

# HOME GOOD

An initiative of United Way of Greater Los Angeles  
& L.A. Area Chamber of Commerce

# STANDARDS of EXCELLENCE: CERTIFICATION

For Outreach Programs / Engagement Services, Emergency / Crisis / Interim Housing,  
and Permanent Supportive Housing

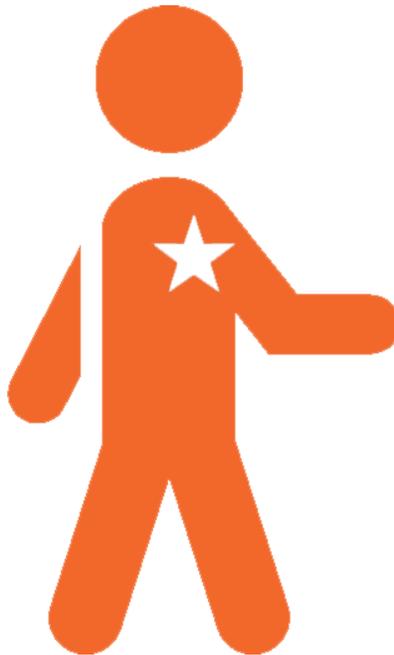
Spring 2014

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# Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in participating in the **Standards of Excellence Certification** process! Certification is meant to be a way for us to recognize the agencies and programs that are making **real progress** in our community, and to help us better **identify gaps and resource needs** overall. By participating in the Certification process, you are not only demonstrating your willingness to **hold your program up next to others**, but also investing your time, energy, and **feedback** into something we want all of you to help guide and own as it develops.



The following pages will explain how certification is meant to work, as well as address any questions you may have. Ready? Let's get started!

# General Instructions

1. Complete and submit an **Application** to participate in the next round of certification. These can be obtained from Home For Good's website at <http://homeforgoodla.org> and are due at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the Assessment Period (note: this step is skipped for the Pilot).
2. Once your participation is confirmed, upon the start of the **Assessment** period, the Certification team will send all participants a unique weblink through which to access the online Evaluation Survey. **Use only this link to access / resume the evaluation.**
3. Participants will have 4 weeks to complete the evaluation. Throughout the process, questions may be submitted to the Certification team. General questions regarding content will be responded to in a publically available FAQ. Questions regarding technical problems (such as accessing the survey, page loading issues, etc) will be responded to directly, depending on the issue.
4. Once the 4 weeks are up, submitted evaluations will be assessed by the Certification team. Participants may be contacted for a consultation or site visit to clarify the responses provided.
5. The Certification team will then determine overall scores and share them directly with the participants at least one week prior to making them available on the Home For Good website. Limited appeals regarding technical issues will be available, but participants that do not agree with their final score can elect to have their results vacated. Participants that are **Awarded** certification will maintain certification for the next 12 months, at which point they can seek re-certification. Participants that are not certified are encouraged to participate in technical assistance and training opportunities and can re-seek certification at the next round as early as 6 months later.

# The Process

## Application, Assessment, Achievement:

To promote the adoption and achievement of the Standards of Excellence, the certification process

### APPLICATION

Certification periods will be opened up in January and July of each year, during which time materials will be sent out to potential participants, including instructions, participation criteria, evaluation areas, and a general scoring overview. An orientation session will also be provided to share the results of any previous certifications and discuss the benefits of participation.

Potential participants will then be given an opportunity to submit an initial comprehensive application, including consent agreements to share data and participate in a potential site visit. All materials will be due in mid- to late February and August. Submitted applications will be reviewed for accuracy and completeness by a committee comprised of representatives from Home For Good as well as a balanced group of consultants, service providers, and funders as determined by the Standards of Excellence Steering Committee.

Potential participants will also be reviewed for participation in their local HMIS/data collection system (Adsystem, Servicepoint, HOMES, etc.) and involvement in their local Coordinated Entry System (CES); applicants that do not collect data through HMIS and have no connection to CES may still participate, but will still be evaluated against participants that meet one or both criteria.

### ASSESSMENT

Participants will be asked to submit:

- A standard **HMIS-generated performance report**, which will measure each program's performance during the previous year;
- An **online survey**, which will ask respondents to describe their alignment with the "Performance Goals and Indicators" and the "Operating Standards" through simple data entry, multiple choice and yes/no questions accompanied by a short narrative; and
- Any additional supporting documents, including safety surveys and pertinent back-up documentation

You will have a total of 4 weeks to complete the initial submission. Once all documents are in, the review committee will evaluate the results over the following 4 weeks. If the committee identifies any needs for clarification, additional information or follow-up site visits, these will be scheduled during this time.

