



Entry Form 2017 Annual Awards for Program Excellence

Entry Deadline: Thursday, June 15, 2017, Midnight ET

Each entry must include a completed entry form. Please complete a form for each entry your HFA is submitting. The completed entry form will become the first page of your entry.

This form is a fillable PDF. Type your information into the entry form and save it as a PDF. Please do not write on or scan the entry form. **Questions: Call 202-624-7710 or email awards@ncsha.org.**

Entry Title: Enter your entry's title exactly as you wish it to be published on the NCSHA website and in the awards program.

Category:

Subcategory:

Entry Summary: A 15-word (max) summary of the program, project, or practice you are entering.

HFA:

HFA Staff Contact:

Phone:

Email:

Visual Aids:

Are you mailing to NCSHA 10 copies of any visual aids that cannot be included in your entry PDF? Yes No

Payment:

My HFA is mailing a check to NCSHA.
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Minnesota Housing

**Step-Down Pilot Project: Creatively and Cost Effectively Expanding Permanent
Supportive Housing Opportunities
Special Needs Housing – Combating Homelessness**

Permanent supportive housing is a proven model that effectively and efficiently helps end the homeless experience for the most difficult to house populations. In the mid 2000's, like many states throughout the country, Minnesota began aggressively pursuing this model and funded both scattered-site rental assistance initiatives and site-based initiatives. Two types of site-based models emerged:

- Developments where a small percentage of overall units were designated as permanent supportive housing units; and
- Developments where 100% of units were designated as permanent supportive housing units.

By funding these two types of site-based models, along with the scattered-site model, Minnesota Housing helped to create a statewide portfolio that now offers more than 5,000 supportive housing opportunities. This portfolio offers a variety of housing to individuals and families in locations of their choosing that best meet their needs.

The Need

The developments with 100% supportive housing site-based services offer deeply affordable rents and intensive, wrap around services individually tailored to people experiencing the most chronic homelessness. Consequently, both the capital and service budgets are higher, making targeting of the units critically important. With the advent and implementation of Coordinated Entry, Minnesota is now well-positioned to make sure this higher cost, intensive intervention will be offered to the individuals or households who needs it the most. State data, however indicates that approximately 25% of current residents in 100% supportive services no longer need the significant level of services provided at the site, but they still need a rental subsidy and some minimal and/or intermittent service supports. These are people who have benefitted from supportive housing. Their housing stability has significantly increased, and they no longer need the services offered at their home, but remain in that high cost unit simply because they cannot afford housing in the private market. This is an inefficient use of scarce resources that may prolong the homelessness of another individual or household who could benefit from this resource.

The Solution

To mitigate this situation, Minnesota Housing sponsored and funded the Step-Down Pilot Project. This pilot project will develop system processes and administrative procedures to provide rental assistance and services to move people from site-based supportive housing into scattered-site housing.

The Step-Down Pilot Project's purpose is to:

- Identify households living in site-based settings who have stabilized enough to no longer need the high level of services.
- Transition these households into scattered-site units with rental assistance while providing access to low-intensity supportive services that are much more customizable to individual household circumstances.
- Evaluate both the development of this pilot project (for scalability purposes) and its effectiveness (**see attachment 1 – Step-Down Pilot Evaluation Framework**).

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Minnesota Housing believes the Step-Down Pilot Project will result in the following benefits:

- Expanded affordable housing supply.
- Increased efficiency of matching housing need and housing intervention.
- Reduced number of people experiencing long term homelessness.
- A step-down program blueprint available for replicability and brought to scale.

Minnesota Housing partnered with a well-respected local organization called Hearth Connection (www.hearthconnection.org) to take step-down from a concept to a reality. Hearth Connection is well suited for this work. They are a housing intermediary who has used thousands of client data points to develop the Flexible Service Levels Model, which includes the “Supported Independence” case management that we predict will be most appropriate in the pilot project (**see attachment 2 - Flexible Service Model Information Sheet**). This right-sized case management model offers the support residents need to transition out of supportive housing and integrate into housing offered by the private market. Coupled with Minnesota Housing funded rental assistance, this low cost, low need step-down model has helped make great strides in achieving the pilot project’s purpose and benefits listed above.

