

Seattle/King County
Safe Harbors HMIS Assessment Final Report:
Findings and Recommendations

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Prepared for:

Seattle/King County Safe Harbors HMIS Funders Group

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Assessment Update

This assessment took place over the course of eight months, from the first onsite visit in July 2012 to February 2013, when the first draft of the report was submitted. The onsite field work took place between July 2012 and September 2012. Since that time, considerable progress has been made in implementing some of the recommended actions or changes identified in this report.

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Executive Summary

The Cloudburst Consulting Group and Tony Gardner Consulting conducted an assessment of the Safe Harbors HMIS implementation. The purpose of the assessment was to identify the root causes of perceived and real problems across a variety of HMIS functional areas and to make recommendations for corrective action.

The technical assistance team first conducted a review of the Seattle/King County Continuum of Care (CoC) checklist and related documents, as well as background documents concerning the Safe Harbors implementation. Then, over a period of three months from July to September 2012, three onsite visits were conducted with a variety of stakeholders including City, County, and United Way staff, the State Department of Commerce, Safe Harbors staff, and end users.

As a result, the technical assistance team believes that Safe Harbors is well on its way toward implementing an HMIS that can effectively meet the comprehensive homelessness data needs of the Seattle/King County CoC and its stakeholders. The Safe Harbors sponsors (City, County, and United Way) are actively engaged at the highest levels. There is a system-wide desire for success from funders, who require HMIS for reporting, and end users, who have expressed a growing confidence in the data. There is a sufficient level of funding for the project and an adequate level of staffing. The HMIS software itself is HUD-compliant and can meet a broad range of needs. In addition, the Safe Harbors Interim Program Manager has already taken several steps to improve internal processes.

This assessment took place over the course of eight months, from the first onsite visit in July 2012 to February 2013, when the first draft of the report was submitted. The onsite field work took place between July 2012 and September 2012. Since that time, considerable progress has been made in implementing some of the recommended actions or changes identified in this report. Many of these changes have been achieved through: (1) hiring the permanent Safe Harbors Technical Program Manager, who was hired with a focus on strengths for technical expertise; and (2) hiring a new Director of Data Integrity who oversees the Safe Harbors Team and the Information Technology Team for Seattle Human Services Department, where Safe Harbors is housed.

The assessment report is grouped into six topic areas: Safe Harbors Governance and Structure Issues; Software Issues; Support, Operations and Staffing Issues; Reporting Issues; Data Integration Issues; and Messaging Issues. Within each topic area, multiple findings and recommendations have been made. While there are many recommended actions detailed in the body of the report, a few of the highest priority recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. The CoC and Sponsoring Partners should clarify and unify the HMIS governance structure. In particular, they should establish a single Safe Harbors Steering Committee that is under and reports to the CoC. The role of the committee should be to review and make decisions on major HMIS policy, program, and reporting issues.
2. The proposed Steering Committee and Safe Harbors should engage users by starting a users group. The user's group should be relevant, interactive, and focused on issues such as data quality, policies and procedures, and user experience and needs.

3. Adsystem (the Safe Harbors HMIS vendor) should improve the users experience by enhancing the look, feel, functionality, and usability of the software. In particular, Adsystem should work closely with Safe Harbors to identify and quickly resolve all known user issues and “bugs.” Safe Harbors should utilize the above users group as a key means to identify to user problems and “bugs” that need to be fixed.
4. Safe Harbors should continue enhancing its support and operational effectiveness. In particular, it should increase its access to IT expertise, make its staffing pattern and job descriptions more flexible for meeting varied needs, and increase the depth and breadth of its training offerings (including making use of technologies, such as webinars and Youtube).
5. Safe Harbors should continue to enhance its capacity for data analysis and reporting. In particular, it should continue improving its data quality and report formats to better meet the varied informational needs of the CoC (e.g., for CoC performance reports), funders (e.g., for program monitoring reports), and programs (e.g., for demographic, service, and outcome data).

To address all the findings and adopt recommendations, the technical assistance team recommends that the Seattle/King County CoC and Sponsoring Partners expand their existing comprehensive work plan and ongoing process to incorporate this report for improving the HMIS.

The technical assistance team also recommends that the Seattle/King County CoC and Sponsoring Partners reaffirm their commitment to the broader vision of Safe Harbors as a comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system. It is not enough that HMIS be a limited tool for agencies to enter required client data and to generate periodic funder reports. Rather, the CoC should continue expanding the use of Safe Harbors as *the* tool for program data management, system-wide coordination, and CoC performance tracking and reporting.

Moreover, Safe Harbors should eventually take on key new roles, such as processing data for centralized or coordinated assessment, managing bed and unit vacancy data, generating the Housing Inventory Chart, managing electronic client referrals, and managing enrollment prioritization processes and tools. To reach this vision, system and operational improvements (described below) will be required, and funders and other stakeholders will need to support Safe Harbors at every step.

Keys to success will lie in enhancing the HMIS experience of end users, expanding HMIS use to all homeless programs, meeting new HUD requirements and expectations for HMIS, and improving the quality of system-wide data. While there is much work to be done, the positive attributes described above have created a framework where this report can be used as a roadmap for success.

Project Background and Context

Technical Assistance Background and Context

In the summer of 2012 through the winter of 2013, a technical assistance team, composed of staff from The Cloudburst Group and Tony Gardner Consulting, carried out a detailed assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of Safe Harbors, which furnishes Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) services for the Seattle/King County Continuum of Care (CoC). The purpose of the assessment was to identify the root causes of perceived and/or real problems across a variety of HMIS functional areas and to make recommendations for corrective action.

The assessment was a part of technical assistance being provided to the Seattle/King County CoC by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) under the national HUD Priority Communities Initiative. The HUD Priority Communities Initiative is joint effort of HUD and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) providing comprehensive technical assistance to nine selected priority communities across the country (including Seattle/King County) in an attempt to “move the needle” on homelessness in the selected communities, which together account for a significant part of the American homeless population.

The scope of and needs to be addressed by Priority Communities Initiative technical assistance for Seattle/King County was determined in the context of the community’s participation in HUD’s CoC Checkup process, as well as through communications among representative from the City of Seattle, King County, the local CoC, the HUD Seattle Field Office, HUD national headquarters, and participating HUD technical assistance providers, including The Cloudburst Group, Abt Associates, and the Technical Assistance Collaborative, Inc. It was also informed by past CoC, HMIS, and Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) technical assistance provided through HUD headquarters and the HUD Seattle Field Office. Building upon these efforts and upon the needs uncovered during the CoC Checkup self-assessment, the broader initiative includes not only HMIS technical assistance, but also technical assistance relating to:

1. Enhancing the periodic point-in-time (PIT) count and study of homelessness within the CoC geography;
2. Identifying and implementing the community-wide performance measures called for by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009; and
3. Identifying and implementing CoC governance and structure changes also called for by the HEARTH Act.

Safe Harbors Background and Context

Founded in 1999, the Safe Harbors Program is one of the nation’s earlier HMIS implementations. Housed and operated by the City of Seattle Human Services Department, it provides HMIS services, mandated by HUD and the State of Washington, to 548 end users at 67 agencies within the Seattle/King County CoC (as of January 2012).

The initial software used by Safe Harbors was a homegrown solution. As the project grew, the homegrown solution lacked sufficient capacity for data collection and reporting and did not meet HUD requirements. In 2008, the Department of Commerce, with the support of Safe Harbors and the Sponsoring Partners, switched to Adsystem, a provider of software, database, and service solutions for governments and human services agencies. In Seattle/King County, Safe Harbors provides the services for HMIS project management, helpdesk, user support, training, and data analysis and reporting.

The Adsystem software itself is not provided by Safe Harbors, but rather through the State of Washington Department of Commerce, which furnishes HMIS for the entire state. Participation in the state system appears to allow cost savings through economies of scale and give Safe Harbors more leverage with the vendor on software and support issues. This is because larger HMIS projects can negotiate lower per-unit costs than smaller HMIS projects, and HMIS vendors have an incentive to work harder to meet the software and service needs for their larger clients.

Because Safe Harbors neither hosts HMIS nor is a part of the City of Seattle Human Services Department IT Unit, its skill sets appear to tilt more toward non-IT rather than toward traditional IT functions. This non-IT orientation is evident in the program staffing. There are nine full-time staff, including a program manager, three agency support staff, one help desk staff, one trainer, one data analyst/report person, one administrative person, and one system analyst (who historically has worked mainly with agencies that do data integration rather than direct data entry). Based upon research and interviews with HMIS projects in comparable communities (detailed later in the report), it appears that the overall level of staffing, as well as the \$1.2 million annual budget, are adequate. Also, Safe Harbors may have a greater workload than comparable communities. This is because the Seattle/King County area has a comparatively large number of homeless funding sources and innovative programs, which can affect the HMIS workload with additional reports to create, programs to set up, and users to support.

Safe Harbors Governance is provided on two levels:

1. The **Sponsoring Partners** (sponsors) meet monthly, are comprised of leadership from the City of Seattle Human Services Department, King County Department of Community and Human Services, and United Way of King County (all of whom fund the program), and set high-level vision and policy, and review and approve annual budgets and key reports; and
2. The **Executive Committee** also meets monthly, is composed of high-level staff from the above agencies, who report to the sponsors, work to implement the vision and policies set by the sponsors, set agendas for sponsors meetings, review work plans and budgets, and facilitate communication with HMIS users and stakeholder groups.

Although they are not currently a part of program governance, a variety of stakeholder groups are interested in the system and its data. These include, but are not limited to, the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (the lead body for the 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness), local elected officials and policymakers, participating agencies, end users, homeless people, the public, and contract monitors from the three agencies who fund Safe Harbors and from the State of Washington.

This assessment took place within the context of a history of perceived problems with HMIS and efforts to investigate the nature of the problems. Based upon documents provided to the technical assistance team, it appears there have been at least four recent processes that include some level of HMIS assessment or evaluation, as follows:

1. 2008 DEA Business Technology Safe Harbors Assessment (which assessed problems with earlier custom Safe Harbors I software and key reasons for shifting in 2008 to the Safe Harbors II Adsystech software);
2. 2010 Safe Harbors II Capacity Building Report (which included in-depth interviews with agency partner staff covering a range of problem areas);
3. 2010 30-Day Safe Harbors II Assessment (which appears to be based upon agency staff interviews and include “issues” and “impacts” in a variety of problem areas); and
4. 2011 Seattle/King County CoC Checkup Action Plan and Assessment Report (which included a comprehensive assessment of the CoC, including HMIS).

For more details about the HMIS challenges identified and recommendations proposed in these past assessments, please see “Review of CEHKC HMIS Prior Assessment Documents,” prepared by the technical assistance team and attached as Exhibit A.

The Sponsoring Partners, Safe Harbors staff, agency partners, the CoC, and the State Department of Commerce have all worked very hard to address the problems and implement the recommendations in past assessment and investigations. For example, to address Adsystech user difficulties and “bugs,” numerous software customizations and “patches” have been requested and put in place; to address user support problems, Safe Harbors’ Help Desk and agency response procedures have been improved; to address data quality and reporting complaints, a Research and Evaluation Assistant position has been added and many new management reports created. These are just a few of the many positive changes that have been implemented in order strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of Safe Harbors as the HMIS for the Seattle/King County CoC.

Despite all the hard work—and clear commitment—of all the key stakeholders, considerably more work needs to be done before Safe Harbors can fully realize its potential as a comprehensive community system for homelessness data collection, management, planning, and policymaking. The desire to improve Safe Harbors led the City of Seattle Human Services Department in 2012 to issue a Request for Information (RFI) for a consultant services to conduct a further Safe Harbors program assessment. When the Seattle/King County CoC was selected by HUD for the Priority Communities Initiative, the City’s RFI was integrated with HUD technical assistance to support this new assessment.

As stated in the RFI, “[a]n effective action plan requires an end-to-end assessment to identify the root cause(s) of the problems.” Based upon discussion with the local staff, the six topics covered in findings and recommendations are as follows:

1. Safe Harbors Governance and Structure Issues
2. Software Issues
3. Support, Operations, and Staffing Issues
4. Reporting Issue

5. Data Integration Issues
6. Messaging Issues

Overview of Assessment Approach

The assessment took place over a period from July 2012 through February 2013. The technical assistance team used the following methods:

Clarified the Scope of the Assessment

Early on, the technical assistance team held periodic conference calls with local staff from the City of Seattle, King County, the United Way of King County, and the Seattle/King County CoC. In person meetings were also held during site visits (below). During meetings, local staff oriented the technical assistance team and helped to clarify and frame the scope of the assessment as described above. The staff were extremely helpful in coordinating all aspects of the assessment, including providing all needed documents; scheduling site visits, setting the agenda and arranging key interviews during onsite visits; arranging demonstrations of the Adsystem software; providing key input themselves; and interfacing with stakeholder groups, HUD, and other technical assistance providers.

Reviewed and Evaluated Existing Relevant Documentation

With the help of local staff, the technical assistance team gathered, reviewed, and evaluated a cache of documents that included, but was not limited to:

- The past assessment and RFI documents
- The Safe Harbors System Guide
- The Safe Harbors Management Reports Guide
- The Safe Harbors Report Manual
- Safe Harbors data integration documentation
- The Safe Harbors “New CoC APR Reporting Guide”
- Various Safe Harbors Report examples, including dashboard performance reports
- Safe Harbors website screenshots, communications examples & user training schedule
- Safe Harbors Standard Operating Procedure
- Safe Harbors Data Quality Tips
- Safe Harbors Client Consent Form and related procedures
- Weekly HEAT Statistics (detailing Help Desk requests and resolution times)
- Various governance, staffing, and annual budget charts.

