

Steering Council Meeting Minutes

JULY 17, 2026 | 8:30 - 10:30 AM
In Person – Heart of West Michigan United Way



FACILITATOR: **Kate Berens**

MEETING ATTENDEES: **Council Members:** Tenisa Frye, Raymond King, Kate Berens, Ryan VerWys, Mark Contreras, Elizabeth Stoddard, Chris Palusky, Thelma Ensink, Monique Carter, Gustavo Perez, Alonda Trammell
Attendees: Becki Postma, Anna Diaz, Carolyn Allen, Shelisa Jeffers
CoC Staff: Maddie Martin, Alyssa Anten, Brianne Robach, Kate Meyer, Lana VanBuren, Courtney Myers-Keaton

TIME CONVENED: 8:39 AM

TIME ADJOURNED: 10:24 AM

APPROVAL OF AGENDA – JULY 18, 2026

MOTION BY: **Ryan VerWys**

SUPPORT FROM: **Elizabeth Stoddard**

CONCLUSION: All in favor, motion carries

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – JUNE 12, 2026 and JUNE 26, 2026

MOTION BY: **Elizabeth Stoddard**

SUPPORT FROM: **Thelma Ensink**

CONCLUSION: All in favor, motion carries

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY AGENDA ITEM *(limit 3 min. each)*

DISCUSSION: N/A

UPDATES

DISCUSSION: **REBRAND REVEAL AND WEBSITE UPDATE: Alyssa Anten**

The Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness has officially been rebranded as the Kent Homeless Coalition (KHC). The transition will be rolled out gradually as materials are updated. A new website is expected to be unveiled at the August General Membership Meeting. KHC will continue to serve as Kent County's federally designated Continuum of Care (CoC).

COORDINATED ENTRY EVALUATION: Brianne Robach

The CoC released an RFP for consultants to evaluate the Coordinated Entry (CE) System. The evaluation will include a review of HUD compliance and regulatory requirements, as well as a broader analysis of system performance through data review and stakeholder engagement, including individuals with lived experience,

service providers, and CoC leadership. The project also involves creating a community values-based framework by engaging stakeholders and gathering public input. The overall goal is to identify strengths and gaps within the CE system and develop an implementation plan for improvements.

- Representatives from CE Leadership, Salvation Army, and Heart of West Michigan United Way will meet next week to review RFP's and select a consultant. Once a consultant is selected, more information and a project timeline will be provided to the Steering Council.

Steering Council members asked Brianne questions about the project:

- Kate asked about the project's correlation to the CE work plan document and how it would affect that progress. Brianne explained how they weren't the same thing, but CE evaluation will include more robust community engagement and help with identifying more thorough areas for improvement. Brianne affirmed that goals in the work plan document are still being addressed and larger projects may be delayed due to the staff time going into the CE evaluation.
- Thelma asked about project funding, and Brianne confirmed costs will be covered by some funding at the CoC level and staff have received a commitment from private philanthropy to cover the remainder.
- Elizabeth asks for timeline, Brianne confirms it will be approximately 3 months from contract signing to completion, depending on the consultant.

STREETS GRANT: Kate Berens

Kate shared information on the Safety Through Recovery, Engagement, and Evidence-based Treatment and Supports (STREETS) grant, highlighting it as a significant funding opportunity for the community. Although competitive, the grant could provide up to \$3 million to the community per year. Community partners are coordinating with the city, as the local government must serve as the applicant. The application is due soon.

Mark added that the funding could improve system responsiveness, support the addition of a healthcare clinic, and enhance integration between outreach, healthcare, and housing efforts through case conferencing. Thelma added that the grant could also fund additional behavioral health support in shelters, including psychiatric advisors.

Thelma noted that Grand Rapids has several strengths that may make it a competitive applicant compared to larger cities. She added that even if Grand Rapids didn't win, being ranked could help position the city for future funding opportunities. She thanked the city for its leadership.

- Chris and Tenisa echoed support for the opportunity.

DIRECTOR RECRUITMENT UPDATE: Becki Postma

Becki shared an update on the new Director recruitment, emphasizing that the search will be intentional and strategic, focused on finding a community-wide convener who can effectively bring partners together.

