

Module 3: BFZ Flex Fund Guide

Implementation: Putting Your Community Flex Fund to Work

Overview + Acknowledgements

Purpose of the Guide

This dynamic guide is designed to assist communities that have recently obtained or are considering applying for Flexible Funding through Community Solutions. Its purpose is not to dictate the use of flexible funding but to provide insights, learnings from other communities, and best practices. Communities are encouraged to think creatively about how flex funding can enhance their local initiatives to fill critical gaps, drive local progress, and achieve their unique goals. Though this guide speaks largely to the use of Flexible Funding granted through Community Solutions, the guidance and strategies can be applied in any community with any combination of private or public funding. Community Solutions encourages all communities to explore flexible funding opportunities to supplement local strategies to prevent and end homelessness.

Orientation to the Guide

This Guide is broken into separate modules

- Background & Introduction to Flex Funds
- Module 1: Planning for Flexible Funding
- Module 2: Preparing for Implementation
- Module 3: Implementation: Putting Your Community Flex Fund to Work
- Module 4: Understanding & Amplifying Impact for Ongoing Sustainability

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many Built for Zero (BFZ) communities who were interviewed and shared their process and learnings implementing flexible funding. Those insights have been instrumental in shaping this guide.

Thank you to: Boulder County, Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, Hennepin County, Washington DC, Maine Statewide, MS Gulf Coast Regional CoC, Pikes Peak, and Nashville.

3.1 Getting Started with Flex Funds

Your community flex fund is established, it's time to put it into action! Implementation is where you begin testing your hypotheses on how flexible funding can have the greatest impact on individual and system outcomes. At the time of implementation, it is important to establish a means for continuous improvement, ensuring that your data collection and decision-making processes are utilized to support informed adjustments as you go.

Spreading the Word

Now that you've defined the purpose of the Flex Funds, your target demographic, the Fiscal Agent, and your process, it's time to initiate your outreach to begin using the funds.

Develop an outreach and marketing plan tailored to your target population and the intended use of the Flex Funds.

- Consider the most suitable platforms and channels to reach your audience and promote the funding opportunity.
- Remember that outreach and marketing efforts might need to be focused on specific groups, such as outreach and shelter providers or case conferencing participants, depending on how the funds are intended to be used.
- Ensure the appropriate providers/community partners know how and where to access funds (and/or to connect the target population with the funds).

By strategically targeting your outreach efforts, you can ensure that the flex fund reaches those who will benefit from it the most.

Community Spotlight: Two Examples of Marketing Strategies

Maine Statewide utilized flex funding to support an ongoing initiative working to house veterans experiencing homelessness. This initiative was focused on securing housing units through a robust landlord engagement and recruitment strategy. The flex funds were used to support security deposits, application fees, and rental assistance, and also landlord incentives and risk mitigation. Marketing strategies were key to effectively reaching landlords and property owners, which included the development of a website portal promoting new partnerships and allowing system leaders and elected officials to spread the word about how landlords could contribute to housing veterans in their community.

Using a very different strategy, the **Gulf Coast, Mississippi**, region made an explicit decision NOT to openly market or advertise the availability of their Flex Funds. The community used their flex funding as a homelessness reduction tool, rather than a housing stability tool, and designed their program accordingly — using the funds as

a resource solely to house people actively homeless and on their by-name-list (BNL). Because the community had a quality BNL, they were able to work with their local service providers in case conferencing to determine when there was a need for flex funding to connect someone on the BNL to housing. Marketing the availability of resources would only invite more requests than the funds could support.

Testing and Learning (Continuous Improvement)

You have the funds, you know what you want to do and how you want to do it, now it's time to start TRYING IT! As you begin rolling out your Flex Fund, it's important to capture lessons learned and remain adaptable. This is a new initiative, and flexibility will be key to its success.

- **Prioritize Speed and Efficiency:** Don't get bogged down in a process that may not work as you planned. Remember, timely referrals, decisions, and payments are essential. Strive to be nimble and responsive by streamlining processes and eliminating unnecessary documentation or procedural steps that hinder serving the intended audience.
- **Foster Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing:** Encourage open communication and collaboration among providers utilizing the Flex Fund. Establish a "learning circle" or similar platform where partners can regularly meet with the Fiscal Agent to discuss the process, troubleshoot challenges, share insights, and exchange ideas.
- **Maintain Focus on Intended Goals:** As you continue to test your strategy ensure that the community's intended outcomes are still central to the use of flex funds and inform any changes or adjustments.
- **Celebrate and Share Successes:** Acknowledge and celebrate even the small victories along the way. Sharing these successes can inspire others and promote a better understanding of how to effectively utilize the funding.

