

Memo

Date: March 14, 2024

To: Joint Office of Homeless Services Executive Leadership

From: Multnomah County Supportive Housing Services Advisory Committee

Subject: Capacity Building Recommendations for Review by JOHS Leadership

Introduction

The SHS Advisory Committee's capacity building workgroup met from May 2023 through January 2024 to tackle one of the committee's top priorities: increasing the operational capacity of the Joint Office's homeless services providers. While the committee is charged with making recommendations specifically related to SHS, the Joint Office may find that because SHS is such a significant funding source these recommendations may have an impact on its broader capacity building work.

During the course of the workgroup, members coalesced around a shared definition of capacity building that the recommendations in this document are built upon. For this group, capacity building means helping developing organizations increase their ability to address social and economic barriers to housing. The group emphasized that the path to this outcome is dependent on creating both **systems-level and provider-level** capacity. The Joint Office must take both into account to help its contracted organizations meet the needs of community members affected by homelessness.

As such, the workgroup recommends that capacity building funds be used to **hire a consultant** to assess Multnomah County's systems-level needs, and has identified the National Alliance to End Homelessness as a suggested vendor.

The committee brings forward the following additional capacity building recommendations, which fall into four categories: strategic expansion, contracting, evaluation, and collaboration.

Strategic Expansion

As the Joint Office makes funding decisions related to capacity, the group recommends focusing on the **strategic expansion** of providers rather than urgently distributing funds. This rapid decision making has harmed culturally specific providers in the past. In addition, the workgroup suggests that capacity building funds be primarily used for **significant and substantial** investments. One-time-only funds present a barrier to organizations who require longer-term support to ensure the sustainability of their programs and continuity of services.

The workgroup elevates the following priorities for capacity building funding (not ranked in order of importance):

- Training and education
- Staff wages
- Infrastructure development
- Policy development
- Information sharing and networking
- FTE to coordinate and increase access to services

- Stipends for everyone who participates in community engagement or on advisory bodies

Contracting

In alignment with the Joint Office's racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity commitments, the workgroup has identified a need for **culturally specific providers** to be prioritized for capacity building funds. These organizations are key to meeting the needs of BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ communities who are underserved by systems but are disproportionately affected by homelessness. The workgroup further emphasizes that there is a need for increased partnership with **new and small** organizations that are aligned with the needs of the underserved homeless population.

With these priority audiences in mind, the workgroup makes the following recommendations related to the Joint Office's contracting strategy for capacity building funds:

- Offer capacity building funds not just to providers who already have contracts with the JOHS, but to all qualified providers.
- Identify creative and flexible ways to use capacity building funds to support culturally specific organizations.
- Guidelines for the use of capacity building funds should specifically acknowledge and include the unique needs of culturally specific providers.
- Survey all organizations who have qualified for funds, but have not yet received contracts, to identify where their capacity-related gaps are.
- Prioritize funding for organizations that are hiring, engaging, advancing, and adequately compensating peers and people with lived experience.

Evaluation

While getting capacity building funds into the right hands is a first step, what happens after funds are spent is also crucial. The Joint Office must hold contracted providers to the highest standards in serving the most underserved while maintaining reasonable expectations for program outcomes given the time and capacity required, especially within culturally specific organizations, to build relationships and deconstruct barriers for SHS priority populations. The workgroup views **evaluation** as an essential piece in the Joint Office's capacity building strategy, and has developed several recommendations to improve how the Joint Office **ensures accountability** and **measures success**:

- Ensure accountability:
 - Develop an evaluation tool that measures SHS providers' success in delivering services and creates accountability for the outcomes described in their contracts. Evaluation results would help determine the supports and interventions needed for providers struggling to meet expectations. Results would also help the JOHS explore funding opportunities during the allocation process for the next fiscal year.
 - Partner with the Popular Education program at the Multnomah County Health Department to design a participatory approach to evaluation that is peer-led by frontline workers and those in service delivery.
 - Create evaluation metrics that hold providers accountable for the quality of service delivery, with a particular focus on racial and LGBTQIA2S+ equity. This will help ensure that dominant culture organizations are successfully operationalizing the SHS measure's commitment to equity.
- Measure success:

- Evaluations should incorporate the perspectives of each organization's direct service workers and the recipients of their services. These perspectives are key to understanding whether the organization should continue to receive SHS funds.
- Create clear guidelines for providers to follow when reporting on the use of SHS funds. Develop key performance indicators (KPI's) to measure their success. Metrics should include whether participants exiting shelter to housing are keeping the housing they obtain, and whether their interactions with providers have contributed positively to their sense of wellbeing and progress toward their goals.

Collaboration

The workgroup would like to see the Joint Office build provider capacity by developing additional opportunities for providers to build relationships and share knowledge, and by investing in information sharing technology.

The workgroup offers the following recommendations in this category:

- Invest in FTE to enhance providers' ability to coordinate and increase access to services.
- Use capacity building funds to invest in a platform or gatherings that allow employees, especially those with lived experience, to connect with one another.
- Providers currently spend a great deal of time completing their own intakes, assessments, and referrals, which requires housing seekers to reapply for services at various agencies. The workgroup suggests that the Joint Office build more flexibility into the system by facilitating information sharing across organizations.