To increase the opportunity for replicability, Minnesota Housing and Hearth Connection developed an Evaluation Framework (**see attachment 1**) at the beginning of the pilot project. The evaluation will:

- Measure the effectiveness of the step-down program by tracking success indicators for all participating households who maintain and/or build ongoing stability and self-sufficiency as they transition out of full-service, site-based apartments and into scattered-site housing with low-level supportive services.
- Monitor the process of designing and implementing this pilot project. The evaluation will define the roles and expectations for each partner agency involved and document lessons learned along the way, to most effectively inform and prepare for future replications of this project.

Funding for the two year pilot project consists of:

- \$300,000 for rental assistance provided by Minnesota Housing.
- \$60,000 for evaluation costs provided by Minnesota Housing and philanthropy.
- \$222,474 for service grant funding provided by Department of Human Services Long Term Homeless Supportive Services Fund.

Success to Date

As of May 30, 2017, 20 households have enrolled in the pilot project, which was designed for a maximum of 23 households. We are proud to report that 18 have already moved into their new step-down housing or have a lease signed and will move soon. Remaining participants are expected to move into their new housing by the end of 2017.

When recruiting supportive housing sites to participate in this pilot project, Hearth Connection received positive feedback from owners about the concept. In a recent project update, Hearth Connection reported that “all site-based programs were very excited about this pilot project. Many said that this was exactly the kind of program that they needed to help clients in their next steps towards independence.”

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Residents are excited about this opportunity as well. Several data points collected from the first round of the participant survey responses show:

- All initial respondents indicated that their new living situation was better than their previous site.
- 80% rated it “a lot better than before.”
- 100% reported their satisfaction as 5 out of 5, “very satisfied.”
- 100% “would definitely recommend this program to others.”

When asked about the benefits of moving, one of the residents said, “The environment changed completely. It’s like being free here. It’s free of negativity here. It’s not stressful here.” Another resident is going to work and school, something he didn’t do in his previous housing site.

The Step-Down Pilot Project reflects Minnesota Housing and Hearth Connection’s deep commitment to ending the cycle of long-term homelessness. It’s a flexible, cost efficient model that helps individuals and families transition to the next level of affordable housing with minimal services, supports and frees up scarce resources for individuals and households who need higher levels of services and interventions.

Minnesota Housing Step Down Pilot Hearth Connection Evaluation Framework

Introduction / Background Information:

There are still many people who are long-term homeless in need of permanent supportive housing. In site based housing with onsite services and security, units turnover slowly and many properties have long waiting lists or only take applications when a unit is available. There are currently an estimated 25% of households living in LTH permanent supportive housing who no longer need the level of services provided at the site, but they still need a rental subsidy and some connection to service supports. Providing rental assistance resources to assist these households would open up the site based units to people in need of the level of services provided at the site.

The purpose of the Step Down Pilot is to develop the necessary system processes and administrative procedures to provide rental assistance and services to move people from site based supportive housing into scattered site housing.

Program Objectives:

The homeless services system of care needs all service levels to best match the needs of people experiencing homelessness and effectively use scarce resources. In site based supportive housing, when a resident reaches a level of stability and no longer needs or wants the level of services available on site, there is currently not a process or resources to move them on to more independent housing. In turn, the unit they are occupying is not available for someone who needs or wants the level of service provided at the site.

The purpose of this program is to 1) identify households residing in site-based settings who have achieved a degree of stability such that they no longer need the high level of service intensity offered by such programs, and 2) transition these households into subsidized scattered-site units while providing access to low-intensity supportive services that are much more customizable to individual household circumstances. The Step Down Pilot project will free up space for site-based programs to serve higher-need households for whom their programs are designed. Participants in the project will continue to have access to supportive services and subsidized housing much more tailored to their current level of stability as opposed to what it was at intake into the site-based program.

Measures of Success:

1. *The evaluation will measure the effectiveness of the program by tracking success indicators for all participating households in maintaining and/or building ongoing stability and self-sufficiency as they transition out of full-service, site-based apartments and into scattered site housing with low-level supportive services.*

Potential success indicators to be tracked

- *Housing stability measures*
 - *Service use patterns*
 - *Self-sufficiency matrix scores*
2. *The evaluation will monitor the process of designing and implementing this pilot project. It will articulate the roles and expectations held by each of the partner agencies involved and document lessons learned along the way, to most effectively inform future iterations of this project.*

Potential process and implementation measures to be tracked

- *Number of applications, number approved, number of individuals approved but do not participate and why*
- *Time to new housing (from application to lease-up)*
- *Landlord engagement activities and effectiveness*
- *Cost savings – cost in PSH compared to cost in Step-down pilot, including direct housing and services costs.*

Standards of Success:

Because this is a pilot project, standards are difficult to establish. Hearth Connection will however compare results to those of participants currently served in Hearth Connection's "Supported Independence" service category which closely aligns with the Step Down Pilot configuration.

