

# Sharing Data Across Systems:

## Leveraging Homeless Service and Public Workforce Systems Data to Support Jobseekers Experiencing Homelessness

### Introduction

People experiencing homelessness often need earned income to become and remain stably housed, and would benefit from improved access to the public workforce system. Housing stability and successful employment are closely linked; **homeless service systems** benefit when people experiencing homelessness succeed in employment, while **workforce development systems** benefit when jobseekers have stable housing. [Collaboration](#) is critical for these two systems to achieve their interrelated goals of helping jobseekers experiencing homelessness obtain and maintain housing and employment.

Homeless service and workforce development systems typically operate in silos. Differentiated funding streams, guiding policies, reporting requirements, performance metrics, and data systems perpetuate siloed, rather than integrated or collaborative, approaches to serving people experiencing homelessness. Communities often struggle to strengthen the connections between their homeless service systems, workforce development systems, and their respective service networks. One promising systems collaboration strategy is cross-systems data sharing. Sharing data allows systems to learn how many people make up their shared service population, what kinds of services these individuals want, need, and receive from each system, and where there may be opportunities for strengthened partnerships or gaps that could best be addressed collaboratively.

Without cross-systems data sharing, neither system can track client-level outcomes across systems and, at the population level, they cannot identify gaps in services for jobseekers experiencing homelessness. This critical lack of collaboration fosters further differentiation and misunderstandings between the systems about everything from service needs to racial equity. At the same time, data sharing can be complex to implement.

This brief provides guidance and examples for how to implement a data sharing project that meets your community's needs. Suggestions made in this resource come from the experiences of real communities across the country that have attempted and/or succeeded in sharing data across public systems and have thus taken a meaningful step toward systems coordination on behalf of jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness.

Heartland Alliance's [IMPACT DIVISION](#) works in partnership with communities nationwide to advance social, economic, and racial justice for people who have been denied it through research, data analysis, policy advocacy, program innovation, and field support. [We are researchers, social workers, policymakers, students, educators, and community members dedicated to creating, implementing, and sharing solutions to the root causes of poverty and inequity.](#)

For the purposes of this resource, “data sharing” refers to any effort to use or share data between the homeless service system and the public workforce development system for the purpose of deepening collaboration between the two systems, including efforts sometimes described as [data integration](#). Data sharing can take a variety of forms depending on the questions a community wants to answer, existing data system capabilities, capacity of data administration staff, and existing systems connections.

## Why Share Data Across Systems?

Data sharing allows community stakeholders to accomplish the following:

### Answer cross-system questions

Any data sharing effort will be shaped by the questions that leaders from both systems want to answer. A few examples of such questions are:



#### Who receives services from both systems?

- What is the size and proportion of the shared service population, and what are the demographics of shared clients?
- What are the employment and housing needs and interests of these shared clients?



#### How effective are referral mechanisms?

- How often do staff refer clients between the two systems?
- How often do clients use referrals between the two systems?
- Is there a reliable, effective way for staff to know whether clients use referrals? If not, how could that be remedied?



#### What are the employment and housing outcomes for shared clients?

- What proportion of clients in the shared population become employed, or increase their income, or increase their housing stability?

## **Inform and drive systems alignment efforts**

Data sharing allows systems to better understand the full scope and scale of their shared service population, and which employment and housing supports this overlapping population needs and receives. With a clearer understanding of the scope and scale of their shared service population, the two systems can align their goals and performance metrics, plan for improved connections between housing and employment services, or advocate for increased resources for jobseekers experiencing homelessness.

When the two systems are able to share data about specific individuals being referred between respective systems, analysis of shared data can reveal how well referral processes are working and where they need strengthening. By sharing data about the degree to which cross-system referrals are used, for example, systems stakeholders can collaboratively determine where there are inefficiencies, gaps, and blind spots in their referral processes and begin to address them. For systems stakeholders focused on improving referral networks, data sharing can be a natural complement to [asset mapping](#), which is a process systems stakeholders can undertake to better understand the local resources available to jobseekers who are experiencing homelessness, build formalized referral relationships between service providers within and across systems, and identify and address service gaps.

