

Homelessness Prevention Network & Housing Resource Specialist Evaluator Request for Qualifications (RFQ)

On behalf of the Central Ohio Stable Housing Network (COSHN) and the City of Columbus, Community Shelter Board (CSB) seeks qualified respondents capable of conducting primary and secondary data collection and evaluation services starting June 2024. CSB seeks an independent evaluator to conduct, document, and present an evaluation of the Homelessness Prevention Network, as further described below, and consistent with the draft evaluation plan included in this RFQ.

The HPN evaluation is intended to provide local planners with process and outcome-related data, analysis, and corresponding recommendations that will inform current and ongoing improvement of HPN effectiveness, efficiency, and quality, as well as future opportunities to build on and enhance the HPN.

Interested parties should carefully review information included in this RFQ and provide the following information to Asli Buldum, Data and Evaluation Director, **at abuldum@csb.org, no later than 5:00 p.m., Friday, May 31, 2024.** Incomplete and late submissions may not be accepted. For questions about this RFQ, please contact: Asli Buldum at **abuldum@csb.org**.

CSB and COSHN partners strongly encourage RFQ submissions from companies that are minority and/or women owned, and those that have prior experience conducting qualitative evaluation activities with people who are economically disadvantaged.

Evaluator Qualifications

To be considered for this opportunity, interested companies must demonstrate the following qualifications. Collaborative proposals involving multiple providers with different areas of expertise are acceptable and encouraged, as needed, to fully meet these qualifications and fulfill the aims of this project.

- Basic knowledge of eviction and homelessness prevention interventions, including key funding streams supporting such interventions.
- Basic understanding of the Columbus and Franklin County homeless crisis response system managed by CSB and partner agencies.
- Ability to engage and empathize with very low-income households who experience severe housing instability and homelessness and who may face a wide variety of personal and structural barriers to achieving housing-related goals.
- Ability to effectively, efficiently, and ethically collect, aggregate, analyze, and present data on individuals, programs and processes of interest to CSB and COSHN and as further described in this RFQ.

RFQ Submission Content

Submissions to this RFQ should be no more than 5 pages in length and include the following information:

- 1. Company name, address, telephone number, and email contact address.** If the response involves more than one company: identify the lead company and each proposed subcontractor; describe the nature of the collaboration and any past collaboration; and describe the general roles/responsibilities for each party.

2. **Statement of understanding and preliminary evaluation approach:** Provide a summary statement indicating your understanding of the purpose and scope of this project. Briefly summarize your proposed approach to this project, including a basic and preliminary approach to conducting the HPN evaluation consistent with this RFQ.
3. **Key qualifications, capacity, and references:** Provide a summary description of key qualifications of your company and staff, specifically addressing each minimum qualification listed in the preceding section. Include at least 2 examples of relevant prior work that exemplify your experience and capacity to complete this project.

Provide at least 2 professional references able to describe your capacity to complete this project based on direct experience with your company. Include name, title, professional relationship, and contact information for each reference.

4. **Preliminary cost proposal:** Provide a preliminary cost proposal to complete the Evaluation Key Activities and Deliverables described in this RFQ. The preliminary cost proposal must describe cost assumptions and any considerations CSB should be aware of that may influence assumed costs, including costs that could change based on the final Scope of Work.

While it is expected that the final project contract cost will not exceed \$50,000, RFQ respondents should reflect the full anticipated costs relative to the Evaluation Key Activities and Deliverables, as further detailed in the draft evaluation plan included in **Attachment A: HPN Draft Evaluation Framework**. The proposal should include compensation for people with lived experience (PLE) who participate in interviews or focus groups at a rate of \$21/hour, as well as incentives for PLE participation in surveys.

Preliminary cost proposals are intended to inform CSB and the City of Columbus about the potential cost to complete the evaluation. CSB and the City of Columbus seek proposals that are cost-efficient and achieve the activities and deliverables described below. CSB and the City of Columbus reserve the right to reject any proposal. The selected company will work with CSB and the City to determine the final evaluation scope of work and project budget.

RFQ Submission

Submissions must be delivered via email as a PDF attachment not later than 5:00 p.m. (EDT), Friday, May 31, 2024, to:

Asli Buldum, Data and Evaluation Director
Community Shelter Board
abuldum@csb.org

RFQ Review & Selection Timeline

- 5/31/2024: RFQ Submissions due to CBS by 5:00 p.m.
- 6/3/2024 – 6/14/2024: RFQ review and interviews by CSB and City of Columbus
- 6/21/2024: Evaluator selection announced
- 7/1/2024: Evaluator contract execution
- 7/1/2024 – 6/30/25: Evaluator contract period

