



Local Plan Guidelines

Background

Washington State law requires that each local homeless housing task force develop and recommend to its local government legislative authority, a five-year homeless housing plan for its jurisdictional area. The local plan must be consistent with the local plan guidelines issued by the Department of Commerce (Commerce).

Summary requirements from the Revised Code of Washington 43.185C:

What must happen: Each local homeless housing task force shall prepare and recommend to its local government legislative authority a five-year homeless housing plan for its jurisdictional area. The plan which must be consistent with Commerce's statewide guidelines and Commerce's five-year homeless housing strategic plan.

The plan must be aimed at eliminating homelessness.¹

Local plans can include other objectives and performance measures adopted by the local government, and may include recommendations for state legislation or resource changes needed to meet state or local plan goals.

When must it happen: A local government may amend the task force's proposal and ultimately must adopt a plan consistent with these guidelines no later than December 1, 2019.²

Who is responsible: Membership on the task force³ may include representatives of the counties, cities, towns, housing authorities, civic and faith organizations, schools, community networks, human services providers, law enforcement personnel, criminal justice personnel, including prosecutors, probation officers, and jail administrators, substance abuse treatment providers, mental health care providers, emergency health care providers, businesses, real estate professionals, at large representatives of the community, and a homeless or formerly homeless individual.

¹ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.050>

² Ways to meet this requirement:

1. New local plan.
2. Addendum to existing plan to fulfill missing elements required by this guidance.
3. In cases where the existing local plan uses different language and structure but is otherwise consistent, a written explanation mapping the current local plan language and structure to the state guidelines.

³ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.160>



In lieu of creating a new task force, a local government may designate an existing governmental or nonprofit body which includes at least one homeless or formerly homeless individual to serve as its homeless representative. As an alternative to a separate plan, two or more local governments may work in concert to develop and execute a joint homeless housing plan, or to contract with another entity to do so according to the requirements.

While a local government has the authority to subcontract with other entities, the local government continues to maintain the ultimate responsibility for the homeless housing program within its borders.⁴

Performance in meeting the local plan objectives that align with the Commerce plan will be assessed annually by the Department as part of the legislatively required annual reporting process.⁵

⁴ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.160>

⁵ <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=43.185C.045>



Statewide vision

No person is left living outside.

Local Plan Guidance

Statewide Goal and Objectives

Washington State is adopting the 2018 federal strategic plan goal to end homelessness.⁶

In support of that goal the state is pursuing the following objectives, which must be included in local plans:

- 1) Quickly identify and engage people experiencing homelessness.
- 2) Prioritization of homeless housing for people with the highest needs.
- 3) Effective and efficient homeless crisis response housing and services.
- 4) A projection of the impact of the fully implemented local plans on the number of households housed and the number of households left unsheltered, assuming existing resources and state policies.

Local plans can include additional objectives beyond those included in this guidance that are connected to reducing homelessness, including objectives that address housing costs, incomes, family stability, behavioral health, and other drivers of homelessness.

Required local plan objectives and related measures of success

Plans must cover the five year period of December 2019 to December 2024.

Local plans are required to describe actions that will be taken to meet the objectives.

For each action, plans must include responsible parties, timelines, at least one implementation milestone scheduled to be completed prior to 2022, and a description of how success will be measured.

Each objective below includes measures of success and related benchmarks that will be published at the state and county levels as part of the state's performance management and transparency system.

Objective 1: Quickly identify and engage people experiencing homelessness.

Measure of success:

⁶ *Home Together: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, page 6:
https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Home-Together-Federal-Strategic-Plan-to-Prevent-and-End-Homelessness.pdf



- a) Compliance with state and federal coordinated entry requirements for all projects receiving federal, state and local homeless funds.⁷ Consider implementation of the Coordinated Entry Core Element⁸ recommendations.

Objective 2: Prioritization of homeless housing for people with the highest needs.

Measure of success:

- a) Successful implementation of prioritization policies for all projects receiving federal, state and local homeless funds, resulting in prioritized people consistently being housed in a timely manner.

Objective 3: Effective and efficient homeless crisis response housing and services.⁹

Measures of success:

System-wide performance:

- a) Increase percentage of exits to permanent housing to the level of the top performing 20 percent of homeless crisis response systems nationwide.¹⁰
- b) Reduce returns to homelessness after exit to permanent housing to less than 10 percent.
- c) Reduce average length of time homeless of those served to less than 90 days.

