# Rural Nevada

## CONTINUUM OF CARE

### RATING AND RANKING PROCEDURES

PREPARED BY: WINGED WOLF INNOVATIONS, LLC |

# Table of Contents

# Introduction

The Rural Nevada Continuum of Care (RNCoC) is dedicated to addressing homelessness and housing instability within the rural and frontier communities of Nevada. Our mission is to create a comprehensive and coordinated response to homelessness by fostering partnerships, leveraging resources, and implementing effective strategies that meet the unique needs of our rural populations.

A critical component of our efforts involves the fair and transparent rating and ranking of project applications for funding in response to the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) released regularly by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The RNCoC rating and ranking policies and procedures are designed to ensure that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively to programs that demonstrate the greatest potential to reduce and ultimately end homelessness in our geographic areas.

These policies and procedures provide a clear framework for evaluating project proposals, prioritizing high-impact initiatives, and maintaining accountability among service providers. By adhering to these guidelines, the RNCoC aims to promote equity, enhance service delivery, and support the strategic goals outlined in our comprehensive plan to address homelessness.

This document outlines the specific criteria, processes, and methodologies employed by the RNCoC in the rating and ranking of project applications. It serves as a guide for applicants, stakeholders, and evaluators, ensuring that all parties have a shared understanding of the standards and expectations that govern our funding decisions.

# The Continuum of Care

The Continuum of Care (CoC) Program is a crucial initiative by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) aimed at addressing homelessness comprehensively.

The primary purpose of the CoC Program is to promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. It provides funding to non-profit organizations, as well as state and local governments, to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families, while minimizing the trauma and dislocation cause by homelessness. The program also aims to optimize self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Key component of HUD CoC program include:

1. **Funding and Grants:** CoC funds are awarded competitively to local organizations and agencies that form a CoC. These funds support a variety of activities, including permanent housing, transitional housing, supportive services, Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) implementation, and in some cases, homelessness prevention.
2. **Coordination and Planning:** Each CoC is responsible for coordinating and planning homeless services within a specified geographic area. This includes conducting biennial point-in-time count of homeless persons, operating a coordinated entry system to ensure that those experiencing homelessness have fair and equal access to housing and services, and developing and implementing strategies to reduce homelessness.
3. **Performance Measurement:** CoCs are required to measure their performance based on specific HUD criteria. These criteria include reducing the length of time individuals and families remain homeless, reducing the rate at which individuals and families return to homelessness, and improving employment and income growth for homeless individuals.
4. **Collaborative Approach:** The CoC Program emphasizes a collaborative approach to addressing homelessness, involving stakeholders from various sectors, including non-profit service providers, local government agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, and homeless or formerly homeless individuals.

The CoC Program aims to create a more organized and efficient system to prevent and end homelessness. By leveraging federal resources and fostering local partnerships, the program has made significant strides in reducing homelessness in communities across the United States. In summary, HUD's Continuum of Care Program is a comprehensive

approach designed to support homeless individuals and families, enhance community planning and coordination, and ultimately work towards the goal of ending homelessness.

# RNCoC Governance

It is the responsibility of the RNCoC Steering Committee to act as the governing structure for the RNCoC and to adopt the rules and operating procedures as it deems necessary to carry out its responsibilities under state and federal legislation. The Steering Committee includes representatives of relevant organizations and of projects serving subpopulations of those experiencing homelessness and shall include at least one individual experiencing homelessness or who has formerly experienced homelessness. Additional representatives shall include public and private sector organizations, including state level administrators from education, health and human services, housing, welfare, veterans, and the disabled community. Remaining memberships shall include non-profits, the treatment community, faith-based organizations, and homeless youth providers.

Standing Committees, Subcommittees and Working Groups include:

- RNCoC Steering Committee
- RNCoC Technical Committee
- Coordinated Entry Committee
- Annual Homeless Point-in-Time Working Group
- Ad Hoc Working Groups
- Rating and Ranking Committee

The Rating and Ranking Committee (RRC), comprised of representatives from neutral (non-applicant) organizations, reviews all renewal and new applications.  The RRC leads the Rating and Ranking process and adopts the HUD Rating and Ranking tool, which is updated annually.

