations or civic groups you want to learn more about.
- **Housing support:** Potential roles include landlord recruitment, welcome-home kits, and faith-based recovery residences. Are there landlords within local faith-based and civic organizations who could be approached in a focus group to identify barriers to renting to people who have been homeless and explore ways to overcome those barriers?
- **Recovery ministries:** Recovery ministries intentionally embrace people in recovery and support them in numerous ways. Activities may include hosting recovery support groups, sharing recovery information, conducting outreach, and engaging people with behavioral health conditions both within and outside the congregation. They may also provide peer support and warm handoffs or referrals to treatment.
- **Advocacy and systems change:** Are members of faith-based or civic organizations already involved, or interested in becoming involved, in tenant protections, zoning boards, or systems transformation? Some members may be landlords, housing developers who work with zoning boards, or county officials addressing transportation or other regional issues. Are there opportunities to leverage these multiple roles for mutual benefit?



- **Employment and income:** Can members of faith-based or civic organizations assist with job referrals or financial coaching?
- **Micro-loans:** Rural or state-specific institutions may be better positioned than faith-based and civic organizations to provide micro-loans. For example, Maine has a robust network of credit unions whose employees are also members of faith-based or civic organizations. Presenting to a faith-based or civic group about the need for job referrals, financial literacy coaching, or a micro-loan to help a homeless individual or family purchase a used car for work can illustrate practical supports that promote self-sufficiency. Likewise, if a member also works for a credit union or another financial institution, they may be able to explain the loan process step by step and provide a warm introduction.
- **Health services:** Health care is typically provided through formal partnerships with clinical providers, including CCBHCs (see the previous section on CCBHCs and learn about the public health services available in your region). Local public health departments often have a strong understanding of regional health needs, and some employees are also members of civic or faith-based organizations. Consider asking whether you can meet with them to discuss the needs you both prioritize.
- **Behavioral health services:** Some faith-based organizations provide behavioral health services directly, whereas others partner with clinical providers to offer services in faith-based settings. In addition, many faith-based organizations emphasize community and connection, both of which can positively affect behavioral health.
- **Transportation:** Many faith-based organizations have members who transport people to worship services, bring the sacrament to members who are housebound or living in nursing homes, deliver meals, or operate secondhand stores that require transporting donated goods. Consider whether existing transportation efforts could be expanded to include rides to mutual-aid groups or behavioral health appointments.

How Faith-based Organizations Can Help

Congregations involved in the homeless response system can help foster greater understanding by explaining how homelessness can occur and emphasizing that there is a person and a story behind every instance of homelessness.

Moving from Transactional to Transformational Partnerships

As you strengthen existing partnerships or develop new ones with faith-based and civic organizations, consider ways to promote transformational partnerships when appropriate, including the following:

- Distinguish between one-time projects and ongoing commitments. Requesting support for a one-time capital campaign to expand shelter capacity, for example, is very different from asking an organization to become a core partner in designing and implementing a recovery-friendly community. Both are valuable initiatives; consider your partnership's goal and vision.



- Design roles that utilize partners' unique relational assets in addition to any services, supports, donations, or facilities they provide. Many civic and faith-based groups include members from businesses, business networks, sports clubs, industries, arts organizations, utility companies, government agencies, and may be able to leverage those relationships to support the work.
- Help partners see themselves as participants rather than simply donors of service or resources. This sense of ownership can deepen long-term commitment.
- Help the homeless response system better understand how faith-based and civic groups already address homelessness so that their strengths and resources are recognized and appreciated.
- Approach partnerships with a variety of options and allow congregations and civic groups to decide how they want to participate.

As you develop a broader understanding of the existing homelessness response system and consider how additional partnerships could address service gaps, also consider how linkages among partner organizations can be strengthened. For example, a housing agency could partner with a church to establish an Off the Streets chapter that provides furniture, move-in kits, and security deposits on behalf of families who have agreed to house a family. Similarly, an outreach team could strengthen its partnership with a synagogue to provide daily essentials to people living in encampments.

Be prepared to share blueprints or models that clearly demonstrate how faith-based and civic organizations can carry out specific activities. Many faith-based and civic groups want to help but are unsure how to get started, and some would welcome models or practices that can be readily replicated. Off the Streets¹⁶ is one example of an easily replicated model. Founded in Connecticut by Reverend Deacon Michael Oles, it provides furniture, household goods, and security deposits to help people transition from homelessness to housing. Off the Streets also offers a toolkit to help congregations establish their own chapter.

Off the Streets

Established in 2009, Off the Streets now has twelve chapters in five states and has served more than 12,000 people using an easy-to-follow model. Its book provides background information and a template for forming a chapter in your community. You can purchase the book on Amazon. All profits go toward security deposits for homeless people and families.



