

Chapter Fifteen: Managing the Work



The work of the local homeless liaison can be demanding and varied. Whether you are a new or seasoned liaison, full time or part time, there are a number of strategies that you can implement to work more effectively and efficiently. The suggestions provided in this section will help you organize your work, increase your capacity, and prioritize your activities.

Section 15.1 Identify the Level of Urgency

In the course of a day, you are likely to face a number of challenges and tasks that need attention. It is important to keep in mind that not all tasks are of equal importance. Quite often, taking care of something important in a systematic and comprehensive way will prevent the issue from becoming a crisis later.

One way to approach multiple demands is to look at Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Effective People*. Covey suggests that work can be categorized into four quadrants, as illustrated in Table 15.1 Covey's Quadrants.

According to Covey, effective people try to spend as much time as they can in Quadrant II and to limit time spent in Quadrant IV. This proactive strategy of focusing on important work that is not urgent and avoiding time wasters can reduce the need to address Quadrant I issues. Prioritizing your work by determining in which quadrant the task would fall can help you decide where to spend your time. Note that a number of tasks may begin in Quadrant II but become Quadrant I if not completed in advance. For example, planning your annual data submission as a long range project may have a number of steps that, if addressed early, are important but not urgent. Without preplanning, the submission of data can "creep up on you" and become an urgent, deadline-driven project.

Appendix 15.A Template of Quadrants to Determine Priorities provides you with a table divided into the four quadrants so that you can determine on which important but not urgent activities to focus.

Table 15.1 Covey's Quadrants

	URGENT	NOT URGENT
IMPORTANT	<p><u>QUADRANT I</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging transportation to the school of origin • Resolving a dispute • Connecting a homeless family to a place to stay • Responding to a time sensitive request from a legislator, the media, public, or superintendent • Meeting the deadline to submit data for the Consolidated State Performance Report (CSPR) 	<p><u>QUADRANT II</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting a needs assessment to prioritize tasks • Developing local policies and procedures to remove barriers to enrollment and attendance • Providing awareness and training to school and school district staff • Developing collaborative partnerships • Preparing CSPR data collection
NOT IMPORTANT	<p><u>QUADRANT III</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending mandatory staff meetings not related to homeless students and their needs • Responding to a request for information that could easily be posted on the district website • Searching through files to compile information in preparation for a monitoring visit 	<p><u>QUADRANT IV</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responding to every email as it arrives in your office, rather than prioritizing which needs an immediate answer • Meeting with colleagues on issues not related to serving homeless children and youth • Attending community meetings in which you do not have a specific role

Section 15.2 Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

In an era of limited resources and competing agendas, it is often easy to lose sight of the purpose of your work. The following two guidelines will help you keep focused when serving homeless children and youth.

- 1) Case-by-case determinations are a must. All homeless families, children, and youth are different, as are the circumstances that brought them into homelessness. Therefore, each child or youth's situation must be reviewed individually to determine how to apply the McKinney-Vento Act and identify appropriate services.
- 2) All services and decisions should be child-centered and in the best interest of the student. Every discussion and task you undertake

should focus on what is in the best interest of children and youth. Keep in mind, and remind others as often as necessary, that the goal is the success of homeless children and youth in school. Sharing the stories of children and youth when you advocate for their needs puts a face on the decisions that are made.

Section 15.3 Know the Law

Familiarity with the McKinney-Vento Act is critical for liaisons to successfully apply it. You should read the full text of the law (See 15.9 Useful Links) and keep a copy on hand to revisit on a regular basis. Some liaisons have tabbed key sections and definitions in the Act to make it easy for them to quickly find answers when questions arise. The following list provides some of the key passages to which liaisons need ready access:

- Local educational agency (LEA) responsibilities: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)
- Local liaison duties: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(6)
- Enrollment: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(C)
- School selection: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(A)
- Best interest: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(B)
- Dispute resolution: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(E)
- Transportation to and from the school of origin: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(1)(J)(iii)
- Comparable services: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(4)
- Definition of homeless : 42 U.S.C. § 11434a (2)
- Definition of unaccompanied youth: 42 U.S.C. § 11434a (2)(B)(6)
- Definition of the school of origin: 42 U.S.C. § 11432 (g)(3)(G)
- Definition of enrollment: 42 U.S.C. § 11434a (1)
- Authorized activities for subgrants: 42 U.S.C. § 11433 (d)

Section 15.4 Identify Your Supports

Having resources and supports at your fingertips will enable you to access help when you need it. Some liaisons call these resources their “Top Fives.” Appendix 15.B Top Five List is a worksheet that will help you create your own list of key resources.