# Rating and Ranking Criteria

The criteria and process for rating and ranking project applications in the RNCoC aims to ensure an objective, transparent and consistent evaluation process that aligns with HUD priorities and focuses on project performance. These measures include project utilization, data quality, spend rate, housing stability, exits to permanent housing, exits to homelessness, income increases, access to mainstream non-cash benefits, reduction in recidivism, utilization of coordinated entry, adherence to Housing First principles, and incorporation of individuals with lived experiences.

1. Alignment with HUD Priorities (20 points)
    a. Housing First Approach (10 points): Projects that adopt a Housing First approach, minimizing barriers to housing access and support.
    b. Utilization of Coordinated Entry (10 points): Integration with the CoC's Coordinated Entry system to prioritize the most vulnerable populations.
2. Project Performance (50 points)

a. Utilization Rate (10 points): Percentage of available units or beds that are occupied during the program year. Higher utilization rates indicate better performance.

b. Data Quality (10 points): Accuracy and completeness of data entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).

c. Spend Rate (10 points): Efficient use of grant funds, with a higher score for projects that spend funds timely and appropriately.

d. Housing Stability (10 points): Measurement of clients maintaining housing stability over time.

e. Exits to Permanent Housing (10 points): Successful exits to permanent housing solutions, including permanent supportive housing, rapid rehousing, and other permanent destinations.

3. Income and Benefits (15 Points)

a. Increase in Income (7 points): Projects that demonstrate an increase in participant earned and unearned income.

b. Mainstream Non-Cash Benefits (8 points): Connection of participants to mainstream non-cash benefits, such as SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid.

4. Reduction in Recidivism (5 points)

a. Reduced Returns to Homelessness (5 points): Projects that show a decrease in the number of participants returning to homelessness after exiting the program.

5. Inclusivity and Participant Engagement (10 points)

a. Utilization of Lived Experiences (5 Points): Incorporation of feedback from individuals with lived experiences of homelessness in program design and implementation.

b. Participant Engagement (5 Points): Active involvement of participants in program planning and decision-making processes.

6. Supplemental Application (100 points)

a. Narrative responses describing the project, identifying population goals, specific objectives and how the project meets the needs of the RNCoC.

# Rating Process

The RNCoC is committed to establishing a fair, transparent, and consistent process for rating and ranking project applications submitted for funding through the Continuum of Care (CoC) local competition. This process will be utilized for all applications submitted for the CoC local competition, including new, renewal, expansion projects, and transition grant projects.

At the onset of every local competition, the CoC or facilitator responsible for coordination of RNCoC activities will post information relevant to the pending competition. This will include information on how applicants are to submit applications, platforms that will be utilized for submissions, deadline for submission of all application criteria and materials.

All project applications with undergo a threshold review prior to the rating and ranking of any projects. This threshold review will ensure that all projects meet the basic eligibility criteria and align with compliance with federal, state, and local regulations; align with CoC priorities and goals, and all required documentation submitted by the competition deadline. Eligibility requirements reviewed during the threshold review will include:

- Recipients and subrecipients are a state or local government agency, non-profit or Faith-based organization, Indian Tribes or Tribally Designated Housing Entities (TDHE).
    - To encourage coordination and collaboration with Indian Tribes or Tribally Designated Housing Entities all new projects that coordinate with Native Tribes or identify projects with a preference to serve this population will receive 10 bonus points on their local application score.
- All applicants have a SAM Registration or Unique Entity Identifier
- Recipients have an active DUNS Number

Applications that do not meet these basic eligibility requirements cannot continue in the rating process and will not be accepted for ranking and Priority Listing. These projects will receive notification in writing of this decision.

Applications are scored using objective, performance-based criteria to evaluate how effective each project is at reducing homelessness throughout the RNCoC. Each year a subcommittee will be responsible for the reviewing and rating of all project applications prior to project ranking. Criteria outlined in this procedure identify the objective criteria to be used for rating applications for CoC Program Funding.

