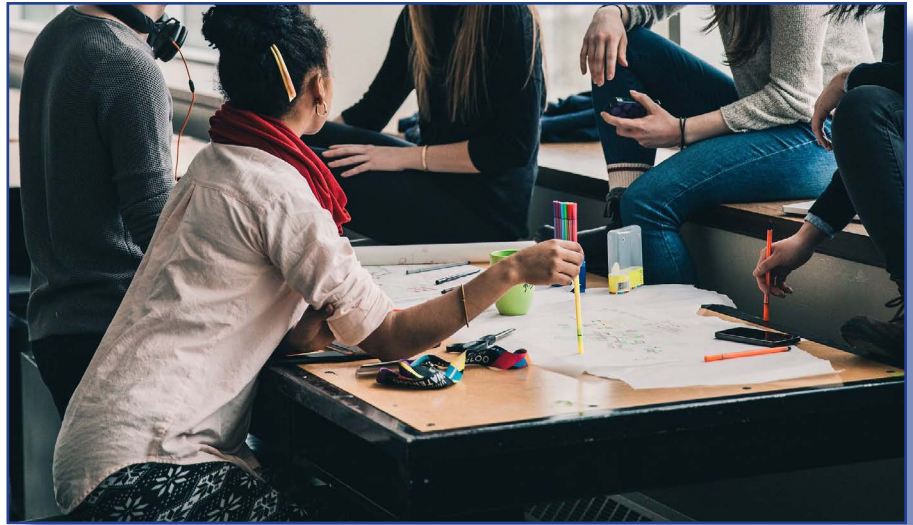National Center for Homeless Education
Supporting the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness
https://nche.ed.gov

BEST PRACTICES IN INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BRIEF SERIES
When Working Together Works:
Interagency Collaboration between McKinney-Vento Programs and Homeless Service Providers

Introduction

This NCHE brief will

- assist SEA and LEA Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) program administrators understand the requirements in the McKinney-Vento Act related to collaboration, consider recommendations provided in the 2016 *Non-regulatory Guidanc*e;[1]

- learn practical strategies to make collaborative efforts effective; and

- provide some basic tips drawn from EHCY State Coordinators and local liaisons along with links to resources.

Because the needs of homeless children and youths are so extensive and varied, State educational agencies (SEAs) and local educational agencies (LEAs) must become part of a system of services to ensure that these vulnerable children and youths can receive the support they need to attain an education. The McKinney-Vento Act,[2] the Federal law that guarantees rights and services for homeless children and youths, includes SEA and

LEA requirements for interagency collaboration.

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[1] Links to all resources and references are included in the resources section at the end of the document.
[2] The term "McKinney-Vento Act" is used in this publication to refer to the education subtitle (Subtitle VII-B) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which was reauthorized and amended in 2015 by Title IX, Part A of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

MCKINNEY-VENTO DEFINITION OF HOMELESS 42 U.S.C. § 11434a(2)

The term "homeless children and youth"—
A. means individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence…; and
B. includes —

i. children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

ii. children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings…

iii. children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and

iv. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii).

Why Collaborate?

Collaboration is a means to expand the capacity of programs and agencies to provide services in a coordinated way. Many organizations serving homeless children, youths, and families have historically operated in silos due to limited time, varying working cultures, and different criteria for who is eligible for services, yet those who work together can provide services that are comprehensive and efficiently delivered, often resulting in dynamic initiatives that grow into an integrated systems of care.

The U.S. Department of Education's (ED) 2016 *Non-regulatory Guidance* states that coordination is critical to ensure homeless students have access to services, besides education, to address their basic needs, such as housing and health (ED, 2016, L-1). Requirements for coordination at the SEA and LEA level in the law are included throughout the McKinney-Vento Act.

McKinney-Vento Act Coordination and Collaboration Requirements for SEAs and LEAs

The McKinney-Vento Act includes specific requirements for State-level and local-level coordination with external agencies. See Appendix 1. SEA Requirements for Coordination and Collaboration in the McKinney-Vento Act and Appendix 2. LEA Requirements for Coordination and Collaboration in the McKinney-Vento Act for excerpts from the law related to coordination requirements.

Coordination and Collaboration with Federally-funded Programs

Throughout the 2016 guidance there is information on interagency coordination for the benefit of homeless children and youths. A summary of the recommendations follow.

