

Speaking the Same Language: Aligning Data, Performance, and Program Needs

NEW COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE, OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT + HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED

QUOTES COURTESY KIM BONES • PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR, HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES UNLIMITED AND COYAN LEWIS • PROJECT MANAGER, OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, NEW COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

“[ECS] has hands on knowledge... They got what we were saying. And made suggestions that make us even better.”



New Communities Initiative began in 2005 as a local response to neighborhood redevelopment in the wake of federal budget cuts to housing revitalization programs and increasing crime and poverty in D.C. neighborhoods.



Founded in 1982, **Housing Opportunities Unlimited** provides both relocation and support services to residents in affordable and mixed income communities.

New Communities Initiative (NCI) is an innovative, long-term community development program through the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development in Washington, D.C. designed to revitalize four distressed public housing buildings and redevelop neighborhoods into dynamic, mixed-income communities. It offers focused support for both the physical housing units as well as the people or “human capital” in them.

Housing Opportunities Unlimited (HOU) has been involved with NCI since 2007. They have 13 staff members and provide comprehensive case management services to the residents in two of the NCI subsidized housing programs, Northwest One and Park Morton, including support with:

- Employment
- Education
- Financial literacy
- Health and wellness
- Parenting

In addition to HOU, Homes for Hope and Far Southeast Collaborative are organizations that also provide NCI case management services. These services are especially valuable when NCI residents are relocated during construction periods. These services and organizations are funded by grants through the Deputy Mayor’s Office of Planning and Economic Development. ▶

“They really understand human services. We said we want to be able to capture this or that in our report, we want to be able to pull up this. ECS had an answer for everything. Some things they instantly fixed for us, and we were so excited.”

“Our reports are able to capture data that we weren’t before. Our data is a lot more accurate. And when we have to prepare monthly reports... we can grab exactly what we need and see it right in front of us.”

Focused, Personalized Attention

In 2014, in order to track program performance and client outcomes across all sites in the NCI program, the Human Capital program decided to switch to the ETO Software® system. After learning about the value of custom system implementation and performance management design for multi-site programs, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development hired the Exact Change Strategies (ECS) team to support NCI. Throughout the swift planning and implementation timeline, ECS was able to offer comprehensive and personalized support to the NCI teams and leaders. This included the development and implementation of ECS’ signature Performance Management Frameworks as well as on-site training, strategic technology support, content revisions, and system testing and launch.

During the project, ECS consulted and met with all staff at HOU as well as with its program leaders. At the outset, these meetings were focused on brainstorming to draft and finalize the overarching Performance Management Framework to cover program goals, activities, and intended outcome and impacts – as well as how the

new software system could streamline NCI’s progress toward these goals. As the project continued, ECS offered insights and ideas to improve data collection, performance management, and reporting based on a deep understanding of the day-to-day workflow and realities that HOU staff were facing. ▶



ARDA SANASCOGILARI/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

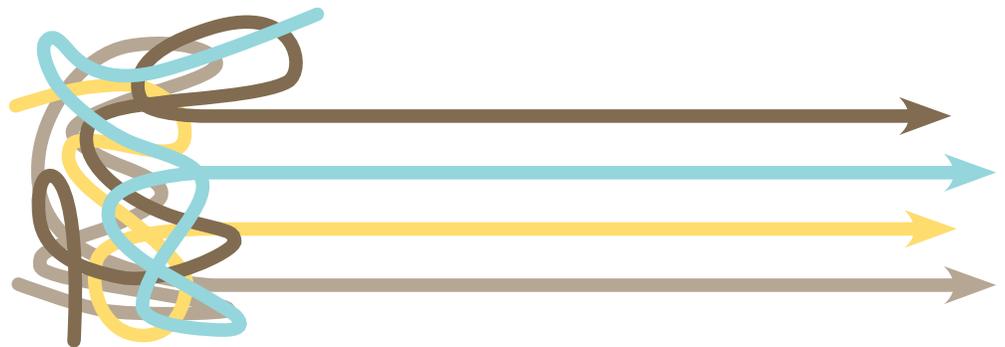
“Everything [ECS] said they were going to do they did. I would recommend them for training and for brainstorming ways to help staff figure out what they actually need and articulate that.”

A Shared Understanding of Human Services

When developing a professional partnership, it is critical to have and use a common language in order to set shared goals and collaborate to achieve them. When it comes to the collection and use of key data indicators and performance management systems, human services programs often find it difficult to find consultants who “speak their language” and understand the complex dynamics and realities they face every day. Together, ECS and HOU were able to achieve so much to advance the NCI goals because they were able to deeply understand one another: ECS brought a team with extensive, firsthand experience in nonprofit and human services work; HOU and NCI brought similar experience in the field and a drive to improve their vision and system in order to best serve their clients and overall program performance goals.

Two additional key elements of this successful partnership were the hands-on collaborative work and all key players’ genuine interest in NCI’s success. Members of the ECS team spent time with the individual service providers involved NCI, including HOU, in order to fully grasp each provider’s goals as well as the common challenges their staff were encountering in the ETO system. By being adept in the system and knowing all its capabilities, ECS was able to translate HOU’s performance and data management requests into immediate improvements as well as follow through with ideas and solutions for persistent issues. For example, based on a discussion with HOU staff, ECS was able to streamline a common task down from several roundabout clicks into one accessible shortcut click. ECS was also able to provide training to HOU and other NCI team members on the array of changes and improvements made. ▶

“They made ETO a lot more user-friendly for us. ...[They] removed unnecessary steps and created more shortcuts. It saves a lot of time. I use data for performance management now. And the case managers, they keep track of their caseloads. They couldn’t trust the numbers before.”



“When you’re in human services and working with data people, it sometimes can feel like we’re speaking people-wise and they’re speaking software-wise, but ECS understands what we’re saying...It doesn’t feel like we’re speaking different languages.”

“When is [ECS] coming back? We’re ready for another round!”

Impacts and Future Inspiration

NCI now boasts a faster, more efficient ETO system that is user friendly for its grantee organizations and staff. It provides reliable and accurate data as well as a variety of reporting options. Previously HOU staff did not have full faith in their data as they noticed errors and duplications. *Now, case managers and leadership are more comfortable and confident in the system, and can use it to track caseloads as well as produce reports that are used both internally and for municipal grant reporting.* The system not only works better for everyone’s needs, it clearly reflects overarching staff and program performance goals that allow leaders to chart and showcase their progress in human capital development (of clients as well as staff) throughout the multi-year NCI program.

Key Early Progress

- **\$100M** invested in housing and community recreation, libraries, and schools
- **\$32M** invested in grants to service providers to provide resident support
- **1,191** housing units built between 2005 and 2017
 - including 346 public housing units replaced and 592 affordable housing units built

See more in the [2016–2017 NCI Stakeholder Report](#). More data is now available for future reports.

Beyond all of this, the updated system and framework have inspired NCI and HOU leaders to use performance management in new ways in order to reach their ultimate vision. This includes learning from other programs and organizations elsewhere in the country who have also been ECS customers as well as making plans to further polish and enhance their performance management techniques and capacity through a new collaborative project with ECS. ●

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CONTACT

Exact Change Strategies • contact@exactchangestrategies.com
512-693-9339 • www.exactchangestrategies.com