Carried Out Site Visits and Conducted Detailed Interviews with a Variety of Stakeholders

Technical assistance team members conducted three onsite visits. The primary purpose of these site visits was to gather in-depth information through meetings and interviews with a large number of Safe Harbors stakeholders, representing a range of opinions. With the assistance of local staff, the technical assistance team conducted 37 separate meetings, interviews, or training observations over the course of the three visits:

**Table 1: Technical Assistance Team
Site Visits, Meetings, Interviews, and Training Observations**

July 24 – 25, 2012 Site Visit	August 21 – 22, 2012 Site Visit	September 11 – 12, 2012 Site Visit
1. Safe Harbors demo	14. Seattle/King County/United Way project staff	27. Seattle/King County/United Way project staff
2. Safe Harbors Research & Evaluation Assistant	15. King County DCHS Director	28. Contract Monitors
3. State Dept. of Commerce staff	16. Former Safe Harbors Manager	29. Seattle HSD Director check in
4. Housing Authority Director	17. User discussion (8 agencies)	30. Family Housing Connection staff
5. IAC Co-Chair	18. Reports discussion (Sponsors staff)	31. Safe Harbors support staff #3
6. YWCA staff	19. Acting Safe Harbors Director	32. Acting Safe Harbors Director
7. HUD Field Office staff	20. Safe Harbors support staff #1	33. Safe Harbors Research & Evaluation Assistant
8. Seattle/King County/United Way project staff	21. Safe Harbors support staff #2	34. Safe Harbors Help Desk
9. User discussion (6 agencies)	22. Safe Harbors data integration staff	35. State Dept. of Commerce staff
10. CEHHC Executive	23. Safe Harbors Trainer	36. Safe Harbors ad hoc report training
11. Seattle HSD Director	24. Safe Harbors user training & demo	37. Debriefing with Seattle/King County / United Way project staff
12. United Way Director	25. Safe Harbors Research & Evaluation Assistant	
13. Reports discussion (Sponsors staff)	26. Debriefing with Seattle/King County/United Way project staff	

Tested the HMIS Software

As mentioned above, the technical assistance team tried out some of the basic functions of the Adsystem software, including data entry and reporting, on three occasions. While these trials were at a basic level, they were useful to better understand the data entry and report concerns raised by end users.

Conducted Best Practices Research to Tap Into the Knowledge & Experience of Other Communities

In order to inform and enrich the assessment with knowledge, experience, approaches, and examples from comparable HMIS implementations, the technical assistance team conducted telephone interviews with staff from the following HMIS implementations:

1. Orange County, CA HMIS (software: Adsystem; shares database with Los Angeles HMIS);
2. Denver Metro HMIS (software: Adsystem; shares database with Colorado Balance of State HMIS);
3. Minneapolis/Hennepin County HMIS (software: ServicePoint; part of Minnesota Statewide HMIS);
4. Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS (software: ServicePoint; same software, but does not share database with Arizona Balance of State HMIS); and
5. Philadelphia HMIS (software: Coelho Consulting Inc. custom-developed; City-operated).

A description of each of these implementations is attached as Exhibit B.

The technical assistance team also reviewed information available on HUD’s Homelessness Resource Exchange (HRE) and HUD’s HMIS.info.

Detailed Findings and Recommendations

The findings and recommendations are underpinned by both an assessment of the information gathered and the HMIS experience and expertise of the technical assistance team members. Based upon this assessment and experience:

The technical assistance team believes that Safe Harbors is well on its way toward implementing an HMIS that can effectively meet the comprehensive homelessness data needs of the Seattle/King County CoC and its stakeholders.

Some major strength areas (that often compare positively to other HMIS projects) include:

- Strong interest in HMIS among high-level local government elected and appointed staff;
- High level of commitment, from funders to end users, to making the HMIS work
- Sufficient commitment of funding from a variety of sources;
- An adequate overall level of staffing;
- A HUD-compliant HMIS software product that can meet a broad range of data needs;
- A variety of local government and private funders that require HMIS for reporting; and
- A well-established system and procedures for supporting system users.

Although a fairly solid HMIS infrastructure has been put into place, considerable work must be carried out (as recommended below) before Safe Harbors can fully realize its potential as a comprehensive homelessness data system. In this regard, it is important to recognize that Safe Harbors is not alone. HMIS is a complex process, and the technical assistance team has seen many other HMIS projects that are facing similar problems.

The type of work needed is not in the nature of a “grand fix,” but rather a series of systems adjustments and problem fixes, which taken together will have a large positive impact. Some of the adjustments and fixes needed have been identified in previous investigations and assessments. In some cases, the recommended changes have been made. What would help is a more consistent process for managing change and improvement. For this reason:

The technical assistance team recommends that the Seattle/King County CoC and Sponsoring Partners expand their existing comprehensive work plan and ongoing process to improve HMIS and to implement the recommendations outlined in this report.

In so doing, the Seattle/King County CoC and Sponsoring Partners should approve this report and form the Safe Harbors Steering Committee (recommended below) to work with Safe Harbors on making the changes and improvements needed. As its first substantive task, the committee should develop and track a work plan based on this report with goals, action steps, timelines, responsible parties, and resources needed. A sample work plan is attached. Given that managing change is an ongoing process, the work plan should be annually updated and the committee should be permanent.

While most of the changes needed are detailed and specific, importantly, the overall vision for HMIS also requires reinforcement and change. As noted above, it appears to the technical assistance team that the early vision of using Safe Harbors as a comprehensive homelessness data management system has slowly given way to the smaller goal of simply entering the required data and generating funder-mandated reports. Again, Safe Harbors is not alone in this lowering of expectations. In the face of complex project reality, many other HMIS projects have lowered their expectations.

The problem is that such a limited vision will simply not take HMIS where it needs to go. Under the HEARTH Act, HUD is requiring a wider role for HMIS, including new program types and reports (e.g., Emergency Solutions Grants and Supportive Services for Veterans Families), community-wide performance reporting, project-specific performance reporting, bed management, and serving as the data system for centralized or coordinated assessment. Adsystem is capable of these and other functions, but is not currently being used to this extent. Programs and end users could better serve clients if they had greater access to range of useful tools and functionalities, such as scan cards, tablets, bed reservations systems, and case management and referral systems. For these reasons:

The technical assistance team recommends that the Seattle/King County CoC and Sponsoring Partners reinforce their commitment to the broader vision of Safe Harbors as a comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system.

While some stakeholders have expressed doubt about the capacity of Safe Harbors for such a broader role, the technical assistance team has found that Safe Harbors does represent the basis on which an expanded homelessness data management strategy can be built. Safe Harbors already provides a functional infrastructure for case coordination, program data management, and system-wide coordination and performance tracking. Safe Harbors can and should expand these roles and take on new ones, e.g., processing data for centralized or coordinated assessment, managing bed and unit vacancy data, generating the Housing Inventory Chart, managing electronic client referrals, and managing enrollment prioritization processes and tools. To reach this vision, system and operational improvements will be required, and funders and other stakeholders will need to support Safe Harbors at every step.

Keys to success will lie in enhancing the HMIS experience of end users, expanding HMIS use to all homeless programs, meeting new HUD requirements and expectations for HMIS, and improving the quality of system-wide data.

The following findings and recommendations provide a roadmap for taking Safe Harbors to this level. (A summary table of all findings and recommendations is attached as Exhibit C.)

Section 1: Safe Harbors Governance and Structure Issues

It is very important to be aware that HUD intends that HMIS be governed ultimately by the CoC. Thus, Safe Harbors governance and structural changes must be thought of within broader changes to CoC governance. More particularly, the recently promulgated HEARTH Continuum of Care Interim Rule formalizes and defines the role and responsibilities of the CoC. It requires each CoC develop a governance charter that document its structure, membership, and representation. The Seattle/King County CoC is assessing its current structure and governance process to ensure that it complies with

these requirements, and will be making changes and adjustments as appropriate. Safe Harbors governance structure will be an integral part of this overall assessment, which should consider the following findings and recommendations.

Findings:

1.F.1: Safe Harbors' governance process is perceived as unwieldy.

- Safe Harbors governance rests upon a partnership between the key funders of the project: the City of Seattle, King County, and the United Way of King County. Governance is provided on two levels: (1) the Sponsoring Partners (sponsors) are comprised of sponsor agency leadership, and (2) The Executive Committee is composed of high-level staff from the sponsors. It is the Executive Committee that has direct oversight of Safe Harbors.
- A number of other committees are interested or involved, such as the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC) Performance Measures Group and the Contract Monitors Work Group.
- Safe Harbors lacks a regular process to gain the feedback and input of diverse range of stakeholders, attentive to the geographic makeup of King County; sub-populations served by homeless service and mainstream agencies; consumer, advocacy, service provider and program management perspectives; the range of funding and public policy organizations; and technical expertise. This type of broad-based Safe Harbors Steering Committee was recommended at the birth of the project, but is not now in place. Many other HMIS projects benefit from such a steering committee. For example:
 - Santa Clara County, CA HMIS is governed by the CoC through a Technology Committee, composed of representative from City and County government, academia, nonprofit homeless assistance agencies, advocacy groups, and the nonprofit HMIS lead.
 - Minnesota Statewide HMIS is governed by a Governing Board composed of representatives from each CoC in the state, key State agencies, and elected representatives from agencies, consumers, and program sectors.
- There are few avenues for meaningful user feedback or input; a Safe Harbors Users Group (SHUG) once existed, but was discontinued. The SHUG was originally a steering committee, but evolved into a user's group. Many CoCs have ongoing HMIS advisory groups to give input on system issues, provide mutual support among users, share best practices and address challenges as a team.
 - Note: the issue of few avenues for meaningful user feedback sub-point also relates to the Messaging topic. Messaging issues are interwoven throughout the first five topic areas in this report. A summary of these are attached as Exhibit D.
- Because the City of Seattle runs Safe Harbors, it is both a partner to and accountable to the other sponsoring partners.

1.F.2: Safe Harbors governance is not yet fully in line with new HUD expectations and regulations.

- The lead CoC governance body is the Committee to End Homelessness in King County (CEHKC). However, the governance link between the CEHKC and Safe Harbors is not clear. The HEARTH Act, the interim CoC regulations, and the proposed HMIS regulations all give major HMIS governance roles and responsibilities to the CoC. These roles include: selecting

the HMIS Lead; designating the single software; approving participation fees; approving HMIS plans, policies, and procedures; developing a governance charter; and approving plans for data quality, security, and privacy.

- The governance link to the State Department of Commerce HMIS project also needs exploration. The proposed HMIS regulations appear to require that all the CoCs in a multi-CoC HMIS project (as this may be) work together on the Governance Charter and governance, technical, security, privacy, and data quality standards.

1.F.3: Like many City/County/State-run HMIS projects, Safe Harbors is positioned as an IT-focused organization within a human services agency. This is not uncommon but has its challenges.

- Safe Harbors is positioned within City of Seattle's Human Services Department, which gives it direct access to human services and CoC resources – which are important, but no direct access to IT capacity and resources. Recently, the City of Seattle has helped to address this problem by providing a Safe Harbors Interim Director who also happened to be the Manager of the City of Seattle's Human Services Department IT Unit. To succeed as a comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system, Safe Harbors will need the continued support and collaboration of both the Human Services Department IT Unit, as well as the State Department of Commerce.
- There are other possibilities for organizational placement of the HMIS, but they are considerably less feasible: City Human Services Department IT Unit; State Department of Commerce; or a technology-focused nonprofit organization.

Recommendations:

1.R.1: The CoC and Sponsoring Partners should clarify and unify the HMIS governance structure.

- Establish a single Safe Harbors Steering Committee that is under and reports to the CoC. It should meet regularly and is representative of the homeless populations served. The role of the committee should be to review, discuss, and make decisions on major HMIS policy, program, and reporting issues. The Steering Committee should be empowered to form sub-committees and *ad hoc* groups as needed.
- Continue the Sponsors Group if needed, but with a narrower focus on funding and financial oversight of Safe Harbors. Also, continue other ad hoc groups, such as the Contract Monitors Work Group.

1.R.2: The proposed Steering Committee and Safe Harbors should engage users by starting a users group

- The users group should be interactive and focused on issues such as data quality, policies and procedures, and user experience and needs. It should be open to all interested system users, should include Safe Harbors staff, and should meet at least once every three months. It should replace the existing Safe Harbors Partners Meeting, which is a top-down forum for delivering information. While important information and updates should be provided, the agenda should be weighted toward user-driven input on system issues, mutual support, sharing of best practices, and building collaboration. The group should be a forum where

users can discuss and reach consensus on requests for software customizations, agency-specific reports, and new functionalities and for Safe Harbors then to act on those requests.

- Pay attention to making the agendas relevant, useful and interesting for all users. Consider splitting into subgroups by population type (e.g., family providers), program type (e.g., permanent supportive housing providers), or user type (e.g., end user or super user). As an example, the Los Angeles HMIS holds program-specific user groups as follows:
 - Emergency Shelter Users Group (every 3 months)
 - Transitional Housing Users Group (every 3 months)
 - Permanent Housing Users Group (every 3 months).

1.R.3: The CoC and Safe Harbors should update their governance charter and take the steps needed to bring Safe Harbors into line with HUD expectations and regulations.

- Working with the CoC, update the CoC governance charter to comply with the HEARTH Act HMIS requirements, articulate the HMIS vision, clearly define the HMIS structure and specific roles of each committee, and clearly define the roles of key player such as the State, County, City, Safe Harbors, United Way, and CoC. The Columbus/Franklin County, OH CoC provides a good CoC governance charter model and is referenced in the attached Exhibit E: List of Reference Materials. The State Department of Commerce should be consulted as required for multi-CoC HMIS projects.
- Ensure Safe Harbors develops and obtains the CoC's approval of the HEARTH Act-required HMIS data quality, privacy, and security plans.

1.R.4: The City of Seattle should ensure Safe Harbors has the IT resources and support, and vendor relationship it needs to fully succeed as comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system.

- The most feasible approach is to maintain the status quo, but add IT support for Safe Harbors to the permanent responsibilities of the City of Seattle Human Services Department IT Unit. Prepare a document defining the scope of this responsibility. This will help ensure that Safe Harbors has continual access to the IT resources and capacity it needs to succeed. The support should include both management assistance to help with project planning and vendor negotiations and IT staff to help with specific systems and network tasks. Some other possibilities for organizational placement of the HMIS are considerably less feasible:
 - Transfer the project to the City Human Services Department IT Unit.
 - Transfer the project completely to the State Department of Commerce.
 - Transfer the project to a technology-focused nonprofit organization.

Section 2: Software Issues

Adsystem is a comprehensive enterprise system for managing client data. The Adsystem product enables homeless assistance staff to collect and manage client data, make referrals and appointments for services and housing on behalf of their clients, review and update client assessment data, record clients' progress in achieving goals, and track outcomes. Other features (not currently used) can help program management staff with activities such as scheduling, accounting, resource tracking, and program reporting. It is noted that Safe Harbors could explore or consider using this

additional functionality. However, as with all comprehensive enterprise systems, the level of functionality used is dependent on several factors, including cost, staffing capacity, and the commitment level of end users.