The facilitator of CoC activities will be responsible for the recruitment of representatives to review and score project applications. Rating and Ranking Committee team members must serve explicitly in a role to utilize objective criteria to score projects and may not be employed by or associated with the agency or organization that has an application in the competition year to be reviewed. Committee members are required to disclose any potential or actual conflicts of interest prior to participating in the rating and ranking process.

# Ranking Process

HUD requires that all CoCs score and rank all new, reallocated, bonus, renewal and DV bonus project applications submitted by applicants. Ranking projects is how all CoCs establish their Priority Listing for those applications in the local competition to indicate project prioritization awards for the RNCoC in the Consolidated Application.

The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) released by HUD outlines the formula used to project each community's Annual Renewal Demand (ARD). During the ranking process, the RNCoC will utilize this information to determine ARD plus any amount available for Bonus projects to estimate the community award.

The Priority Listing established during this process will be ranked into Tier 1 and Tier 2 Projects.

- Tier 1 projects are considered the highest priority for funding. These projects are generally more secure in their likelihood of receiving funding. The amount of funding available for Tier 1 projects is a percentage, typically 90%of the ARD. Projects that are critical for the infrastructure of the CoC are ranked in Tier 1 along with renewal projects that have demonstrated successful outcomes and compliance with HUD standards; and new projects that meet project eligibility, project quality threshold, and improve system performance. Those projects that are critical to the infrastructure of the CoC include those for the community's Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) and the Supportive Services Only- Coordinated Entry project (SSO-CE). Loss of these projects would be detrimental to the success of the RNCoC homeless service system.
- Tier 2 projects are lower priority compared to Tier 1 and face a more competitive funding environment. These projects compete with all other projects in the national competition for funding. Tier 2 projects may include some combination of new and renewal projects and are subject to a rigorous review process and are scored based on various criteria including alignment with HUD priorities, project performance and community impact. Projects in Tier 2 are scored and ranked based on factors such as the CoC's overall application score, project quality, strategic value, and alignment with HUD's policies priorities. Higher-rated projects in Tier 2 have a better chance of being funded.

Objective criteria is used to score projects and inform how successful projects have been at achieving outcomes to end homelessness throughout Rural Nevada. Several factors may affect the ranking and prioritization of projects, like those critical to the infrastructure and

success of the CoC, like Coordinated Entry or Homeless Management Information System - loss of these projects would impact the entire system.

# Reallocation Process

CoCs should establish a process for reallocating program funds for underperforming or low-priority projects to new or higher-priority projects that can more effectively address homelessness throughout the CoC. This process aims to ensure that limited resources are used in the most effective and efficient manner to meet the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Reallocation will occur annually through the local competition process. Reallocation principles include:

- Client-Centred Approach: Ensuring reallocated funds are used to support projects that provide the most benefit to clients experiencing homelessness.
- Performance-Based Funding: Prioritizing funding for projects that demonstrate high performance and effective outcomes in reducing homelessness.
- Transparency and Fairness: Ensuring the reallocation process is transparent, fair, and includes input from all stakeholders.
- Data-Driven Decisions: Use objective data and performance metrics to guide reallocation decisions.

An annual performance evaluation will be done to review the performance of all CoC-funded projects based on HUD established performance measures such as: use of Housing First and Coordinated Entry, housing stability, income growth, bed utilization rates, and effective use of mainstream resources. A needs assessment to identify gaps in services and emerging needs among those experiencing homelessness will be used to inform the type of services that need to be implemented or expanded to meet the need. This will assist with establishing funding priorities and strategic goals for the RNCoC.

Projects will be presented with the opportunity to voluntarily reallocate funds prior to the start of the local competition. Applicants that choose to voluntarily relinquish funds due to an inability to effectively utilize all awarded funds will be **awarded 10 bonus points** in the local competition. HUD requires funding reallocation from project previously funding with DV Bonus funding to be use for project service the same subpopulation.

The rating committee has the right to reallocate all or a portion of funds from renewal projects during the local competition. Projects that may be reallocated include:

1.  Underperforming projects: Those projects that consistently fail to meet performance benchmarks, demonstrate low utilization rates, or consistent underspending.
2.  Low-Priority Projects: Identify projects that no longer align with the CoC's strategic priorities or address the most pressing needs.