The guidance mentions LEA coordination specifically with Federal programs that are required to identify and serve homeless children and youth and to coordinate with LEAs. The guidance states

> Some Federal programs are also required to identify and serve homeless children and youths who meet eligibility criteria for those programs and to coordinate with LEAs. These programs include Head Start; the IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act], which includes child find requirements for children with disabilities from birth through 21 (Part B) and child find requirements for infants and toddlers with disabilities from birth through age two (Part C); and housing programs and services funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD); and programs and services funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act. (ED, 2016, F-4)

The guidance includes collaboration with postsecondary education organizations as the College Cost Reduction Act amendments to the Higher Education Act authorizes local liaisons

to verify unaccompanied homeless youth status for the purpose of applying for independent student status below the age of 24 on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). (ED, 2016, L-1)

The guidance also states

> Several Federal programs administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) use the McKinney-Vento Act's definition of "homeless children and youths" … so it is important for State Coordinators and local liaisons to coordinate for several reasons: to determine eligibility consistently across agencies serving the same families, children, and youths; to coordinate or expedite referrals for services; and to coordinate services overall for families or youths in order to improve education and other outcomes for homeless children and youths. (ED, 2016, L-1)

Regarding Federal agencies that may use a different definition of "homeless," the guidance states

> State Coordinators and local liaisons should develop relationships with their agency counterparts in order to create an expedited referral system. These relationships can also be used to help develop a more detailed understanding of the needs of the homeless populations and a more effective system for serving homeless youths by sharing and using data. (ED, 2016, L-1)

The guidance notes that two major agency programs serving homeless children and youths do not use the McKinney-Vento definition of "homeless children and youths:" Runaway and Homeless Youth Act programs and HUD-administered homeless assistance programs. The guidance recommends that State Coordinators and local liaisons reach out to these agencies' program administrators to ensure the families and youth they serve are familiar with their educational rights under the McKinney-Vento Act and to coordinate referrals. The guidance encourages homeless education representation on HUD Continuum of Care programs and collaboration on HUD's annual Point-in-Time counts. (ED, 2016, L-3)

In addition, the guidance suggests that EHCY administrators should "coordinate and consult with State and local policy makers to ensure that legislation and policies do not create barriers for the education of homeless children and youths (ED, 2016, E-8)."

Serving on Advisory Councils

Several agencies that serve homeless children and youths operate advisory or coordinating councils. Under Part C of IDEA, at least one member of each State's Interagency Coordinating Council must be a representative designated by the State Coordinator's office. Also, under Part B of IDEA, each State's advisory panel must include SEA and LEA administrators, including those who carry out activities under the McKinney-

Vento Act.

Serving on advisory councils related to early childhood is critical to ensure that the needs of young homeless children are addressed. The State Advisory Councils on Early Childhood Education and Care authorized by Head Start may include homeless education expertise. Also, the Child Care and Development Fund State Plans submitted by State child care agencies to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services can benefit from the input of EHCY administrators to ensure that the needs of homeless children are included with their services for vulnerable populations.

Sharing Data Across Agencies

Sharing data is a foundational activity that will help each partner understand the other's program and clients or stakeholders. The 2016 guidance states

State Coordinators and local liaisons may work with their agency counterparts to set up interagency agreements for sharing relevant data to use for planning, coordination, and evaluation. Such agreements must be consistent with FERPA [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act], the confidentiality of information provisions in Parts B and C of IDEA, and other relevant Federal and State laws protecting the privacy of student and family information. (ED, 2016, L-1)

An ED brief entitled Interagency Data Disclosure: A Tip Sheet on Interagency Collaboration spells out clearly from a Federal perspective what is allowed and not allowed in data sharing among agencies and should dispel concerns surrounding this issue.

GOOD PRACTICES FOR COLLABORATION WITH HOMELESS SERVICE PROVIDERS

Levels of Collaboration

The word "collaboration" means a formalized working arrangement that crosses agency or program barriers. In general use, however, the term is used to describe a multitude of partnerships characterized by the level of interaction between agencies. The levels vary by time involved, formality of the interactions, and sharing of resources. The purpose and goals of a partnership will determine the type of interaction needed.

The Chandler Center for Community Leadership provides a detailed chart that depicts the following levels of collaboration: networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration, and specifies the purpose, structure, and process of working together for each one. Understanding the distinctions between the levels of collaboration is helpful in determining what type of interaction will best accomplish the goals of a partnership.

Purposeful Collaboration

As busy as EHCY program administrators and homeless service providers are, most find collaborative relationships that "seem to be going nowhere" a source of frustration, and these collaborations rarely last. However, when collaborative partnerships are targeted in their purpose, they are tremendously satisfying for those involved and impactful for those receiving services. Collaborations from the outset should have a clear purpose, and early into the partnership, agencies should establish a few concrete, attainable, and measurable goals.