Findings:

2.F.1: Adsystem provides a fully functional and HUD-compliant software product that is generally capable of meeting current HMIS data management functionality needs.

- Although the scope of the assessment did not include a technical review of Adsystem software, the HMIS technical assistance team did receive three demonstrations of the product, tested the software, and spoke with several end users who use Adsystem daily. Based on this level of review, the technical assistance team concluded that Adsystem provides a fully functional and HUD-compliant software product that is generally capable of meeting current HMIS data management functionality needs. The Adsystem software is compliant because it collects the HUD-required data elements, produces the HUD-required reports, and provides the HUD-required security framework.

2.F.2: HMIS end users report ongoing problems and frustration relating to the ease, functionality, and usefulness of the Adsystem software.

- A key finding of the assessment is users continue to experience problems and difficulties with the software. In some cases, the issues relate to users' inexperience or need for additional training, but in others they definitely relate to the ease, functionality, and usefulness of the software. This is a high priority issue because in the end, the quality of HMIS data and effectiveness of the HMIS can depend on the quality of the user experience. Specific issues noted include but are not limited to the following:
 - The software is generally not intuitive and is difficult to use, especially for new users.
 - The APR income snapshot apparently has missing data.
 - There is a lack of data field validations, leaving room for error.
 - There appears to be no testing/training "sandbox" environment, forcing new users to "practice" on live data.
 - Some software bugs are identified and reported, but are not fixed.
- Of particular importance for many users, the "easy intake" process is actually not easy, especially for large shelters. It simply takes too much time to enter the data, especially when agencies are trying to process a large number of clients into a nightly program. This is a problem common to most HMIS implementations, including the other Adsystem communities with whom the technical assistance team spoke.
- The other Adsystem communities are seeking to overcome the slow intake problem through implementation of scan cards or scantron data collection forms, both of which Adsystem supports. Orange County, CA is implementing scantron intake, but has faced some challenges in integrating the Adsystem scantron procedures with local intake procedures.
- As mentioned earlier, the vendor has created Version 5 of the software. The technical assistance team spoke with representatives from two Adsystem communities. Both communities spoke well of the look, feel, and usefulness of Version 5 and thought it was an

improvement over Version 4, although they have experienced the kinds of “bugs” that can be expected with the roll out of major new software version.

2.F.3: There is a generally effective process in place for working with the software vendor to improve the software and fix problems and “bugs,” although the vendor can be frustratingly nonresponsive.

- It appears to the technical assistance team that the State of Washington Department of Commerce and Safe Harbors have an effective, ongoing process for identifying and prioritizing enhancements and fixes needed, and for regularly communicating and working with Adsystem on the needed changes.
- On the other hand Adsystem staff are sometimes non-responsive about concerns raised by Safe Harbors and Department of Commerce staff, and can be very slow to fix problems once acknowledged.
- Adsystem staff do not always agree with Safe Harbors and Department of Commerce staff on what constitutes a “bug” (i.e. no charge to fix) and what constitutes an “enhancement” (i.e. must be paid for). This is a continual source of frustration for the Department of Commerce and Safe Harbors.
- Promisingly, representatives from two Adsystem communities felt that Adsystem staff were committed to their product and very interested in helping their clients succeed. For one of these communities, Adsystem’s customer service was an improvement over their previous vendor.
- That said, it appears that enhancements and fixes are sometimes slow, and that “patches” are sometimes not tested before use on live data.
- There appears to be no process for different communities using Adsystem to meet and discuss common issues and questions. Representatives from two other Adsystem communities (Denver Metro and Orange County) expressed the desire to meet with and learn from their peer communities. This could allow the vendor to clearly identify and create enhancements and fixes that meet the common need of all the communities.

Recommendations:

2.R.1: Adsystem, the Safe Harbors HMIS vendor, should improve the user’s experience by enhancing the look, feel, functionality, and usability of the software.

- Adsystem should work with Safe Harbors to address known user issues. For example:
 - Consider implementing a mid-term (between entry and exit) APR income snapshot. This may require creating a system-wide prompt.
 - Create a “sandbox” environment where users may practice entering fictitious data.
 - Implement data field validations to eliminate data entry errors.
- Safe Harbors should place a high priority on taking steps to improve the speed of data entry, especially in large volume shelters. In doing so, Safe Harbors should examine the experience of other Adsystem communities and consider the following alternatives:
 - Develop a nightly check-in functionality that uses fewer keystrokes.
 - Implement Adsystem scantron functionality.
 - Implement Adsystem scan card functionality.

- Provide intake workers with tablets or other hand-held computers so they can rove around the shelter or the intake line to speed up data collection (tablets are supported by Adsystem Version 5).
- Safe Harbors should regularly and systematically gather and assess user feedback on software problems and necessary enhancements (among other topics). Methods for gaining this feedback could be focused discussion in the user group (recommended above), user surveys, and feedback through the help desk. These user-identified changes should always be a high priority in conversations with Adsystem staff.
- Adsystem and Safe Harbors should develop a work plan, timeline, and communications strategy for rolling out Adsystem Version 5. Build upon the lessons learned by Los Angeles and Orange County (CA) early adopters of Version 5.

2.R.2: Safe Harbors should build on its existing vendor relationship, clarify roles and responsibilities, and reach out to other Adsystem implementations in Los Angeles, Orange County (CA), Denver Metro (CO), and Colorado Balance of State.

- Enhance Adsystem vendor relations in a variety of ways that could include: (1) sharing more information about homelessness, data needs, and Safe Harbors strategic direction; (2) communicating regularly about what is working well (as well as what changes are needed); and (3) inviting the vendor to “tour” Safe Harbors, meet with the Continuum of Care, and/or attend other local homelessness conferences.
- Work collaboratively with Adsystem staff to better define the difference between a “bug” and an “enhancement.” This resulting understanding should be added to the vendor contract.
- Request that Adsystem staff convene a process for meeting regularly with other Adsystem communities to discuss common issues. Other HMIS vendors hold periodic conference calls with occasional or annual in-person meetings, often at a national conference such as the National Human Services Data Consortium conference.

Section 3: Support, Operations, and Staffing Issues

This topic concerns the overall quality of the HMIS implementation being provided by Safe Harbors. While there are general overarching items that affect Safe Harbors, such as the aforementioned Governance and Structure and Software, there are several operational issues that affect the day to day functioning of the HMIS.

Findings:

3.F.1: Safe Harbors management and staff have worked very hard to put into place an effective HMIS operational and support structure.

- Since Safe Harbors’ founding, management and staff have worked hard to put into place an operational structure with sufficient staffing not only to operate HMIS and coordinate with Adsystem and the State Department of Commerce, but also to support the participating programs and users with training, technical and program support, a help desk, and standard operating procedures within the framework of HUD HMIS Standards. Over the years, much progress has been made often in the face of major challenges (such as the switch from State-

developed software to Adsystem, as well as the sheer number of different programs and users to support in a relatively resource-rich and innovative CoC).

- Efforts to improve the operational and support structure have been redoubled under Safe Harbors Interim Program Director Signe Olausen (who is also the Manager of the City of Seattle Human Services Department IT Unit). Recent improvements apparent to the technical assistance team include but are not limited to enhancing internal staff communication through SharePoint, improving Help Desk customer service and response time goals, and a new more appealing and usable website.

3.F.2: Safe Harbors appears to have sufficient overall staffing.

- While there is no established industry standard for what constitutes sufficient HMIS project staffing, HUD’s HMIS Budgeting and Staffing Toolkit (<https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/HMISBudgetingStaffingToolkit.pdf>) recommends a ratio of least one staff person (not including the Project Director) for every 75 users. By this measure, Safe Harbors has adequate staffing with a ratio of 1 staff to 69 users.
- The technical assistance team also contacted five HMIS projects and gathered the comparative data listed in the table below. Among the HMIS projects listed, Safe Harbors has the most overall staff and one of the lowest staff-to-user ratios.

Table 2: Comparison of Safe Harbors Staffing with Other HMIS Projects

HMIS Project	Number of Agencies	Number of Programs**	Number of Active Users	No. of Staff Supporting Users	Total Project Staff	Staff/User Ratio*
Safe Harbors	77	393	548	5	9	1/69
Orange County, CA	42	189	224	4	5	1/56
Phoenix/Maricopa, AZ	52	167	450	3	4	1/150
Minnesota Statewide	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	6	7	unknown
Colorado Statewide	88	695	1,056	4	5	1/264
Philadelphia	30 est.	80 est.	500 est.	3	8	1/71

*Per HUD’s HMIS Budgeting and Staffing Toolkit, the staffing ratio is the total active users divided by the total project staff (minus the Project Director).

** Active programs only. HMIS program setup is configured in such a way that an agency offering a single program with multiple sites will set up multiple “programs” in the HMIS.

3.F.3: Safe Harbors needs more access to IT expertise to meet the demands of the project.

- An important finding is that although Safe Harbors may have sufficient overall staffing, the staff as a whole appears to lack sufficient IT development and systems administration skills to meet the complex challenges of a homelessness data collection and management system. For example, stakeholders noted following concerns:
 - Safe Harbors staff are perceived as lacking sufficient technical knowledge of the Adsystem software
 - Safe Harbors staff are perceived as lacking sufficient understanding of the data integration process

- Safe Harbors staff are perceived as lacking sufficient knowledge of complex IT concepts to effectively understand and negotiate with Adsystem.
- By contrast, four out of eight staff have strong IT skills at the Philadelphia HMIS, which like Safe Harbors is a City-operated project. These include a programmer, two hardware and network specialists, and the program director (who has strong IT skills). However, Philadelphia has a high need for IT expertise because the City hosts its own custom-built HMIS database.

3.F.4: Safe Harbors staffing structure appears to be rigid compared to other leading HMIS projects.

- Safe Harbors staff roles tend to be fixed, with work assignments based more often upon fixed roles rather than upon knowledge or skills, and staff usually work separately rather than collaboratively. For example, at Safe Harbors only one person is responsible each for the following functions:
 - Helpdesk
 - Agency support (each agency assigned to one person)
 - Data analysis and reporting
 - Training
 - Data integration.
- This is contrast to other HMIS projects, where responsibilities tend to be shared, work assignments are based on knowledge and skills, and major projects are assigned to a team. For example:
 - Minnesota Statewide HMIS has seven total staff who work on HMIS and other data projects, two of those staff handle training, two staff handle data analysis and reports, and all staff take turns on the helpdesk.
 - Phoenix/Maricopa County, AZ HMIS has four total staff who work only on HMIS, two of those staff share responsibility for all 450 users and all staff share responsibility for the helpdesk.
- Lack of shared or redundant staff roles leaves Safe Harbors vulnerable if a staff person is suddenly unavailable.
- However, since Safe Harbors is housed in a municipality, cross-training of staff could infringe on the existing municipal job description/classification process. There may be less flexibility to change job descriptions, and the process could take longer than in non-municipal implementations.

3.F.5: Like other HMIS projects, Safe Harbors will need to review and update its staffing plan and job descriptions to ensure compliance with HUD's HMIS regulations.

- Staff Harbors staffing pattern and job descriptions do not seem to currently include all of the required HMIS lead agency staff roles described in the HUD's proposed HMIS Regulations. These roles are unlikely change much in the final version of the regulations. Key roles to consider for existing or new staff include:
 - Security (the HMIS Lead must appoint a Security Officer responsible for security compliance).
 - Data quality (while a Data Quality Officer is not required, the proposed regulations make the HMIS lead responsible for data quality, and HMIS projects are starting to add

dedicated data quality staff, such as Orange County CA). This role could be filled by the existing Research and Evaluation Assistant.

- Agency compliance (the proposed regulations make the HMIS lead responsible for participating agencies compliance with the HMIS regulations and Standards, including compliance by victim service providers and legal service providers with the HMIS comparable database requirements).

3.F.6: Some standard operating procedures need to be clarified or improved.

- Although Safe Harbors has worked over the years to develop and implement effective standard operating procedures, a number of key change or updates are needed as follows:
 - The process for setting up new programs within Safe Harbors is not clear or standardized; a single program set-up form with instructions would help agencies better understand what steps must be taken and what information must be provided. The Orange County HMIS Program Set-Up Form at <http://ochmis.org/hmis-help/hmis-v5-forms/> is a good, detailed example.
 - There is no standard process for cleaning up or eliminating defunct programs.
 - Safe Harbors will need to review the standard operating procedures against pending HMIS regulations to determine whether changes or updates are needed, especially in the areas of security, privacy, data quality, and agency compliance.

3.F.7: Safe Harbors agency and user support efforts are not always perceived in a positive light.

- The Help Desk process is perceived as too slow (common, simple problems like password resets take up a disproportionate amount of time), although it appears steps have recently been taken to set timeliness standards.
- Customer service is sometimes perceived as lacking, although it appears that basic customer service commitments are now being addressed.
- Some support staff are viewed as more skilled and helpful than others.
- As mentioned above, the lack of shared support assignments or cross-training may leave agency support needs unmet when assigned staff are unavailable.

3.F.8: Safe Harbors provides a basic user training program, but should do considerably more to address advanced or complex issues and to make use of new technologies for learning.

- Safe Harbors provides a reasonably frequent, introductory HMIS training curriculum that includes Intro to Safe Harbors (basic HMIS training), Management Reports Training, Ad Hoc Reports Training, Using Snapshots and Services for Advanced Users, APR Training, and Intro to Data Integration. This is a good basis, but some other HMIS projects provide considerably more learning opportunities, using a variety of technologies and modalities, which help their users gain a better, more nuanced understanding of how to properly use HMIS in a variety of situations. For example:
 - Los Angeles Adsystem HMIS provides 33 separate trainings or workshops on a broad range of topics, from Intro to HMIS and Policies and Procedures of HMIS, to Data Quality, Outreach Training, Swipe Card Training, Fiscal Compliance, and various types

- of report training. For more details, see Los Angeles's course descriptions at <http://training.lahsa.org/ClassDescription.aspx>.
- Orange County (CA) Adsystem HMIS provides HMIS Beginner's Training, HMIS Report Training, HMIS Data Quality Training, Mark for Delete Training (for users that want the right to reactivate or delete their own client records), as well as a series of recorded webinars viewable at the user's leisure at <http://ochmis.org/hmis-help/hmis-webinars/> on topics such as Version 5 Navigation, Creating New Snapshots, Client Intake and Household Demographics, Snapshot Reset, Recreating Snapshots, Entering Case Notes, Enrolling Multiple Clients in a Service, and Services and Milestones.
 - Michigan State HMIS provides numerous podcasts viewable at the user's leisure on 19 different topics such as Provider Set-Up, Case Plans, Income Entry and Exit, HUD Program Workflow, and Privacy.
- At only 3 hours, the Intro to Safe Harbors training may be on the short side. Many HMIS implementations provide a daylong introductory training, which gives users more knowledge and a better starting point. For example, Phoenix/Maricopa County and Los Angeles both have a 7-hour introduction to HMIS training.