While this list should be tailored to your own needs, some resources and key contacts are recommended below.

<p>People to Know</p>	<p>State Coordinator Title I Coordinator Child Nutrition Coordinator Pupil Transportation Director Data Manager Budget Manager</p>
<p>National Resources</p>	<p>National Center for Homeless Education National Association for the Education of Homeless Children & Youth National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty National Center on Family Homelessness</p>
<p>Documents to Keep on Hand</p>	<p><i>McKinney-Vento Act</i> <i>Education for Homeless Children and Youth Non-Regulatory Guidance</i> <i>NCHE Homeless Liaison Toolkit</i> NAEHCY Frequently Asked Questions Child Nutrition Memos</p>
<p>Programs With Which to Coordinate</p>	<p>Title IA Child Nutrition Special Education Head Start Continuum of Care Child Welfare</p>
<p>Key NCHE Briefs</p>	<p><i>Determining Eligibility for Rights and Services Under the McKinney-Vento Act</i> <i>Guiding the Discussion on School Selection</i> <i>Serving Students Experiencing Homelessness Under Title I, Part A</i> <i>Transporting Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness</i> <i>Supporting the Education of Unaccompanied Homeless Students</i></p>

Section 15.5 Create Capacity in Others

Making sure that school and district staff and administrators understand the needs of homeless students and their rights under the McKinney-Vento Act enables them to work more effectively with the students. Seek opportunities

to provide staff and administrators with training and information, and establish routine communication with them. Many issues can be addressed at the school site without your intervention once others are trained on basic information related to the McKinney-Vento Act. This will preserve your time for addressing more complex issues.

As you begin planning awareness and training activities, remember to schedule the activities on an annual calendar to help you prioritize. For example, in a district with a large number of new enrollment staff, training for those staff members should be conducted as soon as possible.

LEAs with a large number of schools or a part time local liaison frequently appoint a school level contact in addition to the district liaison. Assigning a point of contact in each building will make it more likely that materials sent to the school regarding homelessness will get to appropriate staff and be read. The contact becomes a resource to call when problems arise. You can work with principals to identify appropriate contacts and create a simple form for them to complete to ensure you have the correct person's contact information. (See Appendix 15.C for a sample.) School level contacts should be

trained on the McKinney-Vento Act and on protocols for identifying, enrolling, and serving homeless children. They should also be provided posters and flyers to disseminate at their school and places in the community.

Section 15.6 Assess and Prioritize Needs

Most program managers agree that designing services and activities based on a needs assessment is a way to target time and resources in the most effective way. Whether you have the time and support to conduct a formal needs assessment or can only review a set of questions about homeless students in your LEA, a focused effort to determine the most critical needs of students and the existing gaps in services will help you identify important issues to address.

Based on the McKinney-Vento Act and good practice, ten standards and indicators of quality McKinney-Vento programs were developed by NCHE and included in Non-Regulatory Guidance. The ten standards provide an overview of the main areas your homeless education program should

address. The indicators are suggestions for how the standards can be measured. Section 15.9 Useful Links contains more detail regarding these measures.

Another NCHE document that will assist you in assessing the needs of homeless students in your LEA is *Educating Homeless Children and Youth: Conducting Needs Assessments and Evaluating Services - A Guide for SEAs, LEAs, and Local Schools*. (See Section 15.9 Useful Links.) This document provides a wealth of good strategies for conducting a needs assessment. It includes a worksheet for LEAs, which aligns with LEA requirements in the McKinney-Vento Act, good practices promoted in the Non-Regulatory Guidance, the standards and indicators for quality McKinney-Vento programs, and priorities established by federal monitoring. The worksheet included in the needs assessment guide is also included for your convenience as Appendix 15.D Needs Assessment Worksheet and Summary.

Needs assessments should be updated annually with new numbers and data in order to identify trends and emerging issues. Applications for subgrant funds must also include a needs assessment as part of the application.

Not only a good tool to assist you in planning your program, a needs assessment is also essential for increasing awareness and advocating for resources. It can provide direction for discussions with the Title I Coordinator and community agencies.

Section 15.7 Create a School District Homeless Education Protocol

A homeless education protocol is a written plan detailing the district's procedures for interacting and communicating with and about homeless students and families. It includes checklists for tasks; delineates clear roles, responsibilities, and timelines; and requires the use of standard forms across the district. Standardized processes ensure consistency, enable better service provision, and create opportunities for staff to develop good relationships with students, parents, and community members.