Objective 4: A projection of the impact of the fully implemented local plan on the number of households housed and the number of households left unsheltered, assuming existing resources and state polices.¹¹

⁷ <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/hau-wa-ce-guidelines-1-2018.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Coordinated-Entry-Core-Elements.pdf>

⁹ This objective is focused on ensuring limited resources are used to support interventions that deliver good outcomes at the lowest cost possible per person served. Although high per-intervention performance can increase the number of people that can be served, it should not be assumed that a high performing system has enough capacity to serve everyone experiencing homelessness. These system wide measures are for the whole homeless crisis response system. Performance expectations should be customized for each intervention type or the needs of the population served, with some projects having lower benchmarks. Current performance levels for the state, counties, and individual projects can be found here:

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/homelessness/homeless-system-performance/>

¹⁰ The top performing 20 percent of continuums nationally achieved the following system-wide exits to permanent housing in 2017: >57% for balance of state continuums, >59% for major city continuums of care. <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/system-performance-measures/#data>

¹¹ Commerce recognizes that projections in any field (i.e., market predictions, weather, etc.) at best produce rough estimates of the future based on the imperfect information that is available about the current state and the effect of changes. Methods currently available to estimate future homelessness are simplistic, but research on homelessness intervention effectiveness and related impact estimation techniques have improved in recent years.

The Department is promoting improvements to capacity at the state and local levels to produce good faith and transparent estimates of the impact of the variety of local strategies being considered, tailored to local priorities. The Department aspires to create an environment where people with different perspectives and priorities can more easily develop robust data-driven proposals for changes in policies and the use of resources. Although estimates are useful to test the relative impact of different policies and investments, caution is warranted regarding the accuracy of projections.



Measure of success:

- a) A local plan that includes an estimate of people experiencing homelessness that will be housed during 2024 after successful implementation of the local plan using existing resources, and the count of households left unsheltered at a point in time in 2024, based on credible data and research; including the data, assumptions, calculations, and related citations necessary for outside parties to review and reproduce the estimate.¹²

Alternative measures of success implementing objectives

The state recognizes that measuring the performance of homeless crisis response systems is an evolving field, and welcomes alternatives to the measures or performance targets used by the state. Local governments are encouraged to include the state measures of success in their strategic plans. However, local plans can adopt alternative measures or performance targets if they meet the following criteria:

- 1) Credibly measures success implementing the objective.
- 2) Can be updated at least annually.
- 3) Targeted performance level is based on the performance of communities who have achieved good results in the context of local conditions.¹³

Recommendations to the state

Local governments have the lead responsibility in Washington State to address homelessness using dedicated resources and policy making authority. Local plans should strive to optimize the use of those resources and authority to reduce homelessness.

However, the state strongly encourages local governments to include in their plans recommendations to the state for changes in state laws, policies and resources that may be necessary to further reduce homelessness and work toward the goal of ending homelessness as defined under federal criteria.¹⁴

¹² Commerce will produce estimates of the impact of local plans as requested based on changes to the following variables: homeless crisis system performance (exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, length of time homeless), bed capacity, population, and rent levels. Commerce has some existing capacity to help counties estimate impacts on homelessness related to factors outside of the crisis response system, such as investments in behavioral health, job skills, and homelessness prevention. Alternately, local governments can modify Commerce's estimates to include different assumptions, use other existing forecast tools, or build their own forecasts of local plan impacts.

¹³ HUD provides an accounting of the performance of homeless crisis response systems for communities throughout the nation, that could be a source for alternative performance targets for different community types: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5691/system-performance-measures-data-since-fy-2015/>

¹⁴ Communities and states have successfully ended homelessness for veterans, as defined by federal criteria. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness has published specific criteria that define success in ending homelessness for the veterans, families, and youth. Additional details can be found here: <https://www.usich.gov/tools-for-action/communities-that-have-ended-homelessness/>



Recommendations of any variety are encouraged. But ideally recommendations are specific, include an estimate of the impact on homelessness if adopted, and when applicable include cost estimates. Commerce is available to assist local governments with producing estimates of the impacts and costs of recommendations to the state.

Recommendations to the state can include but are not limited to changes regarding:

- State homeless housing program contract requirements
- State data collection and reporting
- State technical assistance and training
- Refinements, additions, or replacements for existing homeless system performance measures and benchmarks
- State behavioral health policies and investments
- State land use laws and policies
- State affordable housing resources
- Local taxing authority
- Criminal and civil law and enforcement
- Transportation policy
- Social services
- Supports for people with disabilities
- Etc.