

## **Greater Richmond Continuum of Care Community Connection Points**

**Background:** The Greater Richmond Continuum of Care (GRCoC) is a coordinated and compassionate network of homeless service providers in our region supporting our neighbors pushed into homelessness. More than 34 mission-oriented agencies participate in the GRCoC. These homeless service agencies develop and deliver trauma-informed programming, share data with GRCoC partners, provide extensive reports to federal and state funders, undergo audits and monitoring visits to ensure compliance, and commit to continuous quality improvement in order to meet the needs of our neighbors.

Providers in our regional homeless services system, the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care, serve approximately 1,000 people every day in emergency shelter and housing programs. Through partnerships with the coordinated and compassionate members of the Greater Richmond Continuum of Care, we have found permanent housing for more than 11,410 unique individuals in the past 10 years.

**Coordinated Entry System:** Coordinated entry is the unified approach (policies and processes) that governs how people experiencing homelessness access the services available to them. The development and use of a Coordinated Entry System has been a requirement for communities and programs to receive federal and state funding targeted to address homelessness since the implementation of the 2012 Interim Continuum of Care Rule. The design and functions of the GRCoC Coordinated Entry System are grounded in the input and feedback from people with lived experience of homelessness and regional data on needs and resources. The Coordinated Entry System has evolved based on feedback from people with lived experience as well as providers and on resources and program interventions available in the community. The GRCoC System Policy and Process has primary oversight for the operationalization of the GRCoC Coordinated Entry System.

**Community Connection Points:** In 2017, the GRCoC recognized that the formal and federally-required role of “Access Points” as defined in US Department of Housing and Urban Development regulations<sup>1</sup> and local policies that comply with these regulations<sup>2</sup> did not reflect all of the places and ways in which people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in our region learned about resources or sought information and/ or assistance in making connections. The GRCoC recognized that many community organizations and public facilities provided welcoming and safe spaces for people experiencing homelessness or a housing crisis. The concept of a “Community Connection Point” was designed locally to complement the more formalized Access Points in the region.

**Responsibilities of Community Connection Points:** Community Connection Points are organizations that provide light-touch assistance and connections for people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness. Community Connection Points are often existing community-based programs or public facilities with a history of usage by people most likely to need homeless assistance. At a minimum, these organizations provide

- an indoor space for people experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness during established operating hours;

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<sup>11</sup> US Department of Housing and Urban Development *Notice Establishing Additional Requirements for a Continuum of Care Centralized or Coordinated Assessment System*, available at [17-01CPDN.PDF \(hud.gov\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Policies and Standards \(endhomelessnessrva.org\)](#)

- ways for households facing homelessness to connect with a GRCoC Access Point
  - examples include a phone that can be used to connect confidentially with the Homeless Connection Line, the Empowernet Hotline, or an outreach worker;
  - a cell phone charging station and wifi capability; or,
  - space to meet with an outreach worker<sup>3</sup>;
- provide accurate information about GRCoC homeless services;
- and, participate in at least one GRCoC provided training session.

Community Connection Points typically offer other services and resources targeted to households experiencing homelessness, to a specific subpopulation or target group, or to the public at large.

**Support from the GRCoC:** The GRCoC’s Coordinated Entry System Coordinator will:

- Provide printed and/or digital information on GRCoC resources, services, and coordinated entry system information.
- List Community Connection Points on appropriate GRCoC marketing and communication materials.
- Provide training for Community Connection Point staff and volunteers on key components of the GRCoC’s homeless assistance network. Availability and frequency of training may vary based on funding and other related issues.

**Alignment with GRCoC Coordinated Outreach:** Community Connection Points should encourage an individual to first make contact with the Homeless Connection Line and/or EmpowerNet Hotline, depending on the presenting situation and needs of the individual. If an individual has a street outreach worker, they should be encouraged to make contact with them before engaging with another Access Point.

The target population for street outreach programs are individuals living outdoors and in other places not meant for human habitation. Essential elements for outreach include a staff that visits persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness in their physical locations; developing trust to engage hard to reach homeless households; completing the continuum-wide assessment packet; and providing housing-focused, comprehensive, and coordinated services. Outreach workers often schedule meetings in office locations in order to assist a household in navigating resources. As noted in the GRCoC Outreach Program Standards, “however, the primary purpose and function of Outreach is to proactively pursue connections outdoors with unsheltered individuals and households who may otherwise not engage with the GRCoC’s system of care.”<sup>4</sup> Community Connection Points are not designed to replace the invaluable efforts of outreach workers engaging with unsheltered individuals or families in the locations that best meet the needs of the unsheltered household, especially for the households least likely to seek homeless assistance without such engagement.

**Use of the Homeward Community Information System (HCIS):** Please refer to the HCIS application process at [www.homewardva.org/hcis](http://www.homewardva.org/hcis) for more information. Review and approval of the use of HCIS for

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<sup>3</sup> See the notes about the coordination of outreach services and Community Connection Points below.

<sup>4</sup> [Policies and Standards \(endhomelessnessva.org\)](https://www.endhomelessnessva.org/policies-and-standards)

any community program is subject to the process developed by the GRCoC designated HMIS Lead and is separate from the designation process for Community Connection Points.

**Application process:** Community organizations including non-profits, informal programs, and public sector programs or facilities interested in partnering with the GRCoC as a Community Connection Point should complete the Community Connection Point application. Community Connection Point applications can be submitted at any time and will be collated at least quarterly by the CES Coordinator staff and forwarded to the GRCoC System Policy and Process Committee for review and action. For more information, please see [Policies and Standards \(endhomelessnessva.org\)](https://endhomelessnessva.org) or contact [grcoc@homewardva.org](mailto:grcoc@homewardva.org). A Community Connection Point application is valid once approved and remains active unless the organization or Homeward indicates a desire to change the designation. Homeward will follow up annually to confirm interest in continuing to serve as a Community Connection Point. If an organization chooses not to continue, its designation will end, and it must reapply should it wish to participate again in the future.

**Termination of Designation:** Homeward reserves the right to terminate a Community Connection Point designation if the organization no longer meets program expectations, fails to uphold confidentiality or safety standards, or ceases operations. Organizations may also voluntarily withdraw by notifying Homeward via email.