District protocols for serving homeless students are based on the responsibilities of the liaison and the LEA, including

- identifying and enrolling students;
- linking homeless students to educational and related services;

- informing parents, guardians and unaccompanied homeless youth of student rights and available services, including transportation;
- providing opportunities for parents to participate in their children's education;
- posting public notice of educational rights;
- mediating disputes;
- collaborating and coordinating with State Coordinators, community and school personnel;
- reviewing and revising policies that act as barriers, including enrollment, transportation, immunizations, residency, birth certificates, school records, other documentation, and guardianship policies; and
- giving special attention to out-of-school homeless youth.

Enrollment procedures for front office staff are a major component of any district's policy and procedure protocols. Policies for enrollment staff should establish

- conditions when front office staff may determine eligibility,
- guidance on when to refer families to the liaison,
- expectations about confidentiality and sharing information,
- steps to ensure all siblings are identified, and
- directions for noting homeless status in records.

To further simplify procedures, liaisons should provide enrollment staff with

- tips for talking with families;
- substitute terms for homeless;
- topics to cover with families in a checklist format;
- information on the definition of homelessness, educational rights of homeless students, and their options for school selection;
- steps to take to acquire missing records;
- steps to take if a dispute requires resolution; and
- a form to quickly assess student needs, including academic, basic, and other needs that can be addressed by the school or a collaborative partner.

School personnel often struggle with how to enroll and serve unaccompanied homeless youth, so policies dealing specifically with this population will be very useful. Issues to consider include who can enroll an unaccompanied homeless youth; who can make school placement decisions and under what

conditions; who is responsible for arranging transportation and how that should be done. Other important considerations include deciding whether the district will assign an unaccompanied homeless youth an advocate or rely on the liaison to assist the youth in the case of a dispute and identifying appropriate persons to sign medication logs, permission slips, class schedule changes, and notes related to attendance and discipline.

Section 15.8 Keep Program Records and Documents

The most efficient programs have records and documents that are organized and easily accessible. Not only will the local liaison be required to produce documents in local audits and state monitoring visits, but these materials provide the historical context for your program, which can be passed along to the next liaison. Some liaisons have had the unfortunate experience of coming into the position with no records and documents available to them. If you were one of these liaisons, what documents do you wish you could have had to review when you started in the position? If you were a liaison that did inherit good records from your predecessor, what documents were the most helpful to you as a new liaison? Your answers are likely the documents that are now most important for you to keep on file.

Moreover, if records and documents are kept in an organized fashion, when your program is monitored, you will save a great deal of time in compiling materials, either in hard copy or electronically.

Documents specific to your state and LEA may include

- correspondence from the State Coordinator;
- state and local dispute resolution policies;
- forms and templates related to enrollment, written notice for denial of school enrollment, and parent contracts;
- memoranda of agreement with local service providers and partners;
- Consolidated State Performance Reports;
- monitoring reports;
- contact information for community collaborators;
- Title I, Part A set-aside information;
- subgrant applications;
- needs assessments;
- records related to completed disputes and written notice provided to parents and youth;

- subgrant expenditure reports; and
- phone and email logs.

Phone and email logs, or barrier tracking logs, should include all calls from parents, administrators, and staff related to enrolling and serving homeless students. While many liaisons keep informal records of phone calls and email for a short period of time only, keeping these logs on file provides important information on what issues require more training, what policies should be changed, or which staff and schools have the greatest challenges. Barrier tracking logs are an important tool to assist you with prioritizing your activities and targeting time and resources where they are most needed. For a sample form, see Appendix 15.E Barrier Tracking Form.

Section 15.9 Useful Links

McKinney-Vento Act

http://center.serve.org/nche/downloads/mv_full_text.pdf

Educating Homeless Children and Youth: Conducting Needs Assessments and Evaluating Services - A Guide for SEAs, LEAs, and Local Schools

http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/na_eval.php

McKinney-Vento Data Standards and Indicators – 2006 Revisions

http://center.serve.org/nche/pr/st_ind.php#2006

Section 15.10 Resources and Tools for Chapter Fifteen

Appendix 15.A Template of Quadrants to Determine Priorities

Appendix 15.B Top Five List

Appendix 15.C School Level Point of Contact Information

Appendix 15.D Needs Assessment Worksheet and Summary

Appendix 15.E Barrier Tracking Form