



**Recommendations to make CT BoS and ODFC more equitable
and inclusive 2021-2022 Consumer Leadership Involvement
Project Consultants
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CLIP Cohort

In order to ensure that the voices and experiences of people with lived expertise/experience are fully embedded into the planning and the work of the CT Balance of State (CT BoS) and Opening Doors Fairfield County (ODFC) Continuum of Care (CoC), the Consumer Leadership Involvement Project (CLIP) convenes a statewide cohort of consultants that co-leads project work and discussions, provides feedback, and supports each other toward systems change. The CLIP consultants of the 2021-2022 cohort have participated in the CT CoC's as trainers, facilitators, panelists and active meeting participants. CT BoS and ODFC are stakeholder groups responsible for addressing and ending homelessness in their area. CT BoS and ODFC have initiated this project to increase the representation and influence of people with lived experience.

Organizing, training, and supporting persons with lived experience of homelessness to engage, and most importantly, to take proactive and affirmative steps toward ending homelessness is critically important. Involving persons with lived experience in policy/program development and spotlighting their participation provides opportunities to challenge bias against those the homeless sector serves. The CLIP consultants have reviewed, individually and as a team, the Governance Charter/bylaws for CT BoS and the Operating Guidelines for ODFC.

The CLIP Consultants of the 2021-2022 cohort have identified the following three recommendation areas as primary focuses statewide for the CT CoC's:

1. People experiencing homelessness should be made partners during their transition to being housed in permanent homes,
2. Race equity needs to be interwoven in all CoC work,
3. While evaluating performance measures and conducting qualitative analyses, it is imperative to remember that there is a human face behind each piece of data.
 - i. "You can't make me a number"

CLIP Consultants' analysis of the CT BoS Governance Charter/bylaws through the lens of the three recommendations:

Recommendation: People experiencing homelessness should be made partners during their transition to being housed in permanent homes.

- "First you meet their needs—then what? How do you totally integrate them in the community they are living in? We need a continuum of support"
- "We need to emphasize the coordinated part in the charter"
- "You can't teach life experience to people, that is why it is experience. We all bring something to the table that is unique to our life experience. There are ingredients that need to be put in the mix—diversity, inclusion, availability of services."
- "I believe a focus on the gap analysis that the steering committee proposes would be an interesting expansion, and that there needs to be a larger base for homeless and formerly homeless individuals to continue to have an impact in this work."
- "The Governance Charter does a good job at explaining the mission of the different parts and the bylaws of CT BOS including Reaching Home and the Steering Committee, but some of the language is difficult to understand for someone approaching the material from the perspective of a formerly homeless stakeholder."
- "I feel that it needs to be made clear in the document that consent must be given before client information is used, even anonymously."
- "It is important to provide consistent services across the state of CT. It feels like different geographic areas implement training and resources differently."
- "So, we do surveys and go and do research, ask them (persons with lived expertise) questions, so we can take pieces of their experience and tweak our program, all the while, not giving them the credit, they deserve and a place at the table that makes decisions. Having them involved in finding solutions is more than just completing a survey; it goes back to equity, and inclusion, and their right to be included in the decision-making process."
- We are "the ear to the needs of people in the committees we actually live in that are affected by the things in the system that needs to be changed."
- "I believe that a person with lived experience co-leading this work can highly influence a different perspective to people who may be in the work without any [experience]. In my experiences working with YETI meeting and CAN leaders a lot of them appreciate the opinion of someone going through their programs because they can tell you a different perspective to how it feels to be going through it in comparison to facilitating it. Some things such as not feeling safe in shelters, the onboarding processes, and different perspectives from communicating with other people going through like and dislike situations within these same programs, helped change the perspective of many different leaders in the programs. Having someone that knows policies and how it feels to be in it can only advance the understanding and likelihood of success for a lot of these programs."
- "This (the CLIP cohort) is the type of Forward-thinking momentum the system needs. We have to rewrite the thinking and history behind homelessness and people with lived experience!"
- "A person who has lived his life and those struggles and the pain maybe I can help create a better system and make some changes so people have a better understanding how to help others in life."

Recommendations: Race equity needs to be interwoven in all CoC work.

- "There should be acknowledgment of race equity and that homelessness impacts marginalized communities at a disproportionate rate."
- "Inclusion at every level is important."
- "Race equity is not highlighted in the system description of the Governance Charter."
- "There should be a larger base for people with lived experience to be involved- a diversity in platforms and more opportunities. Non-performative opportunities such as the Consumer Leadership Involvement Project cohort, jobs or consulting opportunities where we are valued equally to others in the field, having our voices

heard equally, maybe ways for us to be able to train into jobs that serve this field."

- "Do not suppress, rather openly acknowledge and confront one's biases."
- You need to "start communicating. Sometimes there is a fear of saying the wrong thing."
- "Start practicing these new strategies. Do the work. Acknowledge your bias."

Recommendation: While measuring performance measures and conducting qualitative analysis, it is imperative to remember that there is a human face behind each piece of data.

- "Making targets is very important but having lasting sustained progress with individuals is the way to achieve a long-term solution."
- Include the CT BoS acronym list at the beginning of the Governance Charter as a key.
- A flow chart within the governance charter indicating how the agencies interact with each other would be helpful.
- "We are the human face to the numbers referenced in housing and homelessness data."
- "You can't make me a number."
- "We need to educate and re-humanize funders."
- "I think the most important thing is the passage about duplication of efforts, leveraging resources and coordinated planning."
- "Sometimes the numbers are not exactly the whole story."
- People with lived experience can participate in "data collecting, taking census amongst our communities about programs and organizations that are already in place and to see how well they are working and ways of improvement."

Increased representation and meaningful participation of people with lived experience mean better, more well-informed solutions. People most impacted by decisions have a right to be included in decision-making. To quote a CLIP consultant, "people with lived experience are individuals that have struggled and have found solutions for their issues, with or without the assistance of service providers. They have an inside look on what works. Persons with lived experience have a keen insight on the barriers that are preventing them from getting to a place of wellness. This is what is missing when we make decisions. You will get a perspective of a problem that is distinctive to a person who has lived, and survived it. You will also gain a new awareness and understanding of what needs to be done to include their viewpoint and change the way you may approach implementing policies."