Ongoing Improvement and Adaptation

This process requires ongoing learning and adaptation. By staying proactive, collaborative, and focused on continuous improvement, you can ensure that your Flex Fund makes a meaningful impact in your community. To ensure your Flex Fund's ongoing effectiveness, establish a clear Continuous Quality Improvement framework to evaluate what's working well and identify areas for adjustment.

- **Regular Progress Reviews:** Using your chosen decision-making structure, schedule consistent intervals to assess the core aspects of your Flex Fund implementation.
 - Are you reaching and serving the intended population?

- Is the funding being utilized at the expected pace?
 - Do partners fully understand the purpose and eligible uses of the Flex Fund? (Look for patterns like repeated ineligible requests or unexpectedly low request volume.)
 - Is the request, approval, and disbursement process efficient and timely? Are there opportunities to streamline or clarify procedures?
 - Have any unforeseen needs emerged within the target population?
- **Designing small tests of change** allows for iteration and re-strategizing to increase effectiveness.
 - Design small, targeted interventions or "tests of change" to impact specific measures.
 - Experiment with different approaches and strategies to see what works best for your community.
 - Iterate and re-strategize based on the results of your tests to increase effectiveness or pivot your approach if necessary.

By actively monitoring and evaluating these key areas, you can proactively address challenges, refine your strategies, and ensure your Flex Fund continues to meet the evolving needs of your community.

Community Spotlights: Using Improvement Science to Increase Efficiency

Upon initial implementation of flex funds, the **Gulf Coast, Mississippi, region** adopted a centralized administration approach to their Flex Fund program, but in their experience, found that, based on how they were using funds and who was submitting requests, they could be much more efficient and increase system-wide capacity by subcontracting those funds out to service providers directly.

To ease getting assistance issued quickly, **Nashville, Tennessee**, identified a set of common types of payments (security deposits, securing IDs, and transportation, etc.) and "pre-approved" those items so partners could act quickly to support participants in getting into housing. Other costs were likely to be approved, but required approval before moving forward.

3.2 MEASURING IMPACT

Tracking Outcomes & Progress

Determining how you will measure the impact of your Flex Fund program and what success looks like for your community is a key step in setting up your Flex Fund for success and ongoing sustainability. Here's how you can approach it:

- **Track your progress from the start** by establishing clear goals and objectives.
 - ◆ Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for your project.
 - ◆ Identify key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with your goals.
 - ◆ Consider both participant-level and system-level objectives.
 - ◆ Set baseline data at the outset to measure progress against.
- **Measuring system level impact using Built for Zero metrics** (length of time on the by-name-list dataset, housing placement rates, actively homeless, etc.) can indicate whether or not to shift the Flex Fund strategy.
 - ◆ Use broader framework metrics to watch for indications of impact and shift your Flex Fund strategy if needed.
 - ◆ Monitor systemic changes, such as policy shifts or resource allocation, that may be influenced by your program.
 - ◆ Collaborate with partners across the system to align efforts and maximize impact.

Some specific examples of KPIs that a community could use to measure the impact of their Flex Fund program include:

- **Individual-level indicators:**
 - **Number of individuals or households receiving assistance:** This could include the number of people receiving financial assistance, housing assistance, or other services through the program.
 - **Amount of financial assistance distributed:** This could include the total amount of money distributed through the program, as well as the average amount of assistance provided per individual or household.
 - **Increase in housing stability:** This could be measured by tracking the number of people who are able to maintain stable housing after receiving assistance through the program.
 - **Improved access to housing and other services:** This could be measured by tracking the number of people who are able to access or maintain the housing and services needed for stability.
 - **Participant satisfaction:** This could be measured through surveys or interviews with program participants, asking about their satisfaction with the services provided and the overall impact of the program on their lives.
- **System-level changes:**

- ◆ **Population-level reductions in homelessness:** This could be measured by tracking the number of people entering and exiting homelessness, as well as the overall rate of homelessness in the community.
- ◆ **Policies, procedures, and resources:** This could include changes in policies, procedures, or resource allocation that are implemented as a result of the program.

Tracking and Reporting on Flex Fund Usage

Establish a comprehensive tracking system to monitor both Community Solutions' requirements and other relevant data points identified by your community. Capture essential information such as:

- **Request volume and assistance:** Track the number of requests received and the average amount of assistance provided per participant.
- **Fund allocation:** Document how funds are being used and for what specific purposes.
- **Demographics:** Gather demographic data on the individuals and families receiving assistance.
- **Individual outcomes:** Measure the impact on individuals, such as changes in housing status before and after receiving support.
- **System-Level Outcomes:** Assess broader community impacts, such as reductions in first-time homelessness or the average length of time on the by-name dataset..
- **Qualitative Feedback:** Collect qualitative data through surveys, interviews, or focus groups with participants and community partners to gain valuable insights and perspectives.
- **Process Improvements:** Track changes in processes, policies, or procedures that have been implemented through continuous improvement.

[Sample report form](#)