HPN Evaluation-Related Activities

Pre-Evaluation Period: November 2023-March 2024

- HRS core training (Housing Problem-Solving, Housing-Focused Case Management, eviction prevention, etc.)
- Network development access point recruitment in targeted areas based on housing insecurity heat map
- HMIS data collection set-up, data quality initial monitoring
- Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) targeting model development, including screening tool for ERAP assistance

Evaluation Enrollment Period: April 1, 2024 – September 30, 2024

- 4/3/2024: Initiation of targeted ERAP assistance, including mid-term assistance; begin data capture for evaluation (all enrollments during period)
- Ongoing:
 - HRS ongoing training, ongoing network development
 - Network development access point recruitment in targeted areas based on housing insecurity heat map
 - HMIS data collection; data quality monitoring, mitigation
 - ERAP application entry into HDS Allita data system
 - HRS dashboard report development, routine production

Evaluator Key Activities and Deliverables

- **7/1/2024-6/27/2024:** meetings with COSHN ad hoc evaluation committee to finalize evaluation plan
- **7/26/2024:** Final evaluation plan and qualitative data collection instruments
- **8/1/2024-12/30/2024:** Qualitative data collection per final plan (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews)
- **11/15/2024: Interim Evaluation Report**
 - Summative information on HPN development and implementation to-date
 - Initial qualitative findings
 - Quantitative data analysis
 - Measurable goal achievement during evaluation period (i.e., excluding post-assistance measures)
 - **December 2024:** COSHN stakeholder presentation and dialogue
 - Recommendations for near-term improvements
- **2/14/2025: Final Evaluation Report (1st draft)**
 - Summative information on HPN implementation and improvements to-date
 - Qualitative findings
 - Quantitative data analysis

- Measurable goal achievement, including post-assistance measures pending available data
- Recommendations for near-term improvement
- **April 2025:** COSHN stakeholder presentation and dialogue

- **6/30/2025: Final Evaluation Report**
 - Summative information on HPN implementation and improvements to-date
 - Final qualitative findings
 - Final quantitative data analysis
 - Measurable goal achievement, including post-assistance measures
 - Recommendations for long-term improvement and sustainment
 - **June 2025:** COSHN stakeholder presentation and dialogue

HPN Background

The Central Ohio Stable Housing Network (COSHN) serves to promote a community-wide, coordinated approach to keep individuals and families stably housed. The resources of COSHN partners are invested and coordinated with the intent to further prevent evictions and homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. COSHN is implementing a Coordinated Prevention Framework to practice and document our shared understanding of approaches that reduce housing insecurity generally, while also preventing literal homelessness and inflow of individuals and families into the homeless crisis response system. This Working Framework is a direct outgrowth, and represents the further evolution, of work conducted by COSHN partners. Additional background information is found in the [COSHN Overview & Framework \(v.1\)](https://www.csb.org/providers/applying-for-funds) posted at <https://www.csb.org/providers/applying-for-funds>.

Community Shelter Board leads a coordinated, community effort to make sure everyone has a place to call home. CSB is the collective impact organization driving strategy, accountability, collaboration, and resources to achieve the best outcomes for people facing homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County. CSB directly funds, manages, and strives to continuously improve systematic approaches to offering homelessness prevention, shelter, street outreach, rapid re-housing, and permanent supportive housing.

Funding for the Homelessness Prevention Network (HPN) and HPN Housing Resource Specialists (HRS), including related training and technical assistance, is provided by the City of Columbus using federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Provider contracts initiated in November 2023 and expire at the end of September 2025. Additional funding for HPN administration is provided via funding received by CSB from the Nationwide Foundation, Battelle, Cardinal Health, the City of Columbus, Franklin County, and private funders. Support for COSHN and HPN development, training, and technical assistance, including evaluation planning, is provided by Tom Albanese Consulting, LLC.

HPN was originally launched as a three-year demonstration pilot by CSB in 2020, with support from the Nationwide Foundation, Battelle, and Cardinal Health with an initial goal to provide more targeted housing crisis intervention for families and pregnant women facing imminent literal homelessness, thereby reducing demand for more costly and limited shelter and rehousing assistance.

The demonstration concluded in mid-2023 and, based on the success and learnings from the pilot, was expanded in Fall 2023 with new investment from the City of Columbus for 28 trained and certified Housing Resource Specialists across a diverse range of partner agencies. Today, HRS staff work together as a network, along with HPN “access points” to screen and triage households who are at highest risk for literal homelessness and offer immediate access to “Housing Problem-Solving”. Housing Problem-Solving (HPS) is a nationally recognized, evidence-based practice for helping households who are experiencing or about to experience a housing emergency that relies first on reducing urgency through strengths-based resource exploration, mediation and, when needed, expedited access to other assistance.