Some general goals to consider for a collaborative partnership, listed from simplest to complex, are

1. To increase awareness of the needs of homeless children and youths so that programs and agencies can expand and/or customize their services.

2. To coordinate services for efficient use of resources for a comprehensive approach to serving homeless children and youths, and their families.

3. To align policies and practices to remove barriers to services across programs and agencies.

4. To expand resources for homeless children, youths, and their families.

5. To build strong cross-agency advocacy and policy initiatives to develop an integrated system of services.

Each of these goals can guide partners to identify some specific, measurable outcomes they would like to see so that they can evaluate the effectiveness of their collaborative efforts. Appendix 3. Collaboration Goals for State and Local EHCY Program Administrators and Homeless Service Providers is a table that provides sample measures of effectiveness of partnerships, examples of success stories, and suggested activities for State Coordinators and local liaisons to conduct to move toward collaboration goals.

Getting Started

Many strong partnerships are born of a chance or informal meeting between staff from agencies who explore one another's areas of service and begin to discuss needs and overlap among their agencies. Plans to collaborate can naturally evolve from the relationship begun at such a meeting.

If you need to initiate a contact with an agency, be sure not to underestimate the importance of building the relationship. The goal of the first meeting should be to build the administrator's interest in a possible partnership. In early meetings, potential partners should learn the following about one another:

- the agency's purpose,

- clients and stakeholders and their needs,

- the services the agency provides,

- what needs the agency meets and where the gaps are,

- challenges they face, and

- the agency's vision.

After the initial informal meetings, subsequent meetings should be more formal, involving other stakeholders, and following a detailed agenda for each that spells out what the desired outcome of each meeting will be, such as needs assessment, goal setting, or planning a joint activity.

Some partners in effective collaborations suggest starting with an easy goal or small activity to "test the waters" for how the agencies can work together. Celebrating an early success might be the inspiration to move forward with more ambitious goals.

It is important to evaluate the quality of the collaboration on an ongoing basis to identify areas of improvement as the initiative evolves. A Team Effectiveness Assessment offered through Mind Tools can spark conversation about the effectiveness of the collaborative team and guide the group on ways to improve.

Overcoming Challenges

Despite the energy and effort that you put into building a collaborative relationship, many collaborations encounter barriers that can include a lack of time team members can devote, inability to conduct purposeful and productive meetings, and overcoming mistrust or a history of difficult relationships among agencies. A few bad experiences can bring an atmosphere of cynicism and futility to the table. However, there are strategies that persistent people can employ to move a partnership in the right direction. Appendix 4. Overcoming Challenges to Collaboration provides some tips to consider for various obstacles to collaboration.

Finally, sometimes the most basic lessons in collaboration are the best, as evidenced in the quote below.

A Short Course in Human Relations (as amended)

The SEVEN most important words: "I don't know, but I'll find out."

The SIX most important words: "I admit I made a mistake."

The FIVE most important words: "You did a great job!"

The FOUR most important words: "What do you think?"

The THREE most important words: "If you please..."

The TWO most important words: "Thank you."

The ONE most important word: "We."

The ONE least important word: "I."[3]

Resources

Chandler Center for Community Leadership. (n.d.). *Community based collaboration: Community wellness multiplied.* Retrieved August 2016 from https://www.uvm.edu/extension/community/nnco/collab/wellness.html

Mind Tools, Team Effectiveness Assessment. Retrieved July 2016 http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_84.htm

NCHE's *Homeless Liaison Toolkit*, Chapter 11: Collaboration. Retrieved August 2016 https://nche.ed.gov/pr/liaison_toolkit.php

NCHE's Resources by Topic Web Page on Collaboration. Retrieved August 2016 https://nche.ed.gov/ibt/ibt.php

NCHE's *State Coordinators' Handbook*, Section C: Connections to Collaboration: Yours, Mine, and Ours. Retrieved August 2016 https://nche.ed.gov/pr/sc-hb.php

Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act [42 U.S.C. § 11431 *et seq.*] https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv.php

U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program Non-Regulatory Guidance.* Retrieved April 2017 https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/160240ehcyguidance072716updated0317.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). Interagency data disclosure: A tip sheet on interagency collaboration. Retrieved August 2016 https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/ehcy-interagency-data-disclosure.pdf