## **Advance racial equity efforts**

One of the most important ways data sharing can benefit each system is by helping to identify [structural racism](#) within both systems. Because Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) are disproportionately impacted by [chronic unemployment](#) and [homelessness](#) and over-represented in both systems, failing to [consider race in any approach to data sharing](#) runs the risk of using data in ways that reproduce structural racism and reinforce historically racist policies. For example, a workforce service provider could learn via data sharing that none of its clients who have a history of homelessness or housing instability – who are disproportionately BIPOC – have become employed after receiving workforce development services. With this information, the workforce provider could begin to examine and change its practices, procedures, and policies to intentionally serve jobseekers facing the greatest employment barriers, including homelessness and racism. Although data sharing itself does not guarantee that work within either system will become affirmatively anti-racist, it can illuminate racial disparities that are not readily apparent without the two systems coming together to exchange information.

## **Things to Consider and Prepare For**

If stakeholders in your community are interested in sharing data across homeless service and workforce systems, consider the following as you lay the groundwork for a data sharing effort:

## **Tailor your data sharing approach to your community's objectives and circumstances**

Systems leaders should consider their shared objectives in light of any limitations that may exist in their community. Limitations could include whether their systems data are sufficiently accurate and complete, whether their data systems are agile enough to support some version of data sharing while maintaining client confidentiality, whether staff have the necessary training and capacity to share data, whether the data can be disaggregated by race and ethnicity, whether the two systems define variables similarly, and whether local or state policies place limits on data sharing. Many of these factors will also inform feasibility regarding conducting a one-time match versus creating an ongoing integrated data system. Together, systems leaders will need to work through these limitations and/or revise their list of shared questions.

## **Identify or cultivate champions**

Identifying and engaging champions for this work is critical because they can help overcome obstacles such as entrenched division between organizations, cultural barriers, and bureaucratic or legal hurdles, and they may be able to persuade individuals who otherwise would stand in the way of data sharing efforts. A task force or working group of homeless service and workforce development leaders may be best positioned to build buy-in for cross-system data sharing. In partnership with other homeless service and workforce development stakeholders and decisionmakers, this cross-systems leadership team can determine who will champion a data sharing effort. Champions might come from within either system, they may work at the state or local level, or they may be employed at a non-profit, university, or within philanthropy.

## **Include insights of people with lived experience**

The insight and expertise of people with lived experience of homelessness and economic marginalization should be prioritized in cross-system data sharing processes. Due to deep-seated [racial inequities](#) in education and labor markets, researchers, evaluators, and technology experts are predominantly white, while the majority of people whose personal data are housed in public systems databases are BIPOC. The huge power differential between those two groups can result in unintended consequences regarding how data are used, what questions are asked of data, what assumptions are made about data, and how data are collected, stored, and shared. Having people with lived experience make decisions about data collection, use, and sharing can help [mitigate these issues](#) and advance racial equity.

## **Consider how to protect privacy and confidentiality**

There is natural tension between wanting to share participant data to improve and target services, and the responsibility to keep data private and confidential. Some data collected by

each system are highly sensitive and/or regard federally-protected information such as race and ethnicity, income, and information about a person's past traumas or other personal experiences. A data breach, improper use of the data, or access to the data by unauthorized individuals could result in real harm to participants. These risks underscore the importance of sharing as little information as is required in order to achieve the desired outcome. Planning for data sharing should include developing protocols to ensure that data sharing and storage conforms to all applicable [data privacy and confidentiality](#) standards. These standards can be described in detail in a data sharing agreement between the two parties.

## Conclusion

Sharing data across homeless service systems and public workforce development systems is one of few ways to definitively answer questions about the size of their shared service population, what kinds of services this shared population wants and receives, and whether or not referrals and connections made between systems are effective. In every community, data sharing will be tailored to the community's size, needs, funding, and capacity: there is no one-size-fits-all way to engage in this important cross-systems collaboration strategy.

## Lessons from the field

### Ongoing data sharing: Detroit

In December 2019, leadership from the homeless service system and workforce system in Detroit began discussions about how to share data across their systems to gain a clearer understanding of the two systems' shared service population and to facilitate and track cross-system referrals. Systems leaders engaged local stakeholders and peers who had implemented data sharing efforts in their communities in order to shape and guide their data sharing process.