Deliverables:

1. *Regular, ongoing reports, providing both snapshot and cumulative results.*
 - a. *For program participants, these reports will include information like time until housing, demographics, and matrix results.*
 - b. *For site partners, these reports will include updates on the impact questions asked in the proposal.*
2. *Hearth Connection Step-Down Suitability Standard – a set of criteria or guidelines that enable site-based housing providers to discern which households are good candidates for a "step-down" program of this nature. This would include an assessment tool and appropriate guidance based on results.*
3. *Final report detailing participant outcomes and programmatic results. This report can be used by MHFA, HUD, the RMC, and any other interested parties to guide ongoing development of a larger study or permanent program of this nature.*

Timeline

Activity

Additions to Co-Pilot, creation of initial guidelines
 Funding and project starts
 Interim report
 Interim report
 Interim report
 End of project
 Follow-up interviews complete
 Draft of final report
 Final report on project, including Suitability Standard

Deadline

December 31, 2015
 January 1, 2016
 June 30, 2016
 December 31, 2016
 June 30, 2017
 December 31, 2017
 March 15, 2018
 April 15, 2018
 May 31, 2018

Data Needed to Measure and Evaluate Success

Part 1. Data sources

Source	Frequency	Location
Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix	Every six months	Co-Pilot (existing functionality)
Hearth Connection Productivity Tool	Every six months	Co-Pilot (new functionality added with this project)
Case manager input via case notes	Ongoing	Co-Pilot (existing functionality)
Participant questionnaire	Initial and Follow-up at project conclusion. This questionnaire will be piloted/ tested by our existing Supported Independence population. Hearth Connection will subcontract with Wilder Foundation for expert assistance preparing for and carrying out the questionnaire.	Co-Pilot (new functionality added with this project)
Participant Interviews	This will be conducted through Hearth Connection and Wilder.	Collected and coded by Wilder, delivered to Hearth electronically
Demographic data	Ongoing	Co-Pilot (existing functionality)

Part 2 data sources:

Source	Frequency
Interviews with site-based staff	Ongoing
Interviews with mobile team staff	Ongoing
Interviews with Hearth staff	Ongoing
Financial records	Ongoing

Data Issues

The small size of this project means we won't be able to rigorously test our Suitability Standard guidelines, but we will be able to point future projects in the right direction. We also hope to learn and say something about the characteristics of households who will be most likely to not need housing subsidies in the future, a logical next step for some households, though robust analysis of that subgroup is beyond the scope of this pilot.

Evaluation Methodology

1. Participant questionnaire

One primary goal of the Step Down Metro Pilot Program is to identify the key characteristics that make a participant most likely to be successful in the program. This includes creating a tool that can be used for program replication or expansion to effectively screen potential participants and to evaluate their success over time.

1a. Developing baseline questionnaire

Wilder Research will collaborate with Hearth Connection staff, MHFA, the RMC, and other stakeholders to develop a questionnaire that can be used during program recruitment to screen potential program participants and identify a baseline for detecting changes over time. Hearth Connection staff, MHFA, the RMC, and other stakeholders will have the opportunity to give feedback and request any changes to the instrument during a round of preliminary revisions.

In order to gain the most useful information possible, it is important that the tool be brief, focused, and accessible and understandable to respondents. To ensure that the tool is as accessible and understandable as possible, we propose that Hearth Connection pilot the tool with individuals from their Supported Independence program, which is a strong proxy for the Step Down program participants. Wilder Research will refine the tool based on the results of the pilot.

1b. Developing follow-up questionnaire

In order to assess the outcomes associated with the pilot, Wilder Research will create a modified version of the baseline questionnaire that focuses on changes in key outcomes, as well as participant perceptions of, and satisfaction with, the program. This questionnaire will provide quantitative outcome data, which can be used to supplement the qualitative data proposed below.

2. Key informant interviews with program participants and non-participants

In addition to gathering quantitative information from program participants, Wilder Research will gather qualitative information in order to fully understand the participants' program experience. This more nuanced, in-depth information will provide important context for interpreting the quantitative results, and it will inform any program expansion and replication in order to best meet the needs of the people being served. We will also interview a sample of individuals who apply for this program but choose to withdraw. We are interested in the barriers those individuals perceive, and what might be keeping them from program participation.