Recommendations:

3.R.1: Safe Harbors should take steps to increase its access to IT expertise.

- Increase Safe Harbors access to critically needed IT expertise through one of more of the following approaches:
 - Pay for existing staff to receive new IT training and certifications.
 - Add more Adsystem vendor training to the existing Adsystem service contract.
 - Focus future positions and job descriptions more clearly on demonstrated IT experience, expertise, and certifications.
 - Team with City Human Services Department IT Unit staff to expand Safe Harbors' access to IT expertise. This recommendation is in line with the general recommendation above for Human Services IT and Safe Harbors to coordinate closely.

3.R.2: Safe Harbors should make its staffing pattern and job descriptions less fixed and rigid.

- Rotate the Help Desk among some or all Safe Harbors agency support staff; consider shifting the existing Help Desk position to agency support.
- Develop and implement a shared, team approach to agency support.
- Revise job description and work functions (based upon people interests) so that at least two people have responsibility for each of the following:
 - Training
 - Data analysis and reporting
 - Data integration.
- Work within the municipal job description/classification process to make appropriate changes.

3.R.3: Safe Harbors should incorporate new HUD requirements into the existing staffing pattern and job descriptions.

- Revise one person's job description and work functions to include the HUD-required HMIS Security Officer role.
- Integrate the following functions clearly into other staff's job descriptions and work functions:
 - Data quality (this typically pairs with data analysis and reporting)
 - Confidentiality
 - Agency compliance monitoring.
- Develop and implement a monitoring checklist that includes contract, HMIS Standards, and Safe Harbors policies and procedures requirements (e.g., Are all the HUD-required data elements collected? Are terminals password protected? Is a HUD privacy notice posted?) Santa Cruz County, CA's checklist is referenced in the Exhibit E: List of Reference Materials.

3.R.4: Safe Harbors should continue improving customer service.

- Continue recent efforts to:
 - Implement new standards for response times.
 - Focus on customer satisfaction.
- Set clear expectations of what can and needs to be done, but do not promise what cannot be delivered (e.g. customization).
- Avoid telling the customer that they are "wrong," but do ask probing questions to explore why the user is experiencing the problem.
- Patiently explain the reasoning/background behind proposed solutions to fix a user's issue or correct his/her error.
- Provide "value added" information during the interaction; for example, if a Help Desk call concerns a deleted client, point out any relevant upcoming training.

3.R.5: Safe Harbors should add to and update the standard operating procedures.

- Create a new program setup form with written instructions.
- Develop a new written procedure for eliminating defunct programs.
- Review the pending HMIS regulations and make any modification to the standard operating procedures as needed, for example in the areas of security, privacy, and data quality.
- Review other HMIS's practices in developing an agency compliance monitoring approach with clear requirements and written procedures. Consider:
 - Risk assessments
 - Desk audits versus site visits
 - Documenting problems found and corrections needed
 - Coupling monitoring with technical assistance.
- Relieve the Help Desk and save users' time by granting high functioning users who have properly trained (see Mark to Delete training below) the rights to lock and unlock records and to re-set passwords within their agencies.

3.R.6: Safe Harbors should increase the depth of its training program and use new technologies to increase learning opportunities.

- Add new classroom courses to the training schedule based upon the interest and needs of the users. New courses that might be of interest include data quality training, fixing and replacing snapshots, and enrolling multiple clients.
- Considering increasing the length of and adding new content to the Intro to Safe Harbors class.
- Explore new technologies, such as webinars, podcasts, and Youtube. Choose an approach for making a variety of targeted learning opportunities available to users at their own desks.
- Consider requesting permission from Orange County (CA) HMIS to use and post their existing recorded webinars. Shared online trainings could be a topic for discussion in the above-recommended periodic meetings of Adsystem communities.
- Create and publish “cheat sheets” and a Frequently Asked Questions document of commonly occurring problems/solutions.
- Conduct some trainings onsite at agencies for better connection and understanding.
- Provide Mark for Delete trainings for those who want to lock and unlock their own client records; also provide training for agency super users on re-setting their agencies passwords.

Section 4: Reporting Issues

This section covers issues related to reporting. Reporting is the lifeblood of an HMIS. Not only do reports help tell the “story” of homelessness in a given community, but the quality of the reports is an indicator of the level of success, and maturity of an HMIS implementation.

Findings:

4.F.1: Adsystem is generally capable of meeting the varied reporting needs of the CoC, program funders, and homeless programs.

- It appears to the technical assistance team that Adsystem provides the reporting platform needed to meet a range of reporting needs, including HUD-required reports such as the APR, AHAR, and HIC; CoC-wide and program-specific performance reports; a variety of state and local funder reports; and a range of management reports based on the HUD-required data elements including summary, detail, and data quality reports covering demographics, bed nights, services, and milestones. Users can use the ad hoc reporting functionality to build their own reports, though this can be difficult for less experienced users.

4.F.2: Safe Harbors has a history of reporting problems, but has recently improved its capacity for data analysis and reporting.

- Safe Harbors has had historical problems with reporting, which has undermined confidence in the system. The Adsystem software has also had problems and complaints. Safe Harbors has worked steadily to improve reporting and develop report formats that meet the needs of the CoC, funders, and programs. A major step forward was the hiring of a Research and Evaluation Assistant with responsibility for developing reports and assisting stakeholders with their reporting needs. Key management reports now include not only the APR and AHAR, but also contract monitor reports, data quality reports, Washington State and King County reports, and a new CoC performance report.

- Despite these efforts, considerable attention needs to be given to ensure that reporting continues to improve and be useful for various stakeholders, such as the CoC, funders, and programs.

4.F.3: Data quality is improving but will require continued attention to ensure that all reports are complete and accurate.

- It appears to the technical assistance team that major improvements have been made in the past two years to the general quality of Safe Harbors data. Key findings:
 - The rates of HMIS bed coverage among different residential program types are generally high, meaning that the data set is fairly complete for residential programs, but efforts are still needed to encourage a few programs to join HMIS, especially faith-based programs not funded by HUD or the jurisdictions.
 - Data quality improvements have helped to increase the rate of HUD acceptance of AHAR data tables from only three in 2009 to 18 in 2010. And in 2011 and 2012, all AHAR data tables were accepted. This should be considered a major accomplishment.
 - An effective process is in place whereby (1) data quality reports are generated for every program, and (2) agencies correct data quality errors identified in the reports.
- Although improvements to the quality have been made, users have ongoing concerns about the accuracy of data used in reports. For example:
 - Some agencies don't understand why report numbers differ from their other internal data systems.
 - It is not clear to some users what some reports actually consist of.
 - The process for producing clear, complete, accurate reports is very complex (e.g., need to have at least one service recorded for client to be included in a report).
- While it has data quality requirements in Standard Operating Procedures, Safe Harbors has not yet taken steps to meet some pending HUD requirements, including developing a separate written data quality plan for CoC approval and developing service-volume coverage rates for non-residential programs.

4.F.4: State privacy law has an impact on the quality of HMIS data.

- Data completeness rates are negatively impacted by privacy rights and enhanced consent procedures required by state law.
- As a result, it appears that Safe Harbors has lower data completeness expectations than other CoCs; for example, Safe Harbors has a standard that programs will have only 80% complete data for universal data elements, while many other CoCs have set a 95% standard for universal data element completeness.
- While commenting on state law is beyond the scope of this assessment, it appears to the technical assistance team that changes to consent procedures at the CoC level can result in more consent and therefore higher data completeness rates.

4.F.5: The existing report formats are not always well understood and don't always meet the needs of the CoC, funders, and agencies.

- Although management reports have improved, stakeholders expressed a variety of concerns as follows:
 - There are not enough data being published.
 - There are differences between the contract monitor reports being used by different funders (e.g., they don't use the same reporting period).
 - There is a lack of management reports that sponsors, agencies, and programs think are useful.
 - Some users don't understand what the reports consist of.
 - There is a need for reports that meet HEARTH HMIS and performance requirements (and an initial CoC performance report has been recently created).
 - It is too expensive for Adsystem to develop custom reports.
- Stakeholders reported that the ad hoc reporting functionality is not intuitive and is hard to use.
- Policy makers and program leaders would like to have easy-to-read dashboard reports (which are graphical presentations of current high-level performance data).
- In looking for useful report formats, there are many report examples elsewhere. For example, the Los Angeles CoC, which also uses Adsystem, has an HMIS Report Guide (online at <http://hmis.lahsa.org/documents.html>), listing 50 different reports across categories for data quality, outcomes, and performance tracking.

Recommendations:

4.R.1: Safe Harbors should enhance its capacity for data analysis and reporting.

- At least one additional Safe Harbors staff member should have data analysis and reporting responsibilities beyond the current Research and Evaluation Assistant. Ensure this person has the training and skills needed. This will provide Safe Harbors with the ability to do more analysis and reporting and is in line with the general recommendation (below) for Safe Harbors to adopt a less rigid staffing model and share more functions and responsibilities among staff.
- Negotiate developer access to the HMIS database, whereby a City of Seattle Human Services Department IT Unit staff member can help create custom reports at a lower cost than Adsystem. This recommendation is in line with the general recommendation that Safe Harbors balance its non-IT orientation by expanding coordination with the Human Services Department IT Unit.
- In the future, expand the use of data warehousing to integrate homeless system data with data from other mainstream systems also serving homeless people. The Washington State Department of Commerce and the State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) have begun sharing data to better understand and identify persons who have been served in both HMIS and DSHS programs. Other state and metropolitan areas are increasingly using data warehousing to generate rich repositories of data linking homeless services with other mainstream systems. Examples are the Michigan HMIS-Mainstream Programs and the Pittsburgh/Allegheny County data warehouses. This should not be considered a high priority.

4.R.2: Safe Harbors should reinforce its system and process for improving HMIS data quality.

- Continue expanding HMIS bed and service coverage by encouraging all homeless assistance programs to participate in HMIS; this will require outreach to programs (often faith-based) that are not funded by HUD, the State, or local governments.
- Build upon the existing data quality procedures to develop and obtain CoC approval of a standalone written data quality plan, including data quality benchmarks and a process for measuring performance against the benchmarks. The plan could include report cards or public recognitions for programs that consistently exceed benchmarks. An example—the Columbus Shelter Board Data Quality Plan—is referenced in the attached Exhibit E: List of Reference Materials. Increase the “completeness” benchmark for universal and program-specific data elements from 80% to 95%, to be in line with other CoCs and improve the accuracy of reports. Meeting the higher standard may require revising the client consent procedure to be more encouraging of consent, but without violating state law (see below).
- Provide a separate data quality training course, such as those provided by the Los Angeles and Orange County (CA) Adsystem HMIS projects.
- Develop and implement definitions and procedures for tracking service volume coverage rates of outreach, rapid re-housing, and supportive services programs, as required by HUD’s pending HMIS regulations.

4.R.3: Safe Harbors should review and revise its HMIS client consent forms and procedures to ensure they are not unnecessarily discouraging consent, within existing law.

- Review existing client consent forms and procedures against relevant federal and state law to ensure that the forms and procedures are not more restrictive than required.
- Ensure that staff are trained in how to effectively explain the benefits of HMIS participation to all clients.

4.R.4: Safe Harbors should continue improving its reporting procedures and formats to better meet the information needs of the CoC, funders, and programs.

Funder Reports

- Continue existing efforts to ensure that all funders use HMIS data for reporting. As confidence in the data grows, funders and users alike will benefit from using HMIS data for reporting. Funders will have a common database from which to obtain reports, and users will not have to gather additional data outside of the HMIS.
- Consider creating an *ad hoc* group, including Safe Harbors, funders, and selected agencies, to inform this process. In a best case scenario, the *ad hoc* group would ensure that all funder reports would be created in the HMIS prior to or shortly after the RFP for funding is announced.

CoC Reports

- Create, publish, and distribute an annual CoC-wide progress report. This could be based upon selected sections of the HUD APR, but reported for the whole CoC and presented with graphics.
- Continue publishing annually the AHAR report, but in a single report with improved graphics. See Orange County’s (CA) AHAR report as a model (<http://ochmis.org/oc-reports/hmis-oc-reports/>).

- Continue regularly publishing and improving the new HEARTH performance measure report, which is an excellent dashboard example for other communities. Consider the feasibility for the following:
 - Including additional measures such as numbers served, income at exit, and bed occupancy.
 - Increasing from quarterly to monthly trend analysis.
 - Adding break out reports for different program types (e.g., emergency shelters – families), with performance benchmarks shown on the report.
- Review and consider adapting other communities' dashboard and outcomes report formats, as follows:
 - Washington, D.C.: A nightly count of persons served in shelters. This is interesting as a true dashboard; it is interactive with nightly updates of shelter occupancy data (http://www.community-partnership.org/cp_dr-dashBrd.php).
 - Thurston County, WA (based upon the excellent Department of Commerce format): A monthly performance dashboard of households served, term or homelessness, exits to permanent housing, returns to homelessness, earned income at exit, and data completeness (<http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/sscp/data.html>).
 - Minnesota Statewide: A series of Excel-based dashboard reports using AHAR data to annually report bed capacity, bed occupancy, persons served, and length of stay across a variety of program types (<http://www.hmismn.org/reports/>).
 - Alameda County, CA: "Measuring Progress, Achieving Outcomes," a state-of-the-art annual report using HMIS and other data to report on 10-Year Plan progress and nuanced HEARTH performance across a variety of program types (<http://www.everyonehome.org/measuring-success.html>).
 - Los Angeles CoC, which also uses Adsystem, has an HMIS Report Guide (online at <http://hmis.lahsa.org/documents.html>), listing 50 different reports across categories for data quality, outcomes, and performance tracking, including a recurrence/recidivism report.