A data sharing agreement was developed between the lead agency for the local homeless service system—or [Continuum of Care](#) (CoC)—and lead workforce agency. They also created data sharing agreements with [University of Michigan Poverty Solutions](#) initiative, which facilitated the management and matching of shared data elements. The data sharing agreement allowed for the limited sharing of data elements collected by homeless service providers to be shared with the workforce agency for the purposes of tracking referral outcomes. Once a month, the homeless service system shares demographic data on clients who are referred for

### What if we don't yet have cross-systems buy-in for sharing data across systems?

Service providers in each system that receive public funding are required to collect some information pertaining to the other system; homeless service providers must ask about employment and income, and workforce providers must ask whether a client is experiencing homelessness. By adding a few key questions to either systems' existing data collection processes and ensuring that staff routinely and accurately record responses, both systems can get a more robust understanding of who comprises their shared service population. For example, homeless service providers can add questions about employment service needs and preferences to their [coordinated entry system intake assessment](#) and/or their [Point-in-Time Count surveys](#). Read more about this strategy in our free stakeholder resource: [How and Why to Integrate Income and Employment-Related Questions to Coordinate Entry Assessments](#).

workforce services. The workforce system hosts an internal data dashboard that reflects the matched demographic data – such as race, age, and gender – of clients who make contact with the workforce system based on a referral from the homeless service system, and the type of employment service(s) they receive.

Systems stakeholders in Detroit plan to conduct deeper analysis of the data currently being shared between the two systems and are exploring the possibility of conducting a one-time historical data match that would allow for an analysis of a greater sample of shared clients. Leaders from both systems hope the information gained from data sharing efforts will inform strategies to improve and track referral processes between housing and workforce providers.

### **One-time data match: Chicago**

In 2019, Chicago's homeless service and public workforce systems undertook a one-time historical data match, using de-identified person-level data, to determine how many people received services from both systems between 2016 and 2018. The data match was intended to primarily establish a baseline understanding of the scale of the shared service population. Additionally, systems leaders hoped sharing data from the workforce system to the homeless service system would help the homeless service system fulfill its requirement to report changes in client incomes to HUD. Finally, they hoped that sharing data across systems would expedite the WIOA eligibility determination process; people experiencing homelessness are a priority population for WIOA services, but workforce service providers do not always ensure that clients answer questions about their housing status.

The lead agency for Chicago's CoC had implemented an Employment and Income Taskforce to advance efforts to expand access to economic opportunity for people seeking and receiving housing supports through the CoC. A data administrator from the lead workforce agency attended an Employment and Income Taskforce meeting where the need for cross-systems data sharing was discussed. She volunteered to participate in a data sharing effort, which required that the two systems enter into a data sharing agreement. The CoC lead agency performed the data match, which was then sent to the workforce system data administrator, who was able to look up clients in the WIOA database to search for patterns or trends in employment outcomes among clients who received services from both systems between 2016 and 2018.

The match allowed for an examination of demographics including sex, education level, age, geography, classification/eligibility criteria, and whether people receiving services from both systems were employed during at least one of the four quarters following their exit from WIOA services, comparing the shared service population to the overall WIOA population. The data match ultimately showed little overlap between their two service populations. The two systems used the results of the data match to advocate for systems strategies to improve connections to the workforce services that people seeking housing supports want and need.

# Appendix

## Sample Data Sharing Agreement

## DATA SHARING AGREEMENT

**\*NOTE: THIS DOCUMENT IS NOT INTENDED FOR USE IN ITS CURRENT FORM. REFER TO LOCAL LAWS/POLICIES WHEN DRAFTING A DATA USE AGREEMENT FOR YOUR COMMUNITY\***

THIS DATA SHARING AGREEMENT (“Agreement”) is made this \_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2018 (“Effective Date”), by and between COC LEAD ORGANIZATION, an STATE not for profit corporation (“COC LEAD ORGANIZATION”), and WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD (“WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD”).