Starting April 3, 2024, HPN HRS staff will also have access to dedicated ERAP funding for rental arrears, deposits, and short-term rental assistance for HRS eligible households who also have a financial need, with “mid-term” or extended assistance available for households meeting additional targeting criteria. Local partners characterize the network as “Housing Urgent Care,” reflecting the scale and intended responsiveness of the HPN, as well as the focus on increasing access in higher need areas and through broad-based screening for households who might not otherwise know where to turn apart from the local

Homeless Hotline and emergency shelter system. The expansion of HPN via new city-funded Housing Resources Specialists and other partners allows the community to grow a network of trained staff within targeted areas experiencing higher housing insecurity and with community partners people are already familiar with, so there is more immediate and ready access to urgent housing assistance where and when needed and less reliance on our more costly and over-subscribed emergency shelter and rehousing resources. For additional information on HRS services, see [Housing Resource Specialist Manual \(v.1.1\)](#) posted at <https://www.csb.org/providers/applying-for-funds>.

HPN Impact Statement

The HPN assists households in Columbus and Franklin County who are imminently at-risk of literal homelessness to reduce risk and the need for homeless crisis interventions (e.g., emergency shelter, street outreach, and rehousing services). HPN providers seek to accomplish this collectively through broad use of standardized screening, and immediate access (within 2 business days) to intensive Housing Problem Solving, federally funded rental assistance, and other assistance offered by HPN service providers to high-risk households on a prioritized basis.

HPN Measurable Goals

1. $\geq 95\%$ of high-risk households referred via an HPN Access Point partner will be engaged by an HRS provider within 2 business days.
2. $\geq 85\%$ of households assisted by an HRS who need prioritized access to other assistance (e.g., ERA, food) will be immediately connected to that assistance.
3. $\geq 80\%$ of assisted households will have reduced risk upon exit from HPN assistance.
4. $\geq 85\%$ of assisted households will not be screened again at the same or higher level of risk within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance.
 - $> 85\%$ of households assisted with mid-term ERAP will not be screened again at the same or higher level of risk within 6 months of exit from HPN assistance.
5. $\geq 90\%$ of assisted households will not enter the homeless crisis response system (e.g., enter emergency shelter) within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance.
 - $\geq 90\%$ of households assisted with mid-term ERAP will not enter the homeless crisis response system (e.g., enter emergency shelter) for at least 6 months following exit from HPN assistance.
6. $\geq 90\%$ of assisted households will not experience a formal eviction summons within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance.
 - $\geq 90\%$ of households assisted with mid-term ERAP will not experience a formal eviction summons within 6 months of exit from HPN assistance.
7. $\geq 80\%$ of assisted households will report at least satisfactory experience with each of the following:
 - Ease of understanding, accessing, and navigating assistance
 - Responsiveness and timeliness of HPN/HRS services
 - Quality of engagement with HPN overall and HRS provider
8. $\geq 90\%$ of HPN/HRS partner staff will report at least satisfactory experience with CSB-managed HPN development, training, and HRS staff support.
9. $\geq 80\%$ of landlords receiving Emergency Rental Assistance payments will report at least satisfactory experience with ERA payment process. [Note: this measure is not included as part of the HPN Evaluator RFQ]

10. $\geq 80\%$ of landlords working with HRS staff assisting households with mid-term ERAP assistance will report satisfaction with:
 - Ease of working with HRS staff
 - Responsiveness and timeliness of HRS staff
 - Quality of engagement with HRS staff.
11. The average cost per assisted household will be less than the average cost to shelter and rehouse a similar unassisted household.

Attachment A: HPN DRAFT Evaluation Framework

[NOTE: Selected evaluator will work with CSB, CSB consultant, and COSHN Core Team to finalize evaluation framework and data collection/analysis plan by 6/28/2024]

Evaluation Area	Guiding Questions	Evaluation Measures	Sources/Methods
<p>Qualitative Experience</p>	<p>What aspects of the HPN model do partners and clients view as effective?</p> <p>To what extent is HPN assistance viewed as accessible by clients?</p> <p>To what extent is HPN assistance viewed responsive and timely by clients?</p> <p>To what extent is HPN assistance viewed as effective at identifying options and/or resources for immediate housing stabilization needs by clients?</p> <p>What aspects of HPN training, tools and resources do partner staff find useful and effective?</p> <p>Which communication and learning approaches do partner staff find useful and effective?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) #/% of assisted households reporting at least satisfactory experience with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ease of understanding, accessing, and navigating assistance b) Responsiveness and timeliness of HPN/HRS services c) Quality of engagement HPN overall and HRS provider 2) #/% of HRS staff satisfied with CSB-managed HPN development, training, and HRS staff support. 3) #/% of HPN/HRS partner staff reporting at least satisfactory experience with CSB-managed HPN development, training, and HRS staff support. 4) #/% of landlords working with HRS staff assisting households with mid-term ERAP assistance will report satisfaction with: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Ease of working with HRS staff b) Responsiveness and timeliness of HRS staff c) Quality of engagement with HRS staff. 5) Key aspects of HPN/HRS assistance clients, staff and other stakeholders find most effective. 6) Key areas identified by clients, landlord partners, and staff for improvement. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) HPN client interviews, surveys, and focus groups 2) HRS staff interviews 3) Landlord interviews, surveys, and focus groups 4) Training participant evaluation results 5) Other TBD

Evaluation Area	Guiding Questions	Evaluation Measures	Sources/Methods
	<p>What training topics do HRS staff find most useful and relevant?</p> <p>What changes can be made to improve access to, quality, and effectiveness of HPN assistance?</p>		
Service Outputs	<p>How many households receive HPN assistance and what are their characteristics?</p> <p>How do the characteristics of assisted households compare to households who experience literal homelessness?</p> <p>What types, amount, and duration of HPN assistance do households receive?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Households assisted <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) # households assisted by risk level and HRS provider b) Key characteristics: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Demographics: HH size, age HoH, race/ethnicity, disabling condition, veteran status ii) Income and benefits: monthly income, income sources, non-cash benefit sources iii) Housing situation and barriers 2) HPN assistance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) #/% provided <u>housing problem-solving assistance</u> b) #/% offered and received <u>prioritized access to HPN provider assistance</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i) Type of prioritized HPN assistance offered and received, including short-term and mid-term emergency rental assistance via city ERAP Prevent Homelessness Initiative. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) existing and custom reports and raw data export/analysis 2) HPN Online Screening & Assistance Tracking Tool completed by trained HPN Access Point staff using Zoho platform. 3) City ERAP PHI Screening Tool. This may require manual data extraction from PDF documents uploaded to HMIS. 4) HDS Allita data system raw data export/analysis (ERAP assistance). <p>TBD: Interview with convenience sample of households to supplement data, including housing situation and barriers: current and prior living situations, housing affordability, key housing screening barriers (income, legal issues, credit issues, rental history issues, ancillary support issues, etc).</p>

Evaluation Area	Guiding Questions	Evaluation Measures	Sources/Methods
<p>Outcomes & Impact</p>	<p>What housing outcomes do assisted households experience, both immediately and 3 months following HPN assistance? For mid-term ERAP households, 6 months following assistance?</p> <p>What are the characteristics of households with successful housing outcomes, initially and after three months? How do these compare to households with unsuccessful outcomes?</p> <p>What factors correlate with and seem to support successful housing outcomes? Which inhibit success?</p> <p>How much does HPN assistance cost overall? Per assisted household and per positive outcome? Relative to shelter and rehousing assistance?</p> <p>What effect does the HPN have on homeless crisis response system utilization? HRS provider agencies and other key stakeholders serving the target population?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) #/% of high risk households referred via an HPN Access Point partner engaged by an HRS provider within 2 business days. 2) #/% of households served that reduced risk upon exit from HPN assistance. 3) #/% of households served who are not screened again at the same or higher level of risk within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) #/% of households assisted with mid-term ERAP assistance who are not screened again at the same or higher level of risk within 6 months of exit from HPN assistance. 4) #/% of households served who do not enter the homeless crisis response system within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) #/% of households served assisted with mid-term ERAP assistance who do not enter the homeless crisis response system within 6 months of exit from HPN assistance. 5) #/% of households served who do not receive a formal eviction summons within 3 months of exit from HPN assistance. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) #/% of households served with mid-term ERAP assistance who do not receive a formal eviction summons within 6 months of exit from HPN assistance. 6) Comparative analysis of those screened as level 3 and 4 households who access and receive HPN assistance and experience a successful housing outcome versus those who do not, including average cost per household. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) existing and custom reports and raw data export/analysis and data matching with HPN Online tool and HDS Allita data system. 2) HPN Online Screening & Assistance Tracking Tool completed by trained HPN Access Point staff using Zoho platform. 3) City ERAP PHI Screening Tool. This may require manual data extraction from PDF documents uploaded to HMIS. 4) HDS Allita data system raw data export/analysis (ERAP assistance) and data matching w/HMIS. 5) HPN assistance cost data/analysis based on City contracts and client assistance records compared with shelter/rehousing costs provided by CSB. <p>TBD: Data matching for formal Evictions with Franklin County Municipal Court records.</p> <p>Data matching for subsequent shelter admissions will be conducted by CSB via analysis of HMIS data compared to HPN data. Completion target: 2/28/2025 for 3-month returns through 12/31/2024. 4/30/25 for 6-month returns through 3/31/2025.</p>