Agency/Program Reports

- Continue to expand the range and types of management reports available to agencies and programs. Prepare a written analysis that explains the use and significance of each report type in the management reports catalogue.
- Work with the Safe Harbors Users Group (recommended below) and key agency staff to gain feedback on what new reports will be most useful for agencies.
- Ensure that CoC performance reports drill down to the program level, so that agencies can compare their program's performance to like program in the CoC.
- Develop a Youtube or recorded webinar training on how to prepare *ad hoc* reports.

Reporting Process Issue

- Develop written protocols for preparing reports (e.g., the number of days to review data, the number days to fix data, and deadline to for publishing the report, etc.).
- Create a list and schedule for publishing all management reports.
- Document the specifications for all management reports to help users troubleshoot data quality issues.
- Test all management reports for validity and publish the results.

Section 5: Data Integration Issues

This topic deals with “data integration,” which in the Safe Harbors context means the one-way migration or integration of homelessness data from agency’s legacy data systems into the Safe Harbors HMIS database.

Findings:

5.F.1: While still relevant, this issue of data integration is declining because the number of agencies using data integration has declined from five to two.

Nevertheless, the technical assistance team noted the following:

- Adsystem as a system does support this type of data integration.
- The data integration process has been frustrating, lengthy, complex, and error prone.
- All errors must be manually repaired, which takes even more time and effort.
- Problems with data integration have negatively impacted data quality in the past (although less so now that only two agencies are using data integration).
- Technical skills have varied substantially among agencies using data integration.
- The State Department of Commerce also supports data integration for other CoCs in the State, and Department of Commerce staff are perceived as more skilled and successful at data integration than Safe Harbors staff.

Recommendations:

As detailed above, the technical assistance team recommends that the CoC and funders support Safe Harbors as the single comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system for the Seattle/King County CoC. However, it is acknowledged that the two agencies still using data integration will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Given this, the technical assistance team recommends the following:

5.R.1: Safe Harbors should continue to improve the data integration process. Alternatively, Safe Harbors could outsource data integration to the Washington State Department of Commerce.

- Continue with a data integration working group to focus on meeting the needs of the two agencies.
- Coordinate more closely with City of Seattle Human Services Department IT Unit and State Department of Commerce staff to troubleshoot any problems and identify time saving solutions, with a goal of mirroring the State Department of Commerce’s data integration process.
- Should data integration continue to be an issue, consider outsourcing the process to the State Department of Commerce on a trial basis.

Section 6: Messaging Issues

This topic covers messaging and communications both externally (between Safe Harbors and users, partners and funders, and the general public) and internally (among Safe Harbors staff). It includes the content of messages and the means used to deliver them. This was a significant area of concern for interviewees, especially funders and end users.

It is noted messaging issues are interwoven throughout the first five topic areas in this report. A summary of these are attached as Exhibit D.

Findings:

6.F.1: There is a perception that Safe Harbors does not communicate well on a variety of levels.

- Many stakeholders feel that Safe Harbors does not communicate effectively or proactively at various levels as follows:
 - Communication to the public and policymakers of the “big picture” vision, goals, successes, and future direction of Safe Harbors. At this level, good communications is tied closely to consistent, accurate, and relevant reports; the HMIS projects that are perceived most positively are those that regularly produce good data and reports.
 - Communication with users through the Help Desk or agency support staff regarding technical support needs. At this level, good communications is tied to listening, not telling users they are “wrong,” and solving problems quickly.
 - Communication with agencies about operational matters, such as system down time or training times. At this level, good communications is tied to accurate, timely information consistently delivered through such means as e-mail, web postings, and newsletters.
 - Communication among Safe Harbors staff to ensure all staff have the same information about system and agency problems, solutions, and changes.
- A Safe Harbors Communications Plan, aimed at a range of audiences (including the above), was developed in 2011, but appears not to have been fully implemented due to the turnover of the Project Director position.
- It is important to acknowledge that problems with communication are not at all unique to Safe Harbors, but are shared by many other HMIS Projects.

6.F.2: Safe Harbors is making efforts to improve its communications.

- Against the backdrop of perceived ineffective use of communications technology—e.g., poor website and poor Help Desk ticketing system—positive charges have been made under the Interim Program Manager. These include:
 - A new visually pleasing Safe Harbors website, with home, reports, resources, training, data quality, help desk, and contact pages, various sub-pages, hot topics, feedback link, Help Desk feedback survey, and search feature. While additions to the website are recommended below, this new webpage is better than or comparable to other HMIS implementations.

- A SharePoint system to support collaboration, information sharing, document sharing, and timely notices among Safe Harbors staff.
- In light of the perception of poor user relations, Safe Harbors has implemented an online customer service survey and is newly committed to faster response times and improved Help Desk customer satisfaction. These commitments are reflected in an “Our Customer Service Statement,” a “Response Time Commitment” statement, and other commitments. Most response times are within 24 hours.

Recommendations:

6.R.1: The Sponsoring Partners and CoC should communicate support for Safe Harbors, its vision, goals, and future direction.

- Collectively reaffirm support for Safe Harbors as the comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system. Include a clear summary of Safe Harbors’ vision, goals, successes, and plans for future improvement. Highlighted plans should include starting the Safe Harbors Steering Committee and new user group, improving the software (including plans to launch Version 5), increasing the quality of data, changes to Safe Harbors staffing roles, and implementing a revised work plan to enhance Safe Harbors.
- Regularly publish CoC-wide data reports on clients, services, and outcomes as a tangible demonstration of the use and value of Safe Harbors. See the CoC-wide dashboard and performance report models described above.

6.R.2: Safe Harbors and the recommended Steering Committee should implement the existing Communications Plan.

- Review, update, and implement the Safe Harbors Communications Plan. This responsibility should be shared between the Safe Harbors Program Director (in the job description) and members of the recommended Safe Harbors Steering Committee (in the CoC governance charter). This will entail consistently conveying progress and important information to audiences, such as the public, elected officials, funders, HUD, homeless assistance agencies, users, homeless people, and the HMIS project team.

6.R.3: Safe Harbors should keep improving its use of communications technology.

- Continue improving the website by adding new content and new features, such as:
 - Announcements, prominently on the homepage.
 - Frequently asked questions.
- Implement a new Help Desk ticketing system.
- Use the following methods to distribute important bulletins and alerts:
 - Safe Harbors listserv.
 - Safe Harbors Wiki, YahooGroup, or GoogleGroup.
- Create written standard procedure for communicating time-sensitive or critical HMIS information, such as software changes or system down.

Conclusion

As detailed above, the technical assistance team believes that Safe Harbors is well on its way toward implementing a coordinated HMIS data management strategy that can effectively meet the information needs of the Seattle/King County CoC and its stakeholders. Nevertheless, considerable work must be carried out before Safe Harbors can fully realize its full potential. Realizing this potential will be a major community challenge, but the community can succeed if it carries out the action steps recommended in this report. The key to success will be for all of the partners—the City of Seattle, King County, United Way of King County, State of Washington Department of Commerce, participating agencies, and end users—to fully support the effort, to provide the resources that are needed, and to fully get behind Safe Harbors as the community’s comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system.

Exhibits

Exhibit A: Review of CEHKC HMIS Prior Assessment Documents

Challenges Identified by Topic & Assessment	Proposed Recommendations (If Any) by Topic & Assessment
<p>Governance, Management, and Staffing: Challenges</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Governance groups need ID what reports they want and make sure they are non-duplicative ▪ Contract provisions around data submittal aren't enforced ▪ Opt out issue needs to be dealt with <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organization change problems ▪ Resource constraints <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partners/funders not adequately involved in Safe Harbors' decision-making ▪ Perception that most problems are unique to Seattle, other jurisdictions in State are doing much better <p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p> <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p> <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> None (See below for related issues)</p>	<p>Governance, Management, and Staffing: Recs</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City, County and United Way should revisit the reports that the vendor is asked to develop and agree on a single profile report that works for all and decreases what the vendor has to develop ▪ Funders need to start enforcing contract provisions requiring data ▪ Pull together a team representing Safe Harbors, King County, United Way and several agencies to establish a standard protocol for dealing with clients who opt out of providing personal identifiers <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make the transition from Build to Run and focus majority of efforts on system operation ▪ Develop a strategic 2-3 year roadmap of current and future HMIS modules and capabilities <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u> None</p> <p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p> <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p> <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> N/A</p>

Technical Support and Training: Challenges	Technical Support and Training: Recs
<p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p> <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need staff buy-in and training ▪ Need for agency staff to improve their own data input and process ▪ Need for better, faster help desk procedures ▪ Need stronger more systematic technical support from Safe Harbors ▪ Cost are too high for agencies <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of confidence in the operation, services, and support provided by the Safe Harbors Program Office ▪ Lack of confidence in the operation, services, and support provided by the Safe Harbors Program Office ▪ Perception that Safe Harbors may not be staffed adequately and staff may not have the right skills ▪ Compass Center and Youth Care hired their own staff to perform data analysis and reporting work they thought was going to be supported through the Safe Harbors Program Office ▪ Mistrust of Safe Harbors, but there is good trust among various agency colleagues ▪ Safe Harbors problem resolution and customer support processes differ depending on the support personnel handling the request, but are often inconsistent and unresponsive. Frequently say yes to a request, but nothing happens ▪ Troubleshooting and fixing technical issues is cumbersome. The agencies know the data, and Adsystem knows their database, but everything must go through Safe Harbors staff as the go-between ▪ Safe Harbors Staff will claim a report is working and fixed, when clearly it is not ▪ Safe Harbors staff waits too long before escalating to Adsystem ▪ Report requests go to Safe Harbors (open a ticket), then to Adsystem, then to their programmers in China. Request cycles take too long and often times do not get what is needed (too many tiers for communication) ▪ Training is too basic/generic and not adapted to agency business processes. Specific agency training must augment training provided by Safe Harbors ▪ No training on how to use reports effectively. Need more information on how things are put together, including tables, field names, etc., so always had to ask Safe Harbors for input ▪ System glitches during training are explained away and questions are not always answered ▪ Training schedules do not accommodate off-shift staffing required by agencies ▪ At least one agency is requesting improved offerings with virtual on-demand training for different levels of users. ▪ Training manuals not helpful ▪ No users group. Meet in quarterly Partners meeting, but 	<p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p> <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Improve Help Desk procedures ▪ Create new training curriculum ▪ Continue general training & evangelism ▪ Expand the curriculum to include data quality and privacy ▪ Transition to blended learning and e-learning ▪ Provide video-based instruction that can be viewed locally <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u> None</p>