U.S. Department of Education's Web Page on Initiatives Supporting Homeless Children and Youth. Retrieved August 2016 http://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/supporting-homeless-students/index.html

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3   Retrieved August 2016 http://cdn.terrystarbucker.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/A-Short-Course-In-Human-Relations-as-amended.pdf

(f) The Coordinator for Education of Homeless Children and Youth established in each State shall— …

(4) in order to improve the provision of comprehensive education and related services to homeless children and youths and their families, coordinate activities and collaborate with –

(A) educators, including teachers, special education personnel, administrators, and child development and preschool program personnel;

(B) providers of services to homeless children and youths and their families, including public and private child welfare and social service agencies, law enforcement agencies, juvenile and family courts, agencies providing mental health services, domestic violence agencies, child care providers, runaway and homeless youth centers, and providers of services and programs funded by the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.);

(C) providers of emergency, transitional, and permanent housing to homeless children and youths, and their families, including public housing agencies, shelter operators, operators of transitional housing facilities, and providers of transitional living programs for homeless youths;

(D) local educational agency liaisons designated under subsection (g)(1)(J)(ii) for homeless children and youths; and

(E) community organizations and groups representing homeless children and youths and their families. [42 U.S.C. § 11432(f)(4)].

(5) COORDINATION

(A) IN GENERAL - Each local educational agency serving homeless children and youths that receives assistance under this part shall coordinate—

(i) the provision of services under this subtitle with local social services agencies and other agencies or entitles providing services to homeless children and youths and their families, including services and programs funded under the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (42 U.S.C. 5701 et seq.); and

(ii) transportation, transfer of school records, and other interdistrict activities with other local educational agencies.

(B) HOUSING ASSISTANCE - If applicable, each State educational agency and local educational agency that receives assistance under this subtitle shall coordinate with State and local housing agencies responsible for developing the comprehensive housing affordability strategy described in section 105 of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act (42 U.S.C. 12705) to minimize educational disruption for children and youths who become homeless.

(C) COORDINATION PURPOSE - The coordination required under subparagraphs (A) and (B) shall be designed to—

(i) ensure that all homeless children and youths are promptly identified;

(ii) ensure that all homeless children and youths have access to, and are in reasonable proximity to, available education and related support services; and

(iii) raise the awareness of school personnel and service providers of the effects of short-term stays in a shelter and other challenges associated with homelessness. [42 U.S.C. § 11432(g)(5)]

Appendix 3. Collaboration Goals for State and Local EHCY Program Administrators and Homeless Service Providers

1. *To increase awareness of the needs* of homeless children and youths so that programs and agencies can expand and/or customize their services.			
Indicators or Measures of Effectiveness	*Success Stories*	*Strategies*	*Role of the EHCY Program Administrator*
• Increased number of services for homeless children and youths • Increased number of services in collaborating agencies that have been customized to meet the unique needs of homeless children and youths	• A medical clinic provides services to unaccompanied homeless youth • A homeless shelter designates a "homework room" for school-aged children and youths	• Request to attend a staff or board meeting to do a short presentation on the educational needs of homeless children and youths; have a homeless child or youths speak • Suggest concrete practices • Offer a follow up meeting to an awareness event to provide consultation services or to explore coordination of services	• Participate on advisory boards or coalitions • Increase awareness at state or local agencies through presentations so that they can provide information to their stakeholders • Plan joint trainings with partner agencies for meetings and conferences
2. *To coordinate services* for efficient use of resources for a comprehensive approach to serving homeless children and youths, and their families.			
Indicators or Measures of Effectiveness	*Success Stories*	*Strategies*	*Role of the EHCY Program Administrator*
• Memorandum of agreement or plan for coordination that lists what each partner will contribute and how they will share data • Plan for integrated services that exceed what each individual agency offers • Process for mutual referrals • Increased number of homeless children, youths, and families that receive services from each agency involved in the partnership	• A Head Start program and school district share enrollment forms; the Head Start program has families with school-aged children complete a school enrollment form and sends it to the local liaison; the local liaison has families with preschool-aged children complete a Head Start enrollment form	• Offer resources (consultation services, staffing, or funding) to help an agency to increase services for homeless children and youths • Conduct a needs assessment and review one another's data to identify areas of common need	• Meet with agencies or programs to develop a MOU that describes procedures and responsibilities for coordination and data-sharing