- Desired qualifications for the role include strategic thinking, cross-sector collaboration, accountability, performance management, and political acumen.

- United Way plans to engage an external firm to conduct a national search.

STRATEGIC PLANNING: Becki Postma

Before launching the search, Steering Council must finalize the Vision/Traction Organizer (V/TO) to help define the future direction of the coalition. The Steering Council will complete this work by September, and the results will inform the CoC Director job description and search.

- Lauren VanKeulen (AYA) has agreed to facilitate the V/TO process
- Kate encouraged Steering Council members to come prepared to the upcoming V/TO discussions with input on the CoC's role in the community.

NOFO UPDATES: Courtney Myers-Keaton

Courtney reported various areas of uncertainty related to the FY2026 NOFO from HUD.

- HUD's e-snaps application is still unavailable.
- The CoC also has not received the detailed application instructions for the collaborative application, making it difficult to prepare responses and meet internal deadlines.
- Bonus funding amounts are uncertain, as the Annual Renewal Demand (ARD) report has not been shared. This causes challenges particularly for new project applications.

Advocacy efforts are underway nationwide to encourage HUD to release pending materials. Courtney will distribute advocacy talking points on Monday.

Courtney is hosting "Office Hours" on Tuesdays and Thursdays to support project applicants and stakeholders with the NOFO, local application process, and collaborative application requirements.

With approximately 45 days remaining until applications are due, the lack of HUD guidance is placing increasing pressure on applicants and the Funding Review Committee.

Applicants seeking funding will be required to present their proposed projects as part of the review process.

NOFO PLANNING

DISCUSSION:

POLICY DEVELOPMENT: Courtney Myers-Keaton

Courtney presented two policies for Steering Council review and discussion.

POLICY PROHIBITING ILLICIT DRUG ENABLEMENT AND ADVANCING TREATMENT AND RECOVERY

- Courtney noted that the draft policy is based on NOFO language that is intended to maximize scoring the CoC application. While she acknowledged the Steering Council may have reservations about the policy, she emphasized the opportunity to gain valuable application points (10 points).

- Courtney reminded the Steering Council that the policy may be revised or removed in the future if it's no longer desired or required. She also pointed out that it does not have to be approved.

The draft policy will be distributed to CoC general membership for comments first. These comments will be considered then integrated, then Steering Council can approve the policy at the August meeting.

The Steering Council discussed their thoughts on the policy:

- Elizabeth recommended clarifying that the policy applies to recreational marijuana.
- Thelma clarified if the policy is intended as CoC guidance rather than a requirement for service providers, meaning that enforcement authority is minimal; Courtney confirmed.
- Ryan raised a question about whether limited enforcement language could impact scoring; Courtney noted the draft includes all known HUD requirements.
- Tenisa asked if the policy prohibits life-saving interventions such as naloxone; Courtney confirmed that it does not.
- Council members discussed ensuring the policy does not imply that housing providers are responsible for drug enforcement.

GOVERNANCE CHARTER

- Courtney noted that revisions reflect current operations and support the upcoming NOFO. She added that additional restructuring will likely be needed after a new Director is hired.
- Some proposed changes to the document include: removal of ENTF references, clarification of what full-membership quorum means, designation of outreach as a committee rather than a workgroup, updating the health sector seat from Salvation Army to Grand Rapids Housing Commission, addition of a CE chair, simplification of nominating committee language to focus exclusively on roles and responsibilities.
- New draft also removed equity and LGBTQ language to align with HUD scoring criteria, with firm recognition that Steering Council should add it back in future versions.

The draft will be released for public comment, and any accepted revisions will be incorporated before Steering Council approves the new version in August. Unlike previous updates, approval of the Governance Charter is being delegated to the Steering Council rather than the full membership.

The Steering Council discussed their thoughts on the Governance Charter:

- Elizabeth recommends adding a footnote in this charter to provide future context that the language is very specific to the FY2026 NOFO.
- Members discussed representation on the Steering Council, including whether a domestic violence representative should be included in place of or alongside other designated seats such as the CE seat.