2a. Developing interview protocol

Wilder Research will create a detailed protocol for collecting key informant interview data from program participants. The protocol will focus on participant experiences transitioning to their new housing, accessing supports they formerly accessed through their housing site, and managing their more independent housing situation. Program participants will also be asked about their perceptions of the program's strengths and opportunities for improvement.

2b. Conducting interviews

Wilder Research will be responsible for conducting the interviews with program participants. Our staff have extensive experience conducting interviews with homeless and formerly homeless adults. Based on this experience, Wilder will offer respondents the option of participating in interviews in-person at a location convenient to them or by phone. Because participants are receiving a considerable benefit from Hearth Connection in the form of a housing subsidy and support, they may be less comfortable speaking openly and honestly to Hearth Connection staff about their experiences. Wilder Research staff are not directly involved in implementing the program, which may allow participants to share their opinions more openly and honestly. Detailed notes will be taken during the interviews to ensure that high-quality information is documented.

2c. Analyzing interview findings

Researchers will use open coding to analyze open-ended interview data. Open coding involves developing categories based on concepts frequently appearing in responses to questions (themes). Within each of those concepts, sub-themes will be identified and coded. Close-ended data from the interviews will be entered into a statistical software package (SPSS 20.0) and analyzed by the research staff.

Data Infrastructure Needs

Co-Pilot is a custom, web-hosted database where all participant information is stored for Hearth Connection. It was designed and built during Hearth's initial pilot project to track participant information and remains our primary repository of information. Hearth Connection shares all relevant Co-Pilot data with Minnesota's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), as per state and federal data-sharing requirements.

We will need a place to store the additional data collected in the participant questionnaire that will be created and administered as part of this pilot. Co-Pilot will be expanded to house this new survey-delivery and storage module – the scale and scope of this pilot will not allow for HMIS development to store this information. An additional benefit is that the case manager and any other survey administrators can keep survey results stored in the same location as all other collected data. Having all of these data in the same place will facilitate analysis as we look for relationships and patterns in our successful program participants. The survey module will be built with enough flexibility and extensibility that future surveys (for this project or future projects) can be added with minimal extra work – this is important since this first-of-its-kind project might unearth different predictors of success or criteria from what we originally expected, and our technology systems will need to be flexible to pursue and store new information. Co-Pilot's robust reporting system and our access to the underlying data ensures that we will have access to (or can create) any reports needed.

Co-Pilot costs center around time spent by our contractor, Eric Hands. Eric is the original architect of Co-Pilot and maintains it today. Contracting Mr. Hands for new development ensures compatibility with the rest of Co-Pilot and allows for many economies in development and deployment. We also allocate a portion of Co-Pilot's ongoing maintenance and hosting costs on a per-household basis for all households whose information is stored there.

EVALUATION NARRATIVE

The purpose of this program is to 1) identify households residing in site-based settings who have achieved a degree of stability such that they no longer need the high level of service intensity offered by such programs, and 2) transition these households into subsidized scattered-site units while providing access to low-intensity supportive services that are much more customizable to individual household circumstances. This intervention will free up space for site-based programs to serve higher-need households (for whom their programs are designed), while providing the exiting households with access to a supportive housing setting much more tailored to their current level of stability (as opposed to what it was at intake into the site-based program).

In order to measure the impact of this program, we will conduct an evaluation along two dimensions, 1) effect on program participants and 2) effect on program's organizational partners.

Part 1: Impact on Program Participants

This component of the evaluation will measure the effectiveness of the program by tracking success indicators for all participating households in maintaining and/or building ongoing stability and self-sufficiency, as they transition out of full-service, site-based apartments and into scattered site housing with low level supportive services.

Key Questions (samples):

- How do organizations identify household readiness for a "step-down" in supportive housing?
- Does participant self-sufficiency improve?
- Are participants able to successfully find and replace the supports offered via the site-based model?
- Does moving and stepping to a lower level of supportive services lead to destabilization in the household?
- Are participants more or less satisfied with their housing and life circumstances after their move?
- Are households able to secure scattered site housing within a "reasonable" time frame?
- Others???