Figure 2. Off the Streets Cover Art

Section 4: Formalizing Commitments—Structures That Outlast Champions

From the outset, think about how to create durable structures that outlast individual champions and staffing changes, preventing partnership “fade” and deepening collective impact over time (see Section 5 for additional information on why some partners may disengage or why commitment may fade). Various partnership agreement models and structures exist to support this goal.



Consider developing memorandums of understanding (MOUs) and partnership agreements.

- If using an MOU or similar agreement, be specific about roles of each agency and key personnel, protocols for referrals and warm handoffs, boundaries for data sharing, strategies for conflict resolution, and points of contact, as well as the format and frequency of communications.
- Keep agreements simple enough to review and update annually, as needed.
- Avoid excessive bureaucracy—match formality to partner capacity.
- Determine whether low-burden reporting is feasible. Collecting data on simple metrics that reflect meaningful contribution can strengthen a partnership, identify opportunities for improvement or expansion, and celebrate the accomplishments of all partners.
- Consider providing training to increase knowledge and strengthen collaboration.

A partner organization may benefit from training that your homeless response system can provide. Likewise, a faith-based organization may offer training that the homeless response system is unaware of. Making training available to staff, volunteers, and group members can help formalize collaborations. For example, the American Association of Christian Counselors' offers a Mental Health Coach certification through Light University. Training topics could include the following:

- **Behavioral Health 101:** What is behavioral health, and how can warm hand-offs and referrals be provided when appropriate?
 - ↳ Basics of trauma-informed care
 - ↳ Mental Health First Aid
- How coordinated entry works and why it matters
- HMIS privacy, consent, and what information can be shared
- Using motivational interviewing to support engagement

Another element to discuss and reach agreement on is identifying outcomes, defining success, and establishing a structure for collecting data and tracking progress, as appropriate.

Take time to define what success looks like for both the homeless response system and the partner organization. Consider the following examples:

- A congregation is committed to providing access to services that help homeless women gain self-sufficiency. A local health department commits to parking a mobile health clinic twice a week in the congregation's parking lot. This arrangement is successful for the congregation because it expands health services for women already receiving services. It is also successful for the health department because it increases access to health and behavioral health services.
- A local shelter wants to expand employment opportunities for homeless people and partners with a civic organization to identify employers willing to hire people with gaps in their work histories. Participants complete an employment training program in collaboration with a regional workforce development board (there are over 570 workforce development boards



across the United States and territories; more information is available at the [National Association of Workforce Boards website](#)). This partnership benefits people seeking a pathway to economic mobility, helps the shelter support individuals in earning income so they no longer rely on shelter housing, and provides employers with access to job-ready employees.

As part of formalizing partnerships, determine how often to check in (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly, biannually, or annually). To continue nurturing relationships and strengthening partnerships, establish how often to meet or communicate, the purpose of those interactions, and whether they should occur in person or virtually. You may also wish to determine how each party will communicate with others about the partnership. Consider developing a joint announcement for use on each partner's websites. For a sample volunteer hours tracking form, see Appendix A.

Section 5: Sustaining Engagement— Keeping Partners at the Table

At the beginning of any outreach or partnership effort, approach it with the goal of establishing a long-term partnership or collaboration. The organizations you contact are part of your community, and whether a collaboration develops in the short term, long term, or not at all, building relationships is worthwhile because future opportunities may arise.

Even with strong engagement and an effective initial partnership, collaborations may “fade” over time. To help minimize this, consider why faith-based and civic partners may disengage from your homeless response system.

- **Infrequent or poor communication.** As noted earlier, clarify expectations from the outset regarding the frequency and mode of communication. Following through on those commitments helps strengthen relationships.
- **Feeling like a gap-filler rather than a genuine partner.** Faith-based and civic organizations often want to understand how they contribute to the larger mission and affect the people they serve. Partners may also have ideas of their own, so creating opportunities for these conversations can transform a collaboration from feeling transactional to creating a sense of collective impact and shared purpose.
- **Leadership changes within the faith-based or civic organization.** Regular communication will help you stay informed about planned leadership transitions. Leadership changes are an appropriate time to revisit partnership agreements and determine whether the partnership continues to meet the needs of both organizations.
- **Burnout among volunteers without system support.** Most people serving through faith-based and civic organizations are volunteers and may lack support systems if they become overwhelmed or experience burnout. Consider inviting volunteers to attend trainings offered to your staff on well-being, vicarious trauma, and burnout.
- **Wanting to move on to the next “exciting” cause.** Recognize that some volunteers or parishioners may want to support a cause only briefly before shifting their attention elsewhere. Discuss this possibility with organizational leadership early so that the request can be tailored appropriately. For example, a faith-based or civic organization may be interested in preparing



and serving a monthly meal at a homeless shelter for many years, while another may prefer to conduct a one-time fundraiser to purchase a transportation van. Some faith-based organizations are converting buildings into affordable housing for homeless people and families and inviting them to become part of their communities. A local shooting range owner, however, may only be willing to post suicide prevention hotline information because the business already supports other causes.

