1.0: Purpose

To standardize data collection for all programs in Washoe County serving people experiencing homelessness, ensure data is centralized and apply common outcome metrics to best assess program outcomes. Homeless data collected will be used to provide public facing metrics such as the number of people actively homeless, the number of exits to permanent housing and recidivism rates of people falling back into homelessness.

2.0: Guiding Principles

- All Washoe County programs should operate according to evidence-based practices whenever possible and utilize promising practices when evidence-based practices are unavailable.
- Data collection should be standardized across programs. A minimum data set should be collected for all programs and additional metrics collected as needed to support analysis of specific program outcomes or requirements of specific funders.
- Program outcomes must be standardized and align with national standards such as those set by the United States Department for Housing and Urban Development (HUD).
- Data collected should be centralized to the maximum extent practical, allowing for more efficient analysis of program outcome measures across different programs.

This policy applies to all Washoe County operated programs, or any program receiving Washoe County funding, where the majority (50% or more) of people served are currently experiencing homelessness, including but not limited to all emergency shelter, transitional housing or other residential programs for people experiencing homelessness. This policy does not apply to departments of elected officials.

3.0: Definitions

Applicable Program: for the purposes of this policy, any Washoe County operated program, or any program receiving Washoe County funding, where the majority of people served are currently experiencing homelessness. This includes but is not limited to all emergency shelter, transitional housing, bridge housing or other residential programs for people experiencing homelessness. A program does not include activities of departments of elected officials. A program is defined as having distinct eligibility criteria and is not limited to one specific building or location.

Clarity Human Services: is a software application that is developed for human services client management. It is a web-based program that allows provider agencies to manage and secure client information. This software is used for the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for all homeless service providers in Nevada.

Continuum of Care: The Continuum of Care (CoC) is a HUD program that promotes community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. The program provides funding for efforts by nonprofit providers and state and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals and families while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individuals, families, and communities by homelessness. The program promotes access to and effects utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families. The program optimizes self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

Data: For the purposes of this policy, this refers to all relevant client information collected by programs serving the majority of people experiencing homelessness.

Data Centralization: the collection, storage and maintenance of data in one location that is accessible from many points.

Data Quality Standard: is the number (or %) of client records created in HMIS that are complete and accurate. The Data Quality Standard is set at 95% accuracy or better. All HUD-supported projects and all projects receiving grant funds are expected to correctly and completely input data on at least 95% of its client records. This means that no more than 5% of the client files created by an agency in the HMIS system can have inadequate, inaccurate, or incomplete data entered for the client. To achieve a higher data quality rating, agencies must complete all data fields on all clients entered into the HMIS system. All data fields for each data record must be accurate and complete, which is tested each month by Clarity Human Services. Providers may be asked to change data collection platforms or methods to remain in compliance with HUD or regional data collection standards within a period of 6 months.

Data Standardization: is the critical process of bringing data into a common format that allows for collaborative research, large-scale analytics, and sharing of sophisticated tools and methodologies.

Evidence Based Practices: is the objective, balanced, and responsible use of current research and the best available data to guide policy and practice decisions, such that outcomes for consumers are improved. Used originally in the health care and social science fields, evidence-based practice focuses on approaches demonstrated to be effective through empirical research rather than through anecdote or professional experience alone.

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): is a computerized data collection application designed to capture client-level information over time on the characteristics and service needs of all individuals experiencing homelessness, while also protecting client confidentiality. It is designed to aggregate client-level data to generate an unduplicated count of clients served within a community's system of homeless services.

Housing First: an approach to connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness quickly and successfully to permanent housing without preconditions and barriers to entry, such as sobriety, treatment or service participation requirements.

HUD: The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development

Promising Practice: programs and strategies that have some quantitative data showing positive outcomes over a period of time, but do not have enough research or replication to support generalized outcomes. It has an evaluation design in place to move towards demonstration of effectiveness; however, it does not yet have evaluation data available to demonstrate positive outcomes.

Process Measure: A quantifiable activity such as a service provided.

Outcome Measure: A quantifiable outcome as a direct result of a program or service.

4.0: Data Standardization

All programs that meet the criteria outlined above must collect a minimum data set in alignment with the most current HUD Data Standards. This data includes demographics, enrollment and exit data, income and benefit changes, services provided and exit destination to the maximum extent practical. Programs may identify a need to also collect additional program data beyond the basic data set to meet the requirements of a specific funder or to measure additional program outcome measures.

5.0: Process Measures

All programs that meet the criteria outlined above must utilize a standard set of process measures at a minimum to include:
- Number of unique clients served
- Number of beds available
- Bed utilization rate

6.0: Outcome Measures

All programs that meet the criteria outlined above must utilize a standard set of outcome measures at a minimum to include:
- Number of total exits
- Number of exits to permanent housing (per HUD definition of permanent housing)
- Number of exits to institutions, transitional housing, and other non-permanent housing types (per HUD definition of these exit types)
- Length of time in program prior to exit for both successful exits to permanent housing and all other exit types

- Return rate as measured by returning to homeless as indicated in HMIS across the Washoe County CoC at 6 and 12 months after exit
- Changes in income and benefit status

7.0: Data Centralization

All programs funded by Washoe County must enter all program data directly into HMIS per HUD data standards and the Nevada HMIS Data Quality Management plan.

All programs operated by Washoe County may enter data directly into HMIS or provide a nightly upload into HMIS. If data is uploaded nightly, it is the responsibility of Washoe County program staff providing the data to ensure that all data uploaded into HMIS is correct. Any data corrections needed are the responsibility of program staff for the program that data is uploaded into HMIS.

8.0: New/Additional Software Utilization

Prior to purchasing or implementing any new software or database systems for Washoe County operated programs primarily serving people experiencing homelessness, for the purposes of case management, collecting or storing client data, or other program data the following steps must be taken:

1. Consult with Washoe County Technology Services and the CoC Coordinator regarding any data that should be entering into HMIS or if HMIS can meet the software need.
2. Conduct a needs assessment including a review of the currently utilized system, the needs that are not being met and an analysis of potential new software that could be used to better meet the needs of the program.
   a. Include number of proposed users, cost of software (startup plus annual user fees)
   b. Include a detailed accounting of current workflows and areas where the current software system is insufficient
3. Determine if other departments use software that fills a similar need, and if additional licenses for that software can be purchased.
4. Washoe County Technology Services must review the needs assessment and provide feedback on if the needs assessment is adequate or if additional information needs to be gathered and submitted.
5. Final approval of any new software system for the purposes of case management, collecting or storing client data, or other program data must be provided by the Assistant County Manager over the program requesting the software system.