<p>more of a one-way information meeting (from Safe Harbors staff)</p> <p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It appears there is a lack of standard systems in place (or consistently used) for organizing and carrying out the basic daily operations of the Safe Harbors HMIS ▪ <u>Help Desk:</u> Help Desk responses for frequently asked questions and answers are not standardized, resulting in Safe Harbors staff responding to similar questions with separate and sometimes different responses. This redundancy leads to slow response times for many Help Desk requests. An FAQ posted on the Safe Harbor’s website could cut down on time spent responding to similar questions over and over again ▪ <u>Program set-up:</u> Safe Harbors staff do not use a standard process for implementing program set-up in the HMIS [note: there is a standard process for agencies to follow] ▪ <u>Training:</u> There is not a robust standard training schedule for various SH trainings [October currently shows three trainings; all Intro to SH]. There is not a standardized or clear system for scheduling and communicating when trainings occur (this currently happens haphazardly). Likewise, a clear process for how the trainings are conducted is not evident ▪ SH staff are unable to clearly articulate a clear plan and timeline for training all agencies on management and ad hoc reports ▪ <u>Training:</u> Trainings are disorganized. Safe Harbors staff do not prepare ahead of time or test their training materials for problems before the actual training occurs ▪ There is a lack of helpful written training materials and instructions for agencies ▪ There does not appear to be the capacity to bring all of the THOR agencies onto the Safe Harbors system and train them within the time frame mandated by the state ▪ Responses to Help Desk questions are not timely ▪ Safe Harbors staff does not respond quickly to agencies regarding questions related to program setup, passwords, reports, etc. <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to improve HMIS utilization and data quality <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concerns about Safe Harbors’ responsiveness to requests for support, implementation of corrective actions and the level of formal communication to all stakeholders ▪ Some agencies hired their own staff to perform data analysis and reporting work they thought was going to be supported through the Safe Harbors ▪ Need increased confidence in Safe Harbors’ ability to effectively operate, support and manage the Safe Harbors Program 	<p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p> <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support Safe Harbors staff in continued efforts to improve overall data quality and confidence in data <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> N/A</p>
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<p>Software, Technical Capacity, & Data Integration</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p> <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “People” people doing data stuff ▪ Initial software glitches and reliability problems ▪ Difficult to learn Adsystem and remember how to use ▪ Requires more tech ability to use than expected ▪ Need better, faster process to work out system glitches with vendor ▪ Need better data integration process ▪ Processing errors are taking place in the HMIS <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data Integration a “big problem” but getting better ▪ Data integration is a lengthy and error prone export process that requires significant reconciliation work to achieve adequate data quality. Full data exports are always required; there is no option for incremental updates ▪ Multiple queues for importing data and one can wipe out the other ▪ Reconciling defects is manual, and is very time consuming and difficult because reports lack useful client identifying information ▪ Safe Harbors has only one staff assigned to help resolve data issues during a very compressed 5-day export window ▪ Testing was done in live/production system. One interviewee mentioned that Safe Harbors has a “replica” system, although we are not clear as to what that actually means ▪ The system tool to schedule ongoing services is “broken”. Changes “don’t stick” ▪ Need a unique identifier for non-identified people. Had a 100-character field; now truncated to 20. Field is easily overwritten. Want a system-generated, agency-specific identifier that cannot be overwritten ▪ The field defaults are “weird”. There are no field-value validations; leaves lots of room for errors ▪ Full technical capabilities and features of Adsystem application are not opened to agencies that could benefit from their use, and requests for specific enhancements are not addressed ▪ Safe Harbors agreed to turn on additional functionality such as data warehouse and catalog; wasted 18-24 months waiting on Safe Harbors with no results. With private investor funding, Youth Care implemented a separate instance of Adsystem at State, configured for youth client needs. Youth Care is working with Adsystem and Safe Harbors to add more and new programs to the system; however, Youth Care needs local administrator 	<p>Software, Technical Capacity & Data Integration</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p> <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Launch team for data integration issues ▪ Address initial technical glitches with vendor ▪ Establish data integration working group ▪ Increase frequency of data entry or episodic data transfer, moving from batch update to live integration long-term ▪ Improve HMIS usability ▪ Address COTS mismatch ▪ Participate in Google Data Integration Working Group ▪ Develop an HMIS data integration map and dictionary ▪ Extract and document HMIS business rules <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u> None</p>
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<p>rights to modify and add programs. This will allow them to move more programs to direct entry. Safe Harbors as Sys Admin is reluctant to allow local administrator rights on HMIS. Youth Care is moving forward on youth needs without SH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Lack of an adequate test environment▪ Not clear on decisions on how programs were set up. Field names do not make sense, e.g., contract length field does not use time relevant (days/weeks/months) data▪ System has a lot of functionality, but much of it is turned off. Should have rolled out more functionality initially <p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ There is limited MIS knowledge, as well as ability to create standardized and useful SQL query reports for agencies in advance <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p> <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Data integration agencies are frustrated by a lengthy and error prone export process that requires significant reconciliation work to achieve adequate data quality▪ Users are frustrated that the full technical capabilities and features of the HMIS are not being made available and some needed enhancements are not being addressed	<p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p> <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p> <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> N/A</p>
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<p>Data Entry, Quality, and Reporting: Challenges</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Governance groups need ID what reports they want and make sure they are non-duplicative ▪ Contract provisions around data submittal aren't enforced ▪ Opt out issue needs to be dealt with <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Data quality problems: especially missing entry dates, exit dates, other data, and low provider coverage. ▪ No agency had produced a reliable report ▪ Some agencies cannot reconciles HMIS data with their own separate databases from gaps in the business process of their own data vs. Safe Harbors' ▪ Problems with client IDs (due to opt in confidentiality?) ▪ Concerns about data scrubbing and manipulation in Safe Harbors – not a transparent process ▪ Need data czar in each agency to address data quality. ▪ Data is not reliable and inconsistent with other data or known client facts ▪ Data entry is redundant for those with other systems, or sometimes has to be redone ▪ Lack of necessary and relevant agency data; reports hard to produce; reports not accurate; some data not captured or contains errors; data not well organized ▪ Issues with violations of security ▪ Redundant data entry, processing, and information generated is a big waste of time ▪ Excessive effort required by staff to complete tasks. ▪ Data are unreliable, inconsistent, inaccurate ▪ System not easy to use or learn <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe Harbors' HMIS data and reports are not reliable for analysis/evaluation to measure progress on ending homelessness. ▪ The primary selection criteria for future U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funding are based on performance. The City of Seattle, King County and United Way are at risk of losing Federal HUD funding if reporting for the Seattle/King County, Continuum of Care (CoC) does not meet the performance reporting requirements of the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act. ▪ Funding to agencies will be based only on the data in the system. Agencies within the Continuum of Care (CoC) are not confident that the data in the HMIS system accurately reflects data entered or the services they provide and are concerned their funding is at risk. Problems include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Duplicate counts in same households ▪ Undercounts (missing households and individuals who should be counted) 	<p>Data Entry, Quality, and Reporting: Recs</p> <p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ City, County and United Way should revisit the reports that the vendor is asked to develop and agree on a single profile report that works for all and decreases what the vendor has to develop ▪ Funders need to start enforcing contract provisions requiring data ▪ Pull together a team representing Safe Harbors, King County, United Way and several agencies to establish a standard protocol for dealing with clients who opt out of providing personal identifiers <p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff a floating or rotating data entry function (to help low functioning agencies and those who need data entry backup ▪ Provide funding and/or consultant to work with agencies to address overall fit of their business processes, databases, and HMIS (and fix data inconsistency in parallel processes) ▪ Establish a Data Quality Working Group and agency Data Czars ▪ Establish a Privacy Working Group and CoC Privacy Officer ▪ Use universal hash to conceal personal identifiers <p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <p>None</p>
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- Error messages indicating missing data when the date entered for the client is complete
- HMIS report inconsistencies
- Reconciling defects is very time consuming and difficult because reports lack useful client identifying information. The agency's ID for a particular client never gets on the report and makes it very difficult when reconciling data issues, e.g., who is missing when Safe Harbors data shows fewer clients than agency data. It should be easy to add on field.
- Date attached to data does not get updated when the data is corrected
- Data analysis skills in funder organizations and agencies are too limited to allow agencies to effectively utilize data.
- Some question on whether contract monitors are working with Safe Harbors staff and have a clear understanding of the data in the HMIS reports.
- Reports are rarely right and it takes a lot of effort to reconcile
- Canned reports are inadequate and agencies cannot produce reports that funders are requesting.
- There is no report for doing agencies "daily business".
- Cannot get a City or County demographics report from SH.
- Only Summary Reports for system generated reports.
- No report that drills down on summary report to fix data
- Ad hoc reporting tool (SQL tool) is difficult to use, it is poorly documented, and there is inadequate training; not useful for the typical user. One agency exports all agency records from Safe Harbors into a separate database and then reports off that.
- Stakeholders do not understand the data scrubbing process Safe Harbors staff use for creating HUD reports.
- The reports do not "reflect reality"; meaning, other sources of data seem to tell a different story. More triangulation should be done to check integrity of Safe Harbors reports.
- Need more confidence and control over what is happening with data.
- Significant time and effort required to enter data directly into the HMIS.
- Data entry is not aligned with the flow of work.
- Multiple discrete systems are used to collect redundant/duplicate data for closely coupled human services programs, e.g., Seattle Youth Violence Prevention, Youth Care, RHYA (Runaway Homeless Youth Act) System, Employee Link to Housing, and Employment Contracts should be in, or interfaced with Safe Harbors. Too many agencies reporting through different programs; systems explode/over-state results. For example, youth involved in several programs and all report help getting the youth a GED.
- 20 different City/County programs that need to be checked to view all data. Need to get all the data in one combined system / place. Suggested entering all data directly into Safe Harbors and export to other systems as needed
- Over 18 and under 18 demographics are not in the same system, so cannot see the full picture.
- Youth in residential programs not reflected in the same way as youth in non-residential programs.

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<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <u>Reports</u>: Reporting functionality for the HUD HPRP QPRs and the county demographic reports is not working despite agencies entering all the required data in the system▪ HUD expects that all data in HMIS match the information submitted in the QPR and Annual Report for HPRP. Due to technical issues that have not been solved, agencies and the county have to manually fill out these reports – which is time consuming and ultimately does not result in an accurate representation of client data in HMIS <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Need to improve HMIS utilization and data quality▪ Need to refine performance measures for CoC and individual programs to prepare for HEARTH implementation and attainment of ICH Strategic Plan Goals and systems coordination <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Accuracy of data in reports is questionable▪ Canned reports are perceived as inadequate for local funder needs▪ Ad hoc reporting tools are difficult for agency and funder staff to use to produce reports▪ Direct entry agencies find the system difficult and time intensive to use and report that data in reports is sometimes inconsistent with actual data entered into the HMIS	<p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p> <p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Educated elected officials on barriers created by HMIS Consent Law and safeguards built into system to protect individual information▪ Request USICH involvement in meeting with elected officials to address consent law▪ Assure consistency in data collection and reporting as it relates to service vs. transactional model among emergency shelter providers/programs▪ Review draft performance measures, assess ability to measure and make changes as needed <p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> N/A</p>
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Communications and Messaging: Challenges	Communications and Messaging: Recs
<p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p>	<p><u>DEA Assessment 2008</u> None</p>
<p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of understanding by providers of “big picture” system goals, changes and plans ▪ Need for a new website 	<p><u>SH2 Capacity Building Plan 5/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create new website ▪ Reset aspirations and strategies, utilizing logic model to reflecting current and future goals—big picture and each agency if needed ▪ Establish a community site for agency-to-agency communication ▪ Establish periodic customer satisfaction survey of HMIS agencies
<p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe Harbors Program Office communications on the progress and status of HMIS issues are inconsistent with the perceptions held by funders and providers ▪ Safe Harbors was deployed as a “hammer” instead of as “adding value” and being “an asset” 	<p><u>Agency Interviews 2010</u> None</p>
<p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What is and how things are communicated to agencies is inconsistent amongst staff and between different types of projects ▪ Communication to agencies and funders about changes to the HMIS is poor. Agencies were even sent sanction letters for providing incomplete data on required program entry questions and data elements that they were not informed had been added to the system. ▪ There is no apparent standard system for communicating when processes are delayed and why. ▪ The Safe Harbors web site (while greatly improved) is not as informative and user friendly as it could be. This could be a great mechanism for disseminating current information, training materials, and FAQs for Safe Harbors, but it is not currently used that way. 	<p><u>30-Day SH2 Assessment 10/10</u> None</p>
<p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p>	<p><u>Seattle Community TA Plan 9/11</u> None</p>
<p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> None</p>	<p><u>SH Assessment RFI v5 2012</u> N/A</p>

Exhibit B: HMIS Profiles

HMIS Profile: Orange County, CA

HMIS Project Overview and Staffing

The Orange County HMIS project is housed within the OC Partnership, a nonprofit organization that also staffs the county's homeless Continuum of Care (CoC). Orange County's experiences may be of particular interest and value for Seattle/King County because the two communities share the same HMIS provider, Adsystem. To save money, Orange County shares a single instance of HMIS with the Los Angeles (LA) CoC and collaborates with LA on policies and procedures, but in other respects, it maintains a completely separate HMIS implementation.

Currently, the Orange County HMIS has 42 participating agencies, 189 active programs, and 224 active users. A total of five staff work on HMIS, including the HMIS project manager, two data analysts, and two part-time data quality specialists. Work is divided not by agency caseloads, but by staff availability or specific skills. For example, the help desk is rotated between the data analysts and sometimes the data quality specialists; whoever answers a help call or e-mail handles the problem, although more difficult problems may be assigned to another staff member with relevant skills. One data analyst used to specialize in reports and data integration, while the other handled program setups, but they are now moving toward sharing such functions. Four staff share training duties, including both data analysts and both data quality specialists.

HMIS Budget and Funding

The HMIS budget is integrated with the larger OC Partnership budget, so it can be difficult to accurately isolate HMIS costs. However, the chief operating officer indicated that the HMIS operating budget is \$601,718 per year, not including work on HPRP reporting, the point-in-time count, and the CoC application. Sources of funding include two HUD CoC grants, private grants, and HMIS user fees (\$500 per year per agency).

HMIS Software and Vendor

Orange County HMIS staff expressed general satisfaction with the HMIS software. The project will soon be implementing Adsystem's HMIS version 5, which staff reported to have a more intuitive intake process and smoother workflow. Like their counterparts in Seattle/King County, HMIS staff would like to have a faster intake process for high volume programs. In this regard, staff are piloting Adsystem's Scantron data entry functionality, which includes bubble-filled forms for intake, program enrollment, exit, etc. that are scanned and uploaded to HMIS. The initial pilot attempt indicated either the vendor's or the community's Scantron process "needs to be tweaked."

Staff also noted a good and improving relationship with the vendor (better than their previous vendor), who wants to have a great product and meet client needs. On the other hand, staff would like the vendor to be more proactive in developing useful reports for all CoCs that use Adsystem, rather than responding piecemeal to report requests. Also, staff wants Adsystem to form a group of Adsystem communities to give feedback on the software, reports, and other issues of common interest.

HMIS Training

The Orange County HMIS project offers a comprehensive training series and includes both in person trainings and on-demand webinars. The in-person training series includes:

- HMIS Beginners Training (3 hours, typically twice a month)
- HMIS Report Training (2 hours, typically a month before bundle reports are due)
- "Mark for Delete" Training (1 hour, monthly); trained users are allowed to delete or reactivate their own client enrollments and delete their own client records.

Webinars make these training topics (see <http://ochmis.org/>) widely available on demand:

- HMIS v5 Navigation
- Creating New Snapshots, Snapshot Re-Set, and Recreating Snapshots
- Client Intake and Household Demographics
- Entering Case Notes
- Enrolling Multiple Clients in a Service
- Services and Milestones.

HMIS Reports

Staff said Adsystem does not currently have dashboard reports, but is working on them for version 5 (the dashboard has not yet been released). Each year, the HMIS project produces and publishes its own dashboard and CoC-wide reports on topics such as AHAR, PIT, Client Destinations by Program Type, and Length of Stay by Program Type (see <http://ochmis.org/>). Because they were not sure what all the Adsystem management reports were for, staff prepared a written “Management Reports Analysis” with detailed information on data, uses, and issues. As with other communities, Orange County wants better reports relevant to HEARTH performance measures. Staff noted that LA has a good CoC-wide recidivism report.

HMIS Governance & Monitoring

As mentioned above, the OC Partnership provides both CoC and HMIS services for Orange County. Beyond the County contractual relationship for these services, there is no clear CoC governance structure, no HMIS governance group, and no HMIS Governance Charter. There is a 10-Year Plan implementation body and a CoC provider forum, but there is currently no CoC Leadership Board. With the advent of the HEARTH Act, the community is working on a CoC governance structure. Staff indicated the desire for a governance group that will take an interest in HMIS and request reports.

Moreover, Orange County disbanded its HMIS User Group when users said it was not helpful. Staff surveyed users on what would make the meetings useful, but no one responded. And staff held a webinar on “Agency Empowerment,” but only one agency attended.

HMIS staff are developing an agency monitoring process, to begin next year, which will include:

1. An HMIS compliance checklist
2. On-site visits
3. A problem resolution strategy
4. Giving agency’s 30 days to fix problems and then check in.

Staff have already had to monitor four domestic violence (DV) agencies for comparable database compliance, and found only one of the agencies was close to complying with HUD DV rules.

HMIS Website

<http://ochmis.org/>. A good quality communications tool with lots of easily accessible, relevant information organized by major pages for: Home, About HMIS, HMIS Documents, HMIS Reports, HMIS Help, Newsletters, News, and Opportunities.

HMIS Contact

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HMIS Profile: Denver Metro and Colorado Statewide

HMIS Project Overview and Staffing

The Metro Denver CoC (seven counties) participates in the Colorado Statewide HMIS implementation with Balance of State and Colorado Springs CoCs. The purpose of this shared HMIS is to save money by sharing administration of HMIS. Due to various problems (unspecified), two years ago they selected Adsystem to replace Tapestry, their former HMIS software. They implemented Adsystem last April.

Currently, the Colorado Statewide HMIS has 88 participating agencies, 695 programs, and 1,056 end users. Five FTE staff work on HMIS, including the HMIS Project Manager and four Database Administrators. The title, “Database Administrator” is not descriptive of what they actually do, which is a combination of agency support, program set ups, training, and reports. Thus, they plan to change the job titles and descriptions to be more reflective of what do and to incorporate HEARTH Act and HMIS functions, such as data quality officer and security officer.

Although they currently share functional responsibility (e.g. training and program set up), the four Database Administrators split the agency caseload evenly—22 agencies each. They also rotate the helpdesk, each taking a week at a time. Level 1 problems (password re-sets, etc.) are handled by the helpdesk. Level 2 problems (more complex) are handled by the person assigned to the agency.

HMIS Budget and Funding

The HMIS budget is integrated with the larger Colorado Coalition budget, so it hard to estimate overall HMIS costs. However, the Project Manager indicated that there are 3 CoC HMIS grants totaling about \$400,000, including a \$341,000 grant through the Denver Metro CoC. There are also matching funds.

HMIS Training

Apparently the Colorado State HMIS offers trainings as follows:

- Group training for new users (Monthly)
- One-on-one trainings (as needed)
- Group trainings on specific functionalities, e.g., reporting (once or twice a month).

It is difficult to get further information about these trainings as the web-based training calendar is not yet in use, and the website is still under construction.

However, the Project Manager indicated they are developing Webinar and Youtube trainings on particular functionalities because “Adsystem has a lot of functionalities and it helps to have webinars and Youtube trainings on particular topics ... and helps to reach all users.” Currently on Youtube are the following trainings:

- HMIS User Policies and Procedures
- HMIS Interim Assessments
- Management Reports
- Household Makeup
- Tips and Tricks for Working With Existing Clients
- HMIS Snapshots

HMIS Reports

The Project Manager indicated they have the same reports as other Adsystem users – application reports for specific clients or groups; management reports, such as the APR and AHAR; and *ad hoc* reports. Their CoC-wide reports include a CoC participation report and a CoC-wide data quality report. They have requested from

Adsystech a CoC-wide APR and a report of CoC application (HUD Exhibit 1) questions, but have not yet received these.

HMIS Governance

The Colorado Statewide HMIS works at the direction of the three participating CoCs. In the case of the Metro Denver CoC, the roles and responsibilities are set forth in a governance document called the Statement of Work for HMIS. Metro Denver CoC governance is carried out through an HMIS Policy Committee. The purpose of this committee is to supervise the administration of and set policy for the HMIS in the metro Denver region. It includes representatives from HMIS using agencies, and local government, and meets two Wednesdays per month.

A statewide HMIS Users Group meets every other month. Typically, 20-30 HMIS users attend. The agenda includes communication on HMIS issues, guest speakers, and information about HUD rules. They revamped the format this year to make it more useful. For example, they started an “agency spotlight,” where an agency presents its experience, goals, and strategies. In addition, they segmented the meetings into topical or functional breakout sessions to keep the meetings relevant for different types of agencies.

HMIS Website

<http://coloradohmis.org/>. A rudimentary page, largely “under construction,” with existing or future links for HMIS Documents, Webinars and Presentation, Contact, and Events and Training.

HMIS Contact

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HMIS Profile: Minneapolis and Minnesota Statewide

HMIS Project Overview and Staffing

The Minneapolis/Hennepin County CoC participates in a statewide Minnesota HMIS project with various other CoCs in the state. The lead agency is Wilder Research, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization. The Minnesota statewide HMIS uses Bowman System's ServicePoint software.

There are seven full-time staff for the whole state, but some work on non-HMIS projects as well. In addition to the HMIS project manager, staff included two technical staff working on report design and uploading of data, two staff with lead responsibility for training, and everyone doing agency support work and helpdesk staffing. Staff do cross training and share job responsibilities. The helpdesk is rotated among staff. Everyone answers the phone and helps as needed. Work is not divided by agency caseload, but by availability and expertise. The HMIS project manager believes that it is better that all staff know different aspects of the job. Thus four people take some part in training. Only the two technical do not do training; they take on more complex technical issues.

HMIS Budget and Funding

The HMS budget is integrated with the larger Wilder Research budget, so it is difficult to estimate overall HMIS costs. However, the HMIS Project Manager estimated that the HMIS budget is over \$745,000 per year. This includes 12 small CoC awards statewide, including \$50,000 through the Minneapolis/Hennepin County CoC. Key state funders include:

- Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Minnesota Department of Employment And Economic Development
- Minnesota Office of Economic Opportunity
- Minnesota Department of Public Safety
- Minnesota Housing
- Minnesota Interagency Council Homelessness.

HMIS Training

The Minnesota statewide HMIS project offers the following training opportunities:

- New user group training (full day, twice a month)
- Refresher trainings (half day, every two months)
- Special trainings, such as funder-based reports and data entry requirements (as needed).

In addition, the Minnesota statewide HMIS project has created a range of webinar trainings on issues such as:

- United Way Reporting
- HPRP Entry and Reporting
- CoC APR
- Advanced Reporting Tool (ART)
- Various State Program Data Entry and Reporting
- Youth Programs
- ServicePoint 5.0 Upgrade.

HMIS Reports

Minnesota HMIS provides dashboard reports at all levels, including Statewide, CoC-wide, program-type, and household. The website has an excellent page for dashboard reports with drop-down menus for statewide and CoC dashboard reports.

They also publish an annual report on homeless service usage in Minnesota. In addition they have published AHAR reports every year since 2005. And they publish a variety of state funder reports, including the Family Homelessness Prevention and Assistance Program service report, statewide recidivism reports, a report on long-term homeless households, and program outcomes reports.

HMIS Governance

The Minnesota statewide HMIS project is governed by an HMIS Governing Board with representatives from all of the CoCs in Minnesota, from key state agencies, and elected members from particular agency, consumer, and functional sectors. Currently, there is a desire to change the governance structure. This desire stems from different feelings about the HMIS Governance Board's role in key staffing and project decisions.

Under the HMIS governing board are two working committees that meet as needed:

- Data subcommittee
- Funding subcommittee.

The governing document for the statewide HMIS is the Policies and Procedures Manual. This document lays out the vision and defines the roles and responsibilities of all participants in Minnesota's HMIS. However, it is not HEARTH compliant and HMIS Governing Board is in the process making change to become HEARTH-compliant.

HMIS Website

www.hmismn.org. This is a well-developed comprehensive website with pages for Announcements, About HMIS, Who Should Participate, Entering Data, Consent Forms, Events and Training, Data Quality Tools, Technical FAQs, Funders and Partners, Governing Group, Hall of Fame, Links, Contacts, Help for Users, Newsletter, and Report Center.

HMIS Contact

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HMIS Profile: Phoenix / Maricopa County

HMIS Project Overview and Staffing

The Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS is a project of Community Information and Referral Services (CIR), which also provides 2-1-1 services. There are three Continuums of Care in Arizona—Phoenix/Maricopa County, Tucson/Pima County, and the Balance of State. Although all three use the same software – ServicePoint – they each have separate HMIS implementations and separate lead agencies. The oldest is the Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS, which was founded in 2002.

Currently, the Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS has 52 participating agencies, 167 programs, and 450 active users. A total of four staff work on HMIS, including the HMIS project manager, one trainer/user support specialist, one system specialist, and one person specializing in reports, security, and data compliance. Work is not divided by agency caseload; all staff share the responsibility for all 450 users. While each position is fairly specialized, there is no specific helpdesk function. User calls are fielded by whoever picks up the phone, and user issues are handled by area of expertise (or in some cases are handled by the person who answers the call or who has time).

HMIS Budget and Funding

While no project budget could be shared, the HMIS project manager indicated that the HMIS operating budget is about \$500,000 per year, including an annual \$400,921 HUD CoC grant.

HMIS Training

The Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS project offers training at its HMIS training lab as follows:

- HMIS End User Training (9 a.m. – 4 p.m., once per month)
- Services/ShelterPoint/SkanPoint Training (9 a.m. – 12 p.m., once per month)
- Case Management Training (1 p.m. – 4 p.m., once per month)
- ESG/SSVF Training (as needed upon request)
- Advanced Reporting Tool Training (9 a.m. – 11 a.m. or 2 p.m. – 4 p.m., once per month)
- ESG/SSVF and other customized training (as needed upon request).

They don't use webinar trainings because "you cannot control them well and it is difficult to answer questions."

HMIS Reports

Staff said that ServicePoint has dashboard reports, not for the whole CoC, but only for programs, case managers, and administrators. However, they no longer use dashboard reports due to the difficulty they pose in keeping client information confidential. Instead, they regularly publish aggregate CoC data reports (with no client identifying information). In addition, the ServicePoint Advanced Reporting Tool (ART) provides program or management reports, such as the HUD APR, the PATH report, and data quality reports, as well as a flexible range of *ad hoc* (custom) report made possible by ART. Agencies can request an *ad hoc* report by submitting a report request form to HMIS staff.

HMIS Governance

The Phoenix/Maricopa County HMIS is governed by the lead CoC body (called the Maricopa Association of Governments Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness) through an HMIS Advisory Group. The HMIS Advisory Group, which meets quarterly, is composed of CEOs of participating agencies and the head of the CoC. There are also a quarterly Data Quality Group and an HMIS Users' Group to update users on such

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issues as changes to HMIS requirements and the HEARTH Act. The project manager termed the latter group “kind of big and unruly.”

HMIS Website

<http://cir.org/hmis/>. A fairly minimal page with links for Contact, Meeting Schedule, Forms, CoC reports, and Training Descriptions and Schedule.

HMIS Contact

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HMIS Profile: Philadelphia

HMIS Project Overview and Staffing

The Philadelphia HMIS builds on an early system, initiated in 1991, to track shelter usage for billing purposes. Over the years, the system has been adapted and improved to better meet HUD HMIS requirements; to integrate with other City human service data in a data warehouse; and to allocate resources, conduct performance based contracting, and assess homeless demographic characteristics and trends. A key feature is that the HMIS provides data services for the City's system of centralized intake for City-funded homeless shelters. Like Safe Harbors, the Philadelphia HMIS is a City-operated system, in this case operated by the City of Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing (OSH) IT office.

Currently, the HMIS is a highly custom system, developed with the consulting assistance of Coelho Consulting, Inc. However, because this system has, over the years, become out-of-date (both with current industry standards and the HUD's HMIS requirements and standards), the City has issued an RFP for a new HMIS solution.

Currently, the Philadelphia HMIS has an estimated 30 participating agencies, 80 programs, and 500 end users. There are eight full-time staff who work on HMIS, but they spend roughly 50% of their time on non-HMIS IT projects. These staff members include the Information Technology Manager, 3 persons who handle hardware and software issues, one person who does agency support and training, two people who handle agency support and training overflow, one person who writes reports and responds to data requests, and one person who manages grants. The workload is split by areas of expertise, and there are no set agency or program caseloads.

HMIS Budget and Funding

The HMIS budget is integrated with other IT projects in the larger OSH budget, so it hard to estimate overall HMIS costs. However, the Information Technology Manager indicated that the annual operating budget includes \$235,000 in HUD CoC grants, \$90,000 in City funds, and at times has also included amounts from other sources, such as HPRP and ESG.

HMIS Training

User training includes a combination of classroom and computer-based training modules. New users must complete a total 3 days of training (including classroom and computer module time). Refresher trainings are a full day. Privacy requirements are include in both the new user and refresher trainings. In practice, they mix new user and refresher trainings. Classroom trainings occur as often as needed, but at least once per month. They also have a train-the-trainer approach, where particularly experienced providers can train their own staff.

HMIS Reports

The system produces a variety of reports, such as HUD APRs, HPRP reports, AHAR reports, a self-sufficiency matrix report, as well as demographic and service usage tied to performance-based funding. Their HEARTH Act CoC-wide performance report is adapted from their earlier HPRP report format. They also have: (1) a program-level dashboard report for client numbers, case manager numbers, bed utilization rates, missing universal data elements, and various case management standards, and (2) a client-specific dashboard report providing a range of information for one or a group of clients.

Philadelphia's case management standards are fairly unique. City-funded agencies must meet specific case management performance standards and report within HMIS on meeting the standards. Thus, caseworkers must enter coded HMIS data on key stages in the case management process, including initial contact, first

interview, service planning, continued service, planned and unplanned departures, and program transfers. The system includes a case management system monitor checklist (dashboard), which allows supervisors to see all case management required tasks that are currently overdue.

HMIS Governance

The lead body for the Philadelphia CoC is called the McKinney Strategic Planning Committee. Governance of the HMIS project is handled through an HMIS Subcommittee, which meets monthly or more to provide project oversight on issues such as improving data quality, updating policies and procedures, and participating in the selection of a new HMIS vendor. The HMIS project used to be accountable primarily to City OSH management, but with the advent of the HEARTH Act, there has been a significant effort to make it more accountable to the CoC and to expand the role of the HMIS Subcommittee.

There used to be an HMIS user group. They intend to start a new user group once a new HMIS product is implemented.

HMIS Website

None.

HMIS Contact

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Exhibit C: Summary Table of Findings and Recommendations

Section 1: Safe Harbors Governance and Structure Findings	Section 1: Safe Harbors Governance and Structure Recommendations
<p>1.F.1: Safe Harbors’ governance process is perceived as unwieldy.</p> <p>1.F.2: Safe Harbors governance is not yet fully in line with new HUD expectations and regulations.</p> <p>1.F.3: Like many City/County/State-run HMIS projects, Safe Harbors is positioned as an IT-focused organization within a human services agency. This is not uncommon but has its challenges.</p>	<p>1.R.1: The CoC and Sponsoring Partners should clarify and unify the HMIS governance structure.</p> <p>1.R.2: The proposed Steering Committee and Safe Harbors should engage users by re-starting and re-naming the Safe Harbors Users Group (SHUG)</p> <p>1.R.3: The CoC and Safe Harbors should update their governance charter and take the steps needed to bring Safe Harbors into line with HUD expectations and regulations.</p> <p>1.R.4: The City of Seattle should ensure Safe Harbors has the IT resources and support it needs to fully succeed as comprehensive homelessness data collection and management system.</p>
Section 2: Software Findings	Section 2: Software Recommendations
<p>2.F.1: Adsystem provides a fully functional and HUD-compliant software product that is generally capable of meeting current HMIS data management functionality needs.</p> <p>2.F.2: HMIS end users report ongoing problems and frustration relating to the ease, functionality, and usefulness of the Adsystem software.</p> <p>2.F.3: There is a generally effective process in place for working with the software vendor to improve the software and fix problems and “bugs,” although the vendor can be frustratingly nonresponsive.</p>	<p>2.R.1: Adsystem, the Safe Harbors HMIS vendor, should improve the user’s experience by enhancing the look, feel, functionality, and usability of the software</p> <p>2.R.2: Safe Harbors should build on its existing vendor relationship, clarify roles and responsibilities, and reach out to other Adsystem implementations in Los Angeles, Orange County (CA), Denver Metro (CO), and Colorado Balance of State.</p>
Section 3: Support, Operations, and Staffing Findings	Section 3: Support, Operations, and Staffing Recommendations
<p>3.F.1: Safe Harbors management and staff have worked very hard to put into place an effective HMIS operational and support structure.</p> <p>3.F.2: Safe Harbors appears to have sufficient overall staffing</p> <p>3.F.3: Safe Harbors needs more access to IT expertise to meet the demands of the project.</p> <p>3.F.4: Safe Harbors staffing structure appears to be rigid compared to other leading HMIS projects.</p> <p>3.F.5: Like other HMIS projects, Safe Harbors will need to review and update its staffing plan and job descriptions to ensure compliance with HUD’s HMIS regulations.</p> <p>3.F.6: Some standard operating procedures need to</p>	<p>3.R.1: Safe Harbors should take steps to increase its access to IT expertise.</p> <p>3.R.2: Safe Harbors should make its staffing pattern and job descriptions less fixed and rigid.</p> <p>3.R.3: Safe Harbors should incorporate new HUD requirements into the existing staffing pattern and job descriptions.</p> <p>3.R.4: Safe Harbors should continue improving customer service.</p> <p>3.R.5: Safe Harbors should add to and update the standard operating procedures.</p> <p>3.R.6: Safe Harbors should increase the depth of its training program and use new technologies to increase learning opportunities.</p>

<p><i>be clarified or improved.</i></p> <p><i>3.F.7: Safe Harbors agency and user support efforts are not always perceived in a positive light.</i></p> <p><i>3.F.8: Safe Harbors provides a basic user training program, but should do considerably more to address advanced or complex issues and to make use of new technologies for learning.</i></p>	
<p>Section 4: Reporting Findings</p>	<p>Section 4: Reporting Recommendations</p>
<p><i>4.F.1: Adsystem is generally capable of meeting the varied reporting needs of the CoC, program funders, and homeless programs.</i></p> <p><i>4.F.2: Safe Harbors has a history of reporting problems, but has recently improved its capacity for data analysis and reporting.</i></p> <p><i>4.F.3: Data quality is improving but will require continued attention to ensure that all reports are complete and accurate.</i></p> <p><i>4.F.4: State privacy law has an impact on the quality of HMIS data.</i></p> <p><i>4.F.5: The existing report formats are not always well understood and don't always meet the needs of the CoC, funders, and agencies.</i></p>	<p><i>4.R.1: Safe Harbors should enhance its capacity for data analysis and reporting.</i></p> <p><i>4.R.2: Safe Harbors should reinforce its system and process for improving HMIS data quality.</i></p> <p><i>4.R.3: Safe Harbors should review and revise its HMIS client consent forms and procedures to be as encouraging of consent as possible within existing law.</i></p> <p><i>4.R.4: Safe Harbors should continue improving its reporting procedures and formats to better meet the information needs of the CoC, funders, and programs.</i></p>
<p>Section 5: Data Integration Findings</p>	<p>Section 5: Data Integration Recommendations</p>
<p><i>5.F.1: While still relevant, this issue of data integration is declining because the number of agencies using data integration has declined from five to two.</i></p>	<p><i>5.R.1: Safe Harbors should continue to improve the data integration process. Alternatively, Safe Harbors could outsource data integration to the Washington State Department of Commerce.</i></p>
<p>Section 6: Messaging Findings</p>	<p>Section 7: Messaging Recommendations</p>
<p><i>6.F.1: There is a perception that Safe Harbors does not communicate well on a variety of levels.</i></p> <p><i>6.F.2: Safe Harbors is improving its communications.</i></p>	<p><i>6.R.1: The Sponsoring Partners and CoC should communicate support for Safe Harbors, its vision, goals, and future direction.</i></p> <p><i>6.R.2: Safe Harbors and the recommended Steering Committee should implement the existing Communications Plan.</i></p> <p><i>6.R.3: Safe Harbors should keep improving its use of communications technology.</i></p>

Exhibit D: Summary of Messaging Issues Appearing in the Report

Messaging issues appear throughout the report. Some of the findings and recommendations that also relate to messaging include:

- 1.F.1 (sub-point): There are few avenues for meaningful user feedback or input...
- 2.R.2 (sub-point): ...engage users creating Safe Harbors users group...
- 2.F.2: HMIS end users report ongoing problems and frustration relating to the ease, functionality, and usefulness of the Adsystem software.
- 2.R.1 (sub-point): Safe Harbors should regularly and systematically gather and assess user feedback on software problems and necessary enhancements.
- 2.R.1 (sub-point): Adsystem and Safe Harbors should develop a work plan, timeline, and communications strategy for rolling out Adsystem Version 5.
- 2.R.2 (sub-point): Request that Adsystem staff convene a process for meeting regularly with other Adsystem communities to discuss common issues.
- 3.F.1 (sub-point): Efforts to improve the operational support structure have been redoubled...
- 3.F.6 (sub-point): The process for setting up new programs within Safe Harbors is not clear or standardized.
- 3.F.7: Safe Harbors agency and user support efforts are not always perceived in a positive light.
- 3.F.8 (sub-point): Set clear expectations of what can and needs to be done, but do not promise what cannot be delivered.
- 3.R.4 (sub-point): Avoid telling the customer that they are “wrong,” but do ask probing questions to explore why the user is experiencing the problem.
- 3.R.5 (sub-point): Create a new program setup form with written instructions.
- 3.R.6 (sub-point): Safe Harbors should increase the depth of its training program and use new technologies to increase learning opportunities.
- 4.F.3 (sub-point): Some agencies don’t understand why report numbers differ from their other internal data systems.
- 4.F.5: The existing report formats are not always well understood and don’t always meet the needs of the CoC, funders, and agencies.
- 4.R.2 (sub-point): Build upon the existing data quality procedures to develop and obtain CoC approval of a standalone written data quality plan.
- 4.R.4 (sub-point): Consider creating an *ad hoc* group, including Safe Harbors, funders, and selected agencies, to inform this (funder reporting) process.
- 4.R.4 (sub-points): Create, publish, and distribute an annual CoC-wide progress report, improved AHAR and HEARTH performance reports, and review and consider adapting other communities’ dashboard and outcomes report formats.

Exhibit E: List of Reference Materials:

The following list of references is divided by topic area and includes a selection of documents researched by the technical assistance team during the HMIS assessment process. Some of the documents are referenced in the body of the assessment report, while others are simply provided as useful or interesting examples for consideration. These are intended for use only as desired within the budget, staffing, and interests of Safe Harbors and the community.

Document Name	Description	Weblink, If Any
Software/Easy Intake Examples		
2011 HMIS Scan Cards Report	Provides instructions on how to create HMIS scan cards for quick entry and exit from homeless shelters	N/A
Orange County Adsystem HMIS Scantron Forms	Includes a variety of scantron (fill in the bubble) forms for quick collection and data entry of intake, service, and exit data for clients	N/A
Training Model Examples		
Michigan Statewide HMIS Training Podcast Library	Furnishes a list of and links to a range of HMIS training podcasts relating to data entry, services, and reporting topics	http://www.mihomeless.org/MCAH/Podcast_Library/Podcast_Library.html
Orange County Recorded HMIS Training Webinars	Furnishes a list of and links to a range of Adsystem HMIS training webinars relating to HMIS navigation, data entry, snapshots, etc.	http://ochmis.org/hmis-help/hmis-webinars/
LAHSA (Los Angeles) HMIS Training Webpage	Gives access to all LAHSA Adsystem HMIS training resources, including links to news, course descriptions, schedule, and booking classes	http://training.lahsa.org/
LAHSA Available HMIS Course Schedule	Provides a list, description, and dates and times for all Adsystem HMIS training courses offered by LAHSA	See above
Polices and Procedures Examples		
Montgomery County MD Provider HMIS Setup Form	Is an example of an easy-to-use form for gathering needed information to set up an agency and program in HMIS	http://www6.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhstmpl.asp?url=/content/hhs/hmis/resources_forms.asp
Orange County New Program Setup Form	Is an example of an easy-to-use form for gathering needed information to set up an agency and program in Adsystem HMIS	http://ochmis.org/hmis-help/hmis-v4-form/
Program Information Sheet	Is another example of a form for gathering needed information to set up an agency and program in HMIS	https://www.onecpd.info/resource/1424/hmis-tools-sample-program-information-sheet/

Los Angeles/Orange County HMIS Policies and Procedures Manual - Adsystem	Serves as the comprehensive policies and procedures manual for this two-CoC Adsystem implementation, and includes Orange County's client consent procedures as a good example	http://documents.lahsa.org/it/SharedDocuments/LA_OC_HMIS_Policies_and_Procedures_022013.pdf
Metro Denver Policies and Procedures Manual - Adsystem	Serves as the comprehensive policies and procedures manual for this 7-county Adsystem implementation	http://mdhi.org/colorado-hmis/colorado-hmis-info/
Minnesota's HMIS Policies and Practices Manual	Serves as the comprehensive policies and procedures manual for this statewide HMIS implementation	http://www.hmismn.org/postings/pdfs/MNHMIS-PolicyProcedures(12-12-12Update).pdf
LAHSA (Los Angeles) HMIS User Manual	Provides step-by-step instructions on how to use the Los Angeles Adsystem HMIS.	N/A
Metro Denver HMIS Issues Report Template	Provides a spreadsheet format to track software issues and convey them to the HMIS provider	https://www.onecpd.info/resource/1427/hmis-tools-hmis-issues-report-template-sample/
Reporting/Data Quality Examples		
Columbus System & Program Level Indicator Report	Provides quarterly report, based on HMIS, of a variety of performance goals and outcomes at the program and CoC levels	http://www.csb.org/?id=publications
Columbus Data Snapshot Report	Provides a range of reports on crisis response, transition, and financial issues	http://www.csb.org/?id=publications
Rhode Island HMIS Data Quality Standards	Sets forth the data quality standards and benchmarks for the Rhode Island CoC HMIS	https://www.onecpd.info/resources/documents/RIDataQualityStandards_Handout.pdf
Maricopa HMIS Data Quality and Monitoring Plan	Sets forth the data quality standards and benchmarks for the Phoenix/Maricopa County CoC HMIS	http://www.cir.org/hmis/HMISDataQualityPlan.pdf
Measuring Progress – Achieving Outcomes, Alameda County CA CoC	Furnishes a report evaluating the performance during year of 2011 of individual programs and the system as a whole in achieving outcomes to bring an end to homelessness	http://www.everyonehome.org/measuring-success.html
Minnesota Homeless Service Use Dashboard Reports	Provides a series of dashboard reports for based on program types for each CoC and the State of Minnesota	http://www.hmismn.org/reports/
State of Washington Homeless Dashboard Report	Provides a quarterly dashboard report for the State of Washington based on a range of system performance measures	http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/2012%20Homeless%20Dashboard%20Q4.pdf
Thurston County Homeless Dashboard Report	Provides a quarterly dashboard report for the Thurston County, WA based on a range of system performance measures	http://www.co.thurston.wa.us/health/sscp/Services&Programs/PDF/ThurstonCountyDashboardQ12011.pdf
Minnesota Phase II Data	Sets forth the data quality standards and	http://www.hmismn.org/DQ

Quality and Monitoring Plan	monitoring plan for the Minnesota statewide HMIS	/Data_Quality_Monitoring_Plan_and_Report_Instructions_2_13.pdf
LAHSA HMIS Report Guide	Lists and describes 50 Adystech HMIS Reports available to the Los Angeles CoC HMIS	http://hmis.lahsa.org/documents.html
LAHSA Orange County Recidivism Summary Report	Includes the total recidivism occurrences by transitional housing program for each person and the days for which they were able to maintain permanent housing prior to additional spells of homelessness.	N/A
LAHSA Spreadsheet Analysis of Adystech Management Reports	Provides a description and analysis of the uses of all Adystech management reports in the Los Angeles HMIS	N/A
Homeless Service Use in Minnesota Report	Provides annual HMIS data and reports on emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent supportive housing use in Minnesota	http://www.wilder.org/Wilder-Research/Publications/Pages/default.aspx
Messaging Examples		
Nevada Statewide HMIS Webpage	Serves as the Internet address and portal for information about and access to Nevada's Statewide HMIS	http://www.miner-hmis.com/
Los Angeles HMIS Webpage	Serves as the Internet address and portal for information about and access to the Los Angeles Adystech HMIS	http://hmis.lahsa.org/
Orange County HMIS Webpage	Serves as the Internet address and portal for information about and access to the Orange County Adystech HMIS	http://ochmis.org/
Portland, OR NW Social Service Connections (HMIS) Newsletter	Contains important articles, announcements, and information on HMIS events and trainings, as well as profiles of people and agencies	http://www.portlandoregon.gov/phb/48524
Budgeting Examples		
New Jersey Statewide Dedicated HMIS Budget	Summarizes and categorizes all one-year operational costs for the New Jersey Statewide HMIS Project	N/A
Monitoring Examples		
Rockford IL HMIS Self-Assessment Survey	Is a survey, filled out by the agency in advance of a site visit by the lead agency, which gives a comprehensive picture of the agency's compliance with HMIS privacy, data entry, training, and participation guidelines	https://www.onecpd.info/resource/1426/hmis-tools-hmis-self-assessment-survey/
Guidelines for Self-Assessment of HMIS Grantee Implementation and Operations	Is a survey, to be filled out by community, which gives a comprehensive picture of the CoC's HMIS capacity and standards compliance	N/A