Recognition and visibility strategies can also help sustain engagement and strengthen partnerships with faith-based and civic organizations. Examples include the following:

- **Annual partner gatherings or recognition events.** Acknowledge and celebrate both individual volunteers and organizations. Recognition can include awards that reflect the values of your homeless response system or honor volunteers and organizations that exemplify those values. For example, recognize a partner that recruited additional organizations into the network, resulting in expanded services in another region or community.
- **Impact reports that quantify partner contributions.** Sharing data that clearly demonstrates impact helps partners feel recognized and appreciated while providing information they can share with their communities.
- **Feature partner stories in homeless response system communications.** Consider interviews, podcasts, or videos highlighting individuals and organizations and celebrating the collective impact of your partnerships. Topics might include how the partnership helped the people served, strengthened the homeless response system, and improved the community.

Other strategies for deepening partnerships and reducing the risk of relationships becoming transactional include the following:

- Include partners in leadership, planning, and decision-making.
- Codesign new initiatives rather than asking partners only to implement initiatives that have already been developed.
- Create peer-learning opportunities among faith-based and civic partners. Consider whether organizations are willing to share lessons learned with others considering similar partnerships.
- Document relationships institutionally rather than relying on a single contact within an organization.
- Build relationships with multiple leaders within each organization. Doing so can provide diverse perspectives, uncover additional resources and barriers, and generate ideas for recognizing partner contributions.



Section 6: Resources

This section includes additional resources that may be valuable as you engage faith-based and civic organizations in your homeless response system.

- **Mental health challenges facing farmers in rural areas:** The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities brought farmers and members of the faith community together in 2023 for a “Farmers and Faith Roundtable” and again in 2024 for a “Farm Stress Summit.” These events strengthened connections among farmers, mental health professionals, faith leaders, agencies, and associations to address farm stress. Learn more about farm stress by visiting 988ga.org.
- Farmers face unfavorable weather, economic conditions, fuel prices, commodity prices, debt, labor shortages, and other stressors while working in one of the few industries that cannot set prices for its own products. Many farmers also face the loss of their farms and uncertainty about the future. Because many farmers participate in faith-based and civic organizations, understanding their mental health challenges may reveal opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. Farmers understand the effects of isolation and the importance of connection and community, experiences that may help them better understand what homeless people go through. Likewise, members of congregations and civic groups may benefit from learning more about behavioral health interventions.
- **National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention—Faith Communities:** This initiative helps “faith communities, regardless of creed, address suicide prevention” in recognition of how much faith-based groups “...already contribute by increasing hope, supporting emotional well-being, and fostering the development of positive social connections.” As homeless response systems map their local communities, it may be beneficial to [contact the alliance](#) to learn how to share resources with local faith-based organizations interested in suicide prevention.
- **Faith and Community Roadmap to Recovery Support: Getting Back to Work (2020):** The initiative was created to help congregations and communities support individuals and families affected by substance use challenges. It includes numerous case studies demonstrating collaborative approaches to supporting recovery and meaningful employment. Review the guide on the [HHS website](#).
- **Faith-Based Group Toolkit:** Developed by the Faith-Based Partnership to End Homelessness situated within OneRoof in Alabama, this toolkit provides practical steps for engagement, talking points, myths, and facts, and guidance on how to participate. Access the toolkit on the [OneRoof website](#).
- **Citygate Network:** “Equips gospel-centered ministries to respond to homelessness, trauma, poverty, and addiction with excellence, compassion, and lasting impact.” Learn more about the network on [their website](#).
- **Center for Faith (Faith Center):** Features several guides that could be helpful, including the following:
 - [*Youth Mental Health and Well-being in Faith and Community Settings: Practicing Connectedness*](#)
 - [*A Practical Toolkit for Preventing Drug Overdose and Supporting Recovery in Faith and Community Settings*](#)



APPENDIX A: SAMPLE VOLUNTEER HOURS TRACKING FORM

Volunteer Hours Tracking Form

Please sign in upon arrival and sign out before leaving. Thank you for your service!

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION

Volunteer Name	
Phone Number	
Email Address	
Emergency Contact (Name & Phone)	
Role/Area of Interest	
Orientation/Training Completed (Date)	
Background Check Completed (Date)	

SIGN-IN/SIGN-OUT LOG

Date	Time In	Time Out	Total Hours	Area/Task	Supervisor Initials	Notes



MONTHLY HOURS SUMMARY

Month	Hours This Month	Year-to-Date Hours	Reviewed By

SIGN-OFF

Volunteer Signature / Date

Volunteer Coordinator Signature / Date

Endnotes

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- 10 Wyoming Department of Health, *Recovery Support Services Manual* (2024).
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Learn More about the Homeless and Housing Resource Center

Providing high-quality, no-cost training for health and housing professionals in evidence-based practices that contributes to housing stability, recovery, and an end to homelessness.

Contact Us:

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