Data Collection Sources:

We'll collect this information through a number of data sources, both qualitative and quantitative, including:

Source	Frequency
Arizona Self-Sufficiency Matrix	Every six months
Hearth Connection Productivity Tool	Every six months
Case manager input via case notes	

Participant questionnaire	Initial and Follow-up at project conclusion. Also, this questionnaire will be piloted/tested by our existing Supported Independence population. Hearth Connection will subcontract with Wilder Foundation for expert assistance preparing for and carrying out the questionnaire.
Participant Interviews	This will be conducted through Hearth Connection and Wilder.
Demographic data via Co-Pilot	Ongoing

Deliverables:

1. Set of criteria or guidelines that enable site-based housing providers to discern which households are good candidates for a “step-down” program of this nature. This would include an assessment tool and appropriate guidance based on results.
2. Final report detailing participant outcomes and programmatic results. This report can be used by MHFA, HUD, the RMC, and any other interested parties to guide ongoing development of a larger study or permanent program of this nature.

Limitations:

The small size of this project means that we won’t be able to rigorously test our guidelines, but we should be able to point future projects in the right direction. We also hope to learn and say something about the characteristics of households who will be most likely to not need housing subsidies in the future, a logical next step for some households, though that’s a little beyond the scope of this pilot.

Part 2: Impact on Organizational Partners

This component of the evaluation will monitor the process of designing and implementing this pilot project. It will articulate the roles and expectations held by each of the partner agencies involved and document lessons learned along the way, so as to effectively inform future iterations of this project.

Key Questions:

- How quickly are site-based providers able to identify candidates and fill openings in the project?
- How quickly/efficiently are site-based providers able to fill the newly-created vacancies? (ties into coordinated entry)

- How is the service-delivery “environment” impacted at the sites (as multiple low-need households depart and vacated units are simultaneously filled with new, high-need households)?
- How were partners selected and how were roles and expectations defined?
- Systemic impact; better placement for the right services at the right time.

Data Collection Sources:

Source	Frequency
Interviews with site-based staff	
Interviews with mobile team staff	
Interviews with Hearth staff	
Financial records	

Deliverables:

1. Progress reports delivered every six months?
2. Final written report detailing lessons learned and recommendations for next steps and program replication (could be combined with full report including Part 1 of the evaluation).

Cost over the two years is estimated at \$59,347.

Hearth salaries/benefits	\$31,831
Co-pilot Database Development	\$10,016
Subcontract Wilder	\$15,000
Participant Incentives	\$2,500

What's Working: Flexible Service Levels

Hearth Connection's collaborative projects end the cycle of long-term homelessness. Through a large network of service providers, Hearth Connection offers access to supportive services and housing to nearly 1,300 children, adults and unaccompanied youth each year. In October 2011, Hearth Connection implemented a flexible caseload model that **better adapts to participants' changing needs while also serving a larger population --- all without raising the overall costs of services provided.**



Flexible Service Model - Greater Efficacy

Hearth Connection has a history of combining innovative ideas and data to identify what services and housing will best promote stability for individuals transitioning out of long-term homelessness. Based on best practices, Hearth Connection's service model traditionally emphasized intensive case management and small caseloads to support vulnerable households in making progress toward stability, recovery and self-sufficiency.

For people facing complex barriers like mental illness, chronic health conditions and substance use, the path to recovery and independence is seldom straight forward. Recognizing this, Hearth Connection revised its model to allow service providers to adjust caseload size according to participant needs instead of remaining at a static number.

Service levels now vary from very intensive for people new to the program and/or facing the greatest barriers, to less intensive services for those returning to stability over time.

This flexible model tailors services to the changing needs of participants while tracking outcomes to ensure that reduced services do not result in reduced outcomes. Participants are closely monitored by case managers to determine if needs are being met and if the household can maintain stability with less intensive case management.

KEY RESULTS

Cost per household
REDUCED by 41%

Northeast Region Cost
↓ 47%

Southern Region Cost
↓ 27%

Northeast Region Cost
↓ 32%

KEY RESULTS

Participant
households
SERVED
per service
dollar
INCREASED 69%

Metro Households ↑ 89%

Southern Households ↑ 36%

Northeastern Households ↑ 46%

Service Levels

Standard: 3+ meetings a month, weekly phone contact.

Medium: 2-3 meetings a month, bi-monthly phone contact.

Low: Less than two meetings a month, no more than one phone contact a month.

Supported Independence: Minimum of one meeting per quarter to complete necessary paperwork.