# Appeals Process

The appeals process ensures a fair, transparent and consistent process for addressing concerns or objections related to the rating, ranking, and selection of projects. This process is intended to provide applicants with an opportunity to appeal decisions made by the CoC regarding their project proposal(s).

The following entities are eligible to submit an appeal:

- Project applicants that submitted a project proposal for the current CoC Program Competition.
- Project applicants whose project was not selected for funding.
- Project applicants whose project received a lower ranking than expected based on the published criteria.

Appeals will be considered on the following grounds:

- **Procedural Error:** The applicant believes that a procedural error occurred during the rating and ranking process that adversely affected the outcome of their application.
- **Incorrect Application of Criteria:** The applicant believes that the CoC incorrectly applied the established rating and ranking criteria to the project proposal.
- **New Information:** The applicant has new, relevant information that was not available at the time of the original submission and that could reasonably affect the rating and ranking of their project.

Applicants will be notified in writing of their project's rating and ranking within 3 business days after the Rating and Ranking Committee has completed its review. Appeals are required to be submitted within 3 business days of receiving notification of the rating and ranking results. An appeal request must be submitted via email to rncoc@wingedwolf.org and must include:

- A detailed explanation of the grounds for appeal.
- Supporting documentation or evidence, if applicable.
- The specific relief or resolution sought.

## Appeals Review and Decision

The CoC shall establish a committee to review appeals. This committee will be composed of members who were not involved in the initial rating and ranking process. The Appeals Committee will be responsible for reviewing and rendering a decision for any appeals submitted. The Appeals Committee will review the appeal, including all submitted documentation. Should the committee need additional information to make an informed decision, it can request additional information or clarification from the appellant.

The Appeals Committee will render a decision and the CoC will notify the appellant in writing of the committee's decision and provide a brief explanation of the rationale for the decision within 10 business days of receiving the appeal. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final and no further action may be taken within the CoC process.

All appeals will be handled in a confidential manner, with information shared only with those involved in the appeals process. The CoC will maintain transparency by documenting all steps of the appeals process and making this information available to the CoC Governing Board and HUD upon request.

The CoC will maintain records of all appeals, including the appeals submitted, the decisions rendered, and the rationale for those decisions, for a minimum of 5 years.

This process will be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to ensure continued fairness, transparency and alignment with HUD requirements. This includes ensuring the appeals process provides time for appellant to adequately justify their appeal while maintaining the required timeline for the CoC local competition.

## Conflict of Interest

Conflict of Interest clause is to ensure the integrity and fairness of the rating and ranking process for the local competition. The RNCoC wishes to establish clear guidelines to prevent conflicts of interest and outline the disclosure requirements for all individuals involved in the process.

A conflict of interest occurs when an individual's personal, professional, or financial interests could improperly influence or appear to influence their judgement and action during the rating and ranking process. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Direct or indirect financial interest in any competing entity.
- Personal or familial relationships with competitors or their representatives.
- Employment, consultancy, or board membership with any competing entity.

- Any other situation that could compromise the individual's impartiality.

All individuals involved in rating and ranking process must disclose any potential or actual conflicts of interest. Disclosure should be made in writing to the competition coordinator prior to participating in the rating and ranking process. All individuals involved in the rating and ranking process must complete an annual disclosure form outlining any potential conflicts of interest. If a potential conflict of interest arises during the competition, the committee member must disclose the conflict immediately to the facilitator of CoC local competition.

Facilitator of the CoC local competition will be responsible for reviewing all disclosures and determine if a real or perceived conflict of interest exists. Individuals with a disclosed conflict of interest may be recused from rating and ranking any entries where the conflict exists. The facilitator may appoint an alternate individual who does not have a conflict of interest to participate in the rating and ranking process. The facilitator is responsible for managing all real or perceived conflicts of interest. All disclosures will be documented, and documentation will be maintained.

Disclosures and discussions related to conflicts of interest will be kept confidential and shared only in the event and with those individuals that need to know to manage the conflict of interest. All individuals involved in the rating and ranking process must sign an acknowledgement form indicating that they have read, understand, and agree to comply with the Conflict of Interest.