### AGREEMENTS

In consideration of the Recitals, promises and mutual covenants herein contained and other good and valuable consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which are hereby acknowledged, the parties hereto agree as follows:

1. Purpose of Data Sharing. WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD administers the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I funds for \_\_\_\_\_ County, STATE and collects data regarding the individuals served with WIOA funds. COC LEAD ORGANIZATION is the administrator of the Homeless Management Information System (“HMIS”). WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD desires to provide COC LEAD ORGANIZATION with a list of unemployed individuals from WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD’s database and have COC LEAD ORGANIZATION run a match on such individuals within HMIS (the “Purpose”). COC LEAD ORGANIZATION shall report to WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD the aggregate number of individuals that appear in HMIS from the data initially provided by WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD. The parties acknowledge that all data is being provided to each other on an “as-is” basis and neither party making any representations regarding the accuracy or completeness of such data.

2. Use of the Data. Both parties agree that the data provided to each other shall be used solely for the Purpose.

3. Ownership of the Data. WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD acknowledges and agrees that COC LEAD ORGANIZATION is the owner of the data provided by COC LEAD ORGANIZATION and WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD shall assert no ownership rights in or to such data. COC LEAD ORGANIZATION acknowledges and agrees that WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD is the owner of any data provided by WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD and COC LEAD ORGANIZATION shall assert no ownership rights in or to such data provided by WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD.

4. Confidentiality. Each party (“Receiving Party”) agrees that it shall (a) maintain the data provided by the other party (“Disclosing Party”) in strict confidence; (b) use at least the same degree of care in maintaining the secrecy of the Disclosing Party’s data as the Disclosing Party uses in maintaining the secrecy of its own proprietary, secret or confidential information, but in no event less than a reasonable degree of care; and (c) use the data only for the Purpose set forth in this Agreement. If the Receiving Party enters into an agreement to disclose the data to a third party for the Purpose, the Receiving Party shall provide the Disclosing Party with 30 days’ prior written notice and the Disclosing Party reserves the right to either approve or disapprove of such agreement. The parties shall use commercially reasonable security standards to protect the data

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disclosed hereunder from any unauthorized access, use or disclosure. In the event the Receiving Party is required by legal process to disclose the data, the Receiving Party shall immediately notify the Disclosing Party in writing and cooperate with the Disclosing Party in opposing or limiting such disclosure. If the Receiving Party has knowledge of any unauthorized access, use and/or disclosure of the data, it shall: (a) notify the Disclosing Party immediately (which in no event shall be longer than twelve (12) hours from the time the Receiving Party becomes aware of the unauthorized access, use and/or disclosure); (b) take prompt and appropriate action to prevent further unauthorized access, use and/or disclosure; (c) cooperate with the Receiving Party and any government authorities with respect to the investigation and mitigation of any such unauthorized access, use and/or disclosure; and (d) take such other actions as the Receiving Party may reasonably direct to remedy such unauthorized access, use and/or disclosure, including, if required under any federal or state law, providing notification to the affected individuals.

5. Use of Name. Neither party will use the other party's name, trademarks, logos or other marks without that party's prior written consent.

6. Term. The term of this Agreement shall commence on the Effective Date and shall continue for a period of one (1) year. Thereafter, the term of this Agreement shall automatically renew for two (2) successive periods of one (1) year each. Either party may terminate this Agreement at any time by providing the other party with thirty (30) days prior written notice. All individual level data shared by either party shall be destroyed by the Receiving Party within 90 days of the completion of each data match unless the Disclosing Party agrees in writing to a longer period. Upon termination of the Agreement, the Receiving Party shall destroy the data, and all copies thereof, and shall certify such destruction in writing to the Disclosing Party.

7. Termination for Default. In the event of a default under this Agreement, either party shall have the right to terminate this Agreement by written notice to the defaulting party if such default is not cured as soon as possible, but not longer than five (5) days after the non-defaulting party provides the defaulting party with written notice of such default; provided, however, that if the default is of a nature which in the non-defaulting party's sole discretion cannot be cured then the non-defaulting party may immediately terminate this Agreement through written notice to the defaulting party without providing the defaulting party any additional time to cure such default. The termination of the Agreement under this Section shall be effective as of the date stated in the written notice provided by the non-defaulting party. Additionally, the non-defaulting party shall have the right to: exercise all rights and remedies available at law or in equity including seeking monetary damages and/or specific performance, including, without limitation, injunctive relief.