- Thelma raised questions about the role of ad hoc committees and if they could count toward the committee participation requirement. Courtney noted that this language was removed but could be added back.
- Thelma suggested adding a committee dedicated to addressing program quality, service standards, and evaluating outcomes. Kate supported the idea but recommended delaying the addition until the V/TO is complete.

BOARD RECRUITMENT: Courtney Meyers-Keaton

Courtney facilitated a discussion on meeting Steering Council seat requirements that could strengthen the CoC's NOFO score. While many of the required seats are already filled, additional representation is needed to maximize scoring, including filling two remaining required seats and one Executive Committee seat.

- Areas of focus included business sector representation, additional elected/public official representation, and local court representation.
- Steering Council members discussed potential representatives, including individuals connected to Mel Trotter Ministries' business operations, the City of Grand Rapids, and the Kent County Sheriff's Office.
- Monique suggested reviewing attendance records and, where appropriate, transitioning inactive members off the Steering Council to make room for representation aligned with NOFO guidelines.

TREATMENT BED AND SERVICES AVAILABILITY: Courtney Meyers-Keaton

Courtney reported ongoing discussions with Sanford regarding treatment bed availability. She noted that this will require broader coordination among service providers, as current expectations call for approximately one treatment bed for every two individuals identified with a chronic substance use disorder during the PIT Count. Future discussions will focus on strategies for increasing bed capacity and determining any partnership agreements or MOUs needed to support these efforts.

ACTION ITEMS: **Courtney Meyers-Keaton:** Implement recommended edits to the policies before sending them to General Membership for review.

FUNDING REVIEW COMMITTEE NOMINEES

MOTION BY: **Ryan VerWys**

SUPPORT FROM: **Gustavo Perez**

DISCUSSION: In response to delays in HUD releasing application materials, additional Funding Review Committee members are being added to support the tight turnaround for this year's funding review process.

Colton Hyble (City of Wyoming) was approved to join the Funding Review Committee.

CONCLUSION: All in favor, motion carries.

KENT COUNTY COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT PARTNER FOCUS GROUP

DISCUSSION: Steering Council members participated in a focus group facilitated by Katelyn Kimball as part of a countywide research effort conducted every 3 years examining poverty and

barriers faced by Kent County residents. Steering Council members responded to questions about community strengths, resource gaps, populations experiencing heightened challenges, and opportunities for future investment.

Some topics discussed were:

- Community strengths such as resource availability, hope, systems-thinking, job training opportunities, strong cross-sector partnerships, and a commitment to growth and development.
- Service gaps related to workforce development supports, including job coaching, training capacity, and wraparound services for individuals seeking employment.
- Ongoing needs for housing, transitional housing (TH) and treatment beds, healthcare stabilization services, eviction prevention/diversion resources, transportation, and transportation/childcare options (especially for individuals working 2nd or 3rd shift.)
- Barriers disproportionately affecting certain populations, including racial discrimination, older single men, and people with disabilities.
- Barriers for youth including limited income, no rental or credit history, employment opportunities, educational barriers, financial competency, mental health needs, and limited family stabilization supports/family disintegration, highlighting that poverty extends beyond financial hardship alone.
- Areas where funding would be most beneficial including prevention and diversion assistance, expanded housing options, workforce support, and increased treatment and supportive service capacity.

ANY OTHER MATTERS BY STEERING COUNCIL MEMBERS

DISCUSSION: Tenisa shared an update on state budget discussions related to ESP funding, noting concerns about potential funding cuts and encouraging members to share any additional information as it becomes available due to the potential impact on services.

Elizabeth reported concerns HUD criteria for Fair Housing funding, noting that they may not be able to acquire funding until 2029. She shared that an advocacy letter is being prepared for elected officials. She offered to distribute additional information to interested members.

ACTION ITEMS: **Monique Carter and Tenisa Frye** - Connect about Financial Literacy in Youth.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY MATTER *(limit 3 min. each)*

DISCUSSION: N/A

ADJOURNMENT – *Next meeting: Aug. 21, 2026*