3. *To expand resources* for homeless children, youths, and their families.			
Indicators or Measures of Effectiveness	**Success Stories**	**Strategies**	**Role of the EHCY Program Administrator**
• Increased number of services for homeless children and youths	• A faith-based organization provides backpacks with food and supplies for homeless children	• Provide examples to churches, civic organizations, colleges, and universities of services and initiatives conducted in other communities • Contact businesses with specific requests; get media coverage for their contributions • Write grant proposals	• Identify and share examples of services and initiatives conducted in other communities through attending conferences or reviewing materials from national organizations • Provide information on grant opportunities • Include presentations on increasing resources at trainings
4: *To align policies and practices* to remove barriers to services across programs and agencies.			
Indicators or Measures of Effectiveness	**Success Stories**	**Strategies**	**Role of the EHCY Program Administrator**
• Aligned policies to which collaborating agencies agree • MOUs between collaborating agencies	• A shelter provider and local liaison agree on how to coordinate services for homeless children, youths, and families despite having different criteria for eligibility	• Review phone calls and emails to identify areas of non-alignment • Convene a meeting or task force to discuss the issue and identify how to align policies • Develop a joint memo that clarifies how each program and agency will align its policies	• Meet with agencies to identify areas of non-alignment and develop policies to guide alignment
5. *To build strong cross-agency advocacy and policy initiatives* to develop an integrated system of services.			
Indicators or Measures of Effectiveness	**Success Stories**	**Strategies**	**Role of the EHCY Program Administrator**

• Proposed or enacted policies or laws that benefit homeless children, youths, and families	• A city passes a bond referendum that funds an increase in building affordable housing	• Share data with agencies on barriers that result from policies or laws needed or in need of revision • Identify champions with political power and provide information. • Create a local task force to identify and address challenges for unaccompanied homeless youth to access programs and services • Develop joint communications to legislators and policy makers	• Participate on state-level advisory boards or coalitions • Identify and share sample laws and policies developed by other communities through attending conferences or reviewing materials from national organizations

Appendix 4. Overcoming Challenges to Collaboration

Challenge	Strategies

1. Lack of time	• Prioritize collaborative activities according to importance of goals, what is required by law, and amount of time needed.
	
	• Think in terms of a multiple-year strategy; everything doesn't have to be accomplished in one year.
	
	• Identify the type of activity needed for collaboration goals – not all collaborations require extensive investments of time.
	
	• Don't feel the need to attend every meeting.
	
	    o Review agendas ahead of time to note which meetings will address issues of relevance for homeless children and youths.
	
	    o Participate via conference call.
	
	    o Review minutes of meetings that you do not attend and offer feedback by email or in a conversation with the leadership.

2. Not welcomed at the table; bad history; lack of trust	• Build the relationship – give it the time it needs. • Identify individuals who are open to building the collaboration; let them be your champions. • Be persistent in contacts ("gentle pressure relentlessly applied can change the course of a river"). • Offer something from which the agency will benefit (e.g., consultation, hosting a meeting, presentation). • Identify short-term, easily attainable goals to "test the waters" (e.g., develop a joint memo, co-present at a conference).

3. Collaboration has no clear direction or goals	• Suggest that the group conduct an informal or informal needs assessment to identify a common agenda and goals. • Identify short-term, easily attainable goals to "test the waters" (e.g., develop a joint memo, co-present at a conference).
4. My agency has no tangible resources to contribute	• Promote the value of your expertise and connection to your stakeholders and data. • Provide support in the nature of hosting a meeting, conducting a presentation, or sending information to your stakeholders.
5. Meetings are unproductive	• Suggest that the group conduct an informal or informal needs assessment to identify a common agenda and goals. • Help with tasks that will make meetings productive (e.g., solicit items for and provide a written agenda, help with goal setting). • Engage an outside facilitator. • Suggest that the team conduct a self-assessment using a tool such as one provided through Mind Tools (http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMM_84.htm).
6. Vast differences in culture, purpose, and goals	• Conduct conversations at meetings or with participants individually to identify areas of common need and interest. • Have an open discussion of potential barriers to collaboration resulting from differences and how these barriers might be overcome. • Provide awareness of the perspective of your agency and its authorizing statute; help create understanding of how the collaborating agency is and is not like your agency.

This brief was developed by:
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Every state is required to have a State Coordinator for Homeless Education, and every school district is required to have a local homeless education liaison. These individuals will assist you with the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act. To find out who your State Coordinator is, visit the NCHE website at www.serve.org/nche/states/state_resources.php.

For more information on issues related to the education of homeless children and youth, contact the NCHE helpline at 800-308-2145 (toll-free) or homeless@serve.org.

Local Contact Information: