U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 　　　　*U.S. Department of Education*
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 　　*U.S. Department of Agriculture*
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 　　　　　　　　　*U.S. Department of Justice*
U.S. Department of Labor 　　　　　　　　　　　　　　*U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness*

Improving Access to Mainstream Services for Families with Children Experiencing Homelessness

Hilton Anaheim
Anaheim, CA
November 1-3, 2005

PRE-ACADEMY ASSIGNMENT

INSTRUCTIONS: Please complete Sections I (the Vision) and Section II (the Reality Assessment) and return it to HSR before the Policy Academy is convened. It will be up to your team to decide how frequently it will need to meet beforehand in order to complete the homework assignment and to adequately prepare for the Academy.

The expectation is that your team will come to the Academy having reached preliminary consensus on your vision and assessed the current reality in your State. With feedback from faculty and peers, your team will refine its vision and reality assessment, and define its goals and assess its priorities (Section III) at the Academy. You will also begin developing strategies (Section IV) and action steps (Section V) to help realize the team's vision.

I.　*The Vision (Your State Tomorrow).* The vision is the description of your "preferred future." It is the fundamental, unique purpose that identifies the scope of your team's activities. It will identify the uniqueness that has led to the creation of your team and will serve as the reference point for all future decisions. It represents the foundation for all of your priorities, strategies, plans, and work assignments. Although the vision can be modified over time to reflect changing environmental conditions or different philosophies, it should always serve as a reference point for strategic thought and action at specific points in time.

- Define your "preferred" future (i.e., coordinating services and housing, maximizing funding flexibility and capacity, availability and accessibility of resources, integrating systems of care, strategic priorities, development of affordable housing, etc.).

- What will be the government's role in this future (e.g., helping clients achieve self-sufficiency, ensuring an adequate safety net, etc.)?

- What roles will others play (such as faith-based organizations, consumers, employers, insurers, providers, and individuals)?

II.　*The Reality Assessment (Your State Today).* The reality assessment is a review and description of the current problem issues in your State and the policy actions taken to date to address these critical issues. Specifically, it involves the assessment of your system's strengths and weaknesses, including a review of the political environment in which you have

to operate. This assessment will be used to help your team narrow its priorities and identify appropriate strategies for achieving your vision. The reality assessment should be viewed as a completely separate component from your vision.

- Brainstorm the current problems/issues requiring attention in your State.

- Take a comprehensive inventory of current programs, activities, stakeholders, and resources (real or potential) at your disposal.

- Brainstorm the strengths of your current system. Weaknesses. Opportunities. Threats.

- Define the current political environment. What previous policy actions have been taken in the last five to ten years to address the critical issues you identified? To what extent are executive, legislative, administrative, and private sector policymakers positioned to improve access to mainstream services for people experiencing chronic homelessness including persons with serious mental health and/or substance abuse problems? How are each held accountable? Is there now significant stakeholder support to address the causes you identified? Are key actors at the State level ready to move forward? Are local communities and non-government stakeholders ready to move forward? How can the State assist?

III. *Team Priorities/Goals (Gaps).* Priorities/goals are defined as the gaps(s) between your preferred future (vision) and the reality of where your State is today. These are areas where your team will target its efforts. Priorities and goals are the concrete, specific aims that you are seeking to achieve, often within a stated time period. They form the guideposts in defining standards of what the team should accomplish. The formulation of appropriate priorities will be crucial to your team's success in accomplishing its mission, since these priorities will form the basis for planning, policy-making, and setting performance standards. When narrowing team priorities, you should take into consideration your team's vision of the future, the critical problems/issues identified by your team, the resources available, and the political environment in which you have to operate.

- Given limited resources, what aspects of the overall situation in your State do you plan to address (e.g., expand the availability of needed services, better integrate programs and services, reduce other system barriers to accessing services, integrate and improve data, simplify eligibility requirements, etc.)?

- Define your long and short-term goals. What results do you want to achieve in the next year? The next three to five years? Why do you view these as important?

- What are the challenges to achieving your desired results?

- What can you realistically accomplish in the short-term (six months to two years)?

- How will achievement of your short-term goals help you realize your long-term vision?

- What evidence or benchmarks will you need to achieve to know that you are making progress?

IV. *Strategies With Potential (Tactics).* Strategies with potential are broad ranging tactics that tend to require Statewide or cross-agency efforts to affect change in targeted conditions and causes. These are approaches you have brainstormed that would help close the gaps between your team's vision and the current reality in your State. Strategies involve the

actual pursuit of your goals. They are the overall aims to achieve an end result in accordance with your vision and goals. *Short-range strategies* are aims to be accomplished within a period of one year or less; *long-range strategies* are aims to be achieved within a period longer than one year.

- How must State policies and programs change to achieve your goals? What changes must occur in your State and local communities to achieve your preferred future?

- What approaches, tactics, or methods should States and communities pursue in order to reach the desired increased access to mainstream services by people experiencing chronic homelessness (e.g., standardize eligibility across programs, implement a systematic approach to information release, enhance funding and services for multi-needs clients, etc.)?

- Who has influence over specific policies and programs that can influence or advance your overall strategies (i.e., the Governor, State legislators, program administrators, private sector stakeholders, etc.)?

- Who will be responsible for coordinating the actions (and actors) needed to implement each strategy?

- What evidence or benchmarks (indicators) will you need to achieve in order to know that you are making progress? How will you collect this information?

V. *Action Steps.* Action Steps are specific activities that depend upon individual or departmental efforts to implement the broad-ranging strategies of your team. They are specific activities that will be undertaken in accordance with the strategies you have selected. Action steps require the identification of specific individuals (or entities) to perform specific activities within a specified time period. When deciding upon action steps, it should be taken into consideration exactly who will be responsible for completing each action, what resources they will require, what will be their timeline, and who will be affected by their actions.

- What specific actions must be taken to overcome identified barriers and to implement your strategies?

- Who will be responsible for taking each action? Coordinating each action?

- What resources will be needed to support each action?

- Who will be affected by each action?

- What is your timeline for completing each action?