8. Miscellaneous

(a) Mediation. All claims, disputes, and controversies arising out of or in relation to the performance, interpretation, application, or enforcement of this agreement, including but not limited to breach thereof, shall be referred to mediation. The Parties agree to first pursue in good faith the mediation of any dispute arising out of the subject matter of this agreement before resorting to arbitration or any other legal remedy. Mediation fees, if any, shall be divided equally among the parties involved.

(b) Entire Understanding. This Agreement constitutes the complete understanding between the parties hereto and supersedes any prior understandings whether written or oral between the parties relating to the subject matter hereof.

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(c) Waiver. No action or failure to act by either party shall constitute a waiver of any right or duty afforded any of them under the Agreement, nor shall any action or failure to act constitute an approval of or acquiescence in any breach thereunder, except as may be specifically agreed in writing.

(d) Governing Law. This Agreement shall be construed in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois, without regards to its conflicts of law principles.

(e) Amendments. This Agreement may not be amended or revised except by an instrument executed by the parties.

(f) Time and Binding Effect. Time shall be of the essence of this Agreement and the covenants and agreements herein contained shall be binding upon and shall inure to the benefit of the parties hereto and their respective legal representatives, successors and assigns.

(g) Attorney's Fees. In the event of any mediation arising from this Agreement, the prevailing party shall be entitled to recover from the other party all provable costs and expenses incurred in enforcing its rights hereunder, including, without limitation, the prevailing party's reasonable attorney's fees and court costs.

(h) Validity. If any provision of this Agreement, or any paragraph, sentence, clause, phrase, or word, or the application thereof, any circumstances, is adjudicated by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid, the validity of the remainder of this Agreement shall be construed as if such invalid part were never included herein.

(i) Headings. The headings and captions as contained in this Agreement are inserted for convenience of reference only and in no way define, describe or limit the scope or intent of this Agreement or any of the provisions hereof.

(j) Assignment. Neither party shall assign, transfer or convey any of its duties or obligations or rights hereunder without first obtaining the prior written consent of the other party.

(k) Relationship of the Parties. The parties hereto acknowledge and agree that they are at all times acting and performing as independent contractors with respect to the subject matter of this Agreement. At no time shall WORKFORCE SYSTEM LEAD be considered an agent, employee, partner or joint venture of COC LEAD ORGANIZATION.

(l) Notice. All notices shall be given in writing to the intended recipient at the facsimile or address specified in the signature block set forth below or such other number or address as such party shall at any time or otherwise specify by like notice to the other party. Any and all notices shall be given in the following manner: (a) by registered or certified mail, return receipt requested, or (b) by facsimile, or (c) by personal delivery. Each such notice shall be effective (i) if given by mail, five business days after such communication is deposited in the United States mail with first-class postage prepaid; (ii) if given by facsimile, at the time such facsimile is transmitted and the appropriate confirmation is received, provided that the notice transmitted shall be sent out on business days between 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Central Standard Time, (or if such time is not during a business day, at the beginning of the next business day) or (iii) if given by any other means, when delivered at the address pursuant hereto.

(m) Survival. The termination of this Agreement shall not end the obligation of a party to this Agreement which is intended to survive the termination of this Agreement, including, without limitation, sections 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

(n) Remedies Not Exclusive. The exercise of a remedy by a party to this Agreement shall not preclude such party from exercising any and all other remedies available under this Agreement, law and/or equity.

(o) Counterparts, Facsimile and E-mail Transmission. This Agreement may be signed in any number of counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, and all of which taken together shall constitute one and the same Agreement. The parties may sign and deliver this Agreement by facsimile transmission, or by e-mail with attached scanned signature page image. Each of the parties agree that they shall have the same force and effect as delivery of original signatures and that each of the parties may use such signatures as evidence of the execution and delivery of this Agreement by all parties to the same extent that an original signature could be used.

(p) No Presumption. This Agreement is a product of the negotiations between the parties. If there is a dispute as to the interpretation or meaning of this Agreement, there shall be no presumption against the party which prepared or proposed all or part of the language of this Agreement.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties have executed this Agreement as of the Effective Date.

**Approved for**  
**Workforce Development Board:**

**Approved for**  
**Continuum of Care Lead Org:**

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Title \_\_\_\_\_  
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