HEARTH ACT IMPLEMENTATION
Homeless Consumer Focus Groups
Discussion Questions and Report Forms
October 2009

SUMMARY INFORMATION ABOUT FOCUS GROUP

Convened by (name of organization host(s))

________________________________________________________________________

Point of Contact (Name, Telephone Email)

_______________________________________________________________________

Dates(s) held ____________________________________________________________

Location(s) ______________________________________________________________

Geographic Area (specify the metropolitan city, county, rural region, or other geographic area from which focus group participants were recruited)

______________________________________________________________________

SUMMARY INFORMATION ABOUT FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

Total Number of Participants _______________________________________________

Please check all categories in which one or more of focus group participants may be categorized (Please complete to the extent you are able).

Single Adult ________ Family Head of Household _________ Homeless Youth _______

Veteran ________ Disabled _______ Elderly ________

Street ________ Emergency Shelter ________ Transitional Housing ______

Permanent Housing ________ Doubled-Up ________ Other ______

Please collect and attach a list of email addresses for any participants with email and who would like to be added to NCH’s email distribution list.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Topic 1: Definition of Homelessness

The HEARTH Act provides a new definition of the various living arrangements that are considered to be “homeless” for purposes of determining whether an individual is eligible for shelter, housing, or services funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. What we are hoping to learn from you today are your recommendations for educating people experiencing homelessness about the new definition.

Question 1: Do you think the government has a responsibility to tell people that the living arrangements in which they find themselves may make them eligible for HUD homeless assistance programs because they may be considered “homeless?”

(Enter typed responses here and thereafter following each question.)

Question 2: If so, what steps should the government take to make people more aware that their living arrangements may qualify them for HUD homeless assistance programs?

Question 3: Should organizations receiving HUD homeless assistance program funds provide information about the types of living arrangements that constitute “homelessness,” to people requesting the organization’s help?

Question 4: Should people seeking help from a homeless assistance organization be required to provide “proof” of their homeless condition? Is it reasonable for the government or a service provider to ask for proof? What do you consider do be reasonable proof of being homeless?

Question 5: Should people who are denied admission into a homeless assistance program because someone doing an intake decides your living arrangement is not considered by the government to be homeless have a right to appeal that denial?

Question 6: If so, to which organization or agency in our area would you feel comfortable appealing that decision?

Topic 2: Consumer Participation in Homeless Assistance Planning

HUD homeless assistance program dollars are awarded to service providers through a process called the “continuum of care” where applications for projects from an entire geographic area are considered as a package. Under the new law, this application is going to be prepared by an entity called the “collaborative applicant.”

One of the responsibilities of the collaborative applicant is to ensure that the views and recommendations of various “stakeholders,” including people experiencing homelessness, are collected and given consideration when the applicant is seeking funds.
Question 7: How well do you think that government agencies and service providers in our geographic area are doing in to involve people experiencing homelessness in preparing our area’s response to homelessness?

Question 8: Have you ever been asked before by a government agency or a service provider to offer feedback on the quality of services you are currently receiving from them?

Question 9: If so, how were you asked for your opinion? And did it feel like a positive thing that was being taken seriously or just someone asking you because they were told they needed to?

One idea that has been considered in the past would be to require the “collaborative applicant” to establish a decision-making body with a majority of representatives on the body being people experiencing homelessness, people formerly experiencing homelessness, and/or homelessness advocacy groups.

Question 10: Do you think that it should be a requirement that “collaborative applicants” establish decision-making bodies, or boards, of which the majority of members are people experiencing homelessness or their advocates?

Question 11: What are some other ways that organizations responsible for planning the HUD application of funds should do to gather views and recommendations of people experiencing homelessness?

Question 12: Which of the methods that you suggested above do you feel will produce a better result than others in terms of getting your views known to people who make decisions?

**Topic 3: Homeless Management Information System**

Service providers that receive HUD homeless assistance program funds are required to collect data about the people they are serving. This data is reported to the federal government through a database called the Homeless Management Information System, or HMIS.

We are interested in knowing your views about your level of comfort with this data collection.

Question 13: Have you personally experienced a situation where someone in government, law enforcement, or another service provider learned something about you that you did not want them to know because information about you was found out through the homeless management information system? Do you know anyone who had this happen to them?

Question 14: When you are being admitted into a homeless program, should you be specifically notified that the service provider is going to collect some information about you and enter it into a data base?

Question 15: If you think a notice should be provided, should that notice be made in writing or is just an oral statement okay?

Question 16: Should the provider ask you to sign a consent document to share your information, or are you okay if the provider just assumes you are okay with providing the basic information they ask?

Question 17: What kinds of information about you would you be uncomfortable having recorded into a database generally, or shared between service providers in your area, or shared with the government?
**Topic 4: Federal Homelessness Plan**

The federal government must create a federal plan to end homelessness. NCH is interested in learning what people experiencing homelessness think ought to be addressed in the federal plan.

**Question 18:** Recognizing that there are currently not enough funds being made available by the government to end homelessness once and for all, how do you think we are doing in our geographic area in terms of preventing and ending homelessness?

**Question 19:** Do you think we have the right mix of shelter, housing, and services, again knowing that there isn’t enough of any of them?

**Question 20:** Do you feel that some groups of homeless people are getting more attention than others, or does it seem pretty fair to you?

**Question 21:** What is the one thing that would have helped you most to prevent your becoming homeless?

**Question 22:** What is the one thing you need most now to help you get a permanent place to live?

**Question 23:** What is the number one service that you think everyone involved in ending homelessness always forgets about when they are developing strategies and programs that supposedly address your needs?

**Question 24:** If you were President Obama and were writing the federal homelessness plan yourself, what is the basic challenge or message about homelessness that you would want to deliver to the American people?

**Other Comments**

(Please use this section to record participant comments that do not address the four topic areas above).