Upon the completion of the reviews and any site visits, the committee will then score the submissions according to the previously established scoring criteria. Initial results will be sent out to participants, who will get up to 2 weeks to respond with questions or data accuracy concerns, but will not be able to submit any additional information at that time. Participants may also opt out of certification and elect to be re-evaluated during the next certification period.

## The “Triple A” Approach to Certification

ss will recognize those that are achieving a level of excellence in their work to end homelessness.

### ACHIEVEMENT

Once the final scores are established, participants will be certified according to the criteria outlined in this chart. The score range for each level of achievement will also have been determined prior to the assessment and will be based on the goals of the current set of Standards as well as lessons learned from prior certifications.

The participants that achieve certification will be certified for one full year. They will be recognized and encouraged to help lead peer-learning opportunities. Those that are not certified will be encouraged to work with the review committee to identify any capacity building opportunities that may facilitate future certification.

All participants will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the Standards of Excellence and the certification process. This feedback, along with any other lessons learned, will be reviewed by the committee and used to shape future certifications.



# Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: Why should I participate in the pilot Certification process?**

A: Because we need your feedback! We want to ensure that the Standards and the Certification process is one that has been vetted and deemed trustworthy by service providers and funders alike, and without all of your feedback, we will not be able to accomplish that. Participating now will also give you access to information and materials that are not otherwise public at this time, so you'd be getting an early jump on what we will eventually make into a process available to everyone.

**Q: I don't participate in HMIS , or feel that the data included there properly reflects my program's performance. Can I still participate?**

A: Yes! While we would like the majority of your performance data to be based upon HMIS data, we understand that, depending on the system you're utilizing, there are some limitations to what can be drawn from there, or how reliable it may be. Please note that we are well aware of the current capabilities of the various HMIS implementations throughout LA County, so any instance in which you indicate that the data you provided was NOT from an HMIS will be reviewed and scored accordingly.

**Q: I don't participate in the Coordinated Entry System (CES) / Family Solutions System (FSS) / etc. Can I still participate?**

A: Yes! We encourage you to participate in the certification regardless of your connection (or lack thereof) to any coordinated assessment efforts. Please note that the Standards are designed to prioritize activities that are part of a coordinated assessment system, and that your participation level will have a direct effect on your overall score.

**Q: Will the results of the certification be shared publically?**

A: To highlight the agencies and programs that achieve certification, and to demonstrate the comprehensiveness and utility of the Standards and the Certification process, we would prefer to share list of certified agencies publically. However, agencies are welcome to opt-out of any publically shared materials at any time. Agencies / programs that are not certified will never be shared publically, unless specifically requested to do so by the affected agency. For the purposes of the Pilot, we will defer to the Pilot group's feedback before sharing any information more broadly.

**Q: What happens if my program is certified?**

A: Congratulations! Unless you request otherwise, we will publically recognize your agency and program as being the standard bearer for all other similar programs. We will also request your participation in leading any peer-learning opportunities and events. Your "certified" status will hold for the next twelve (12) months, after which we ask that you seek re-certification.

**Q: What happens if my program is not certified?**

A: Not to worry! We will work closely with your agency to identify any barriers and opportunities to achievement, and prioritize you for any capacity building trainings or technical assistance opportunities we may provide. At your discretion, you can reapply for certification as early as six (6) months afterwards. We will not publically share your results, unless you specifically request us to do so. We will however, include your results in any aggregated reports, but will not specifically identify you or your program.

**Q: I work with youth / families / survivors of domestic violence / etc. Can I participate in Certification?**

A: Yes! The Certification process is open to any who wish to participate. Please note that you will be evaluated against programs that may not serve the same populations, and as a result may have inherently different results than the ones being sought overall. However, depending on demand or demonstrated need, we may use your results and feedback to carve out more discrete categories of certification in the future.

**Q: I provide transitional housing / safe haven / winter shelter / etc. Can I participate in Certification?**

A: Yes! While the Standards lays out 3 specific categories of housing / services for evaluation, you are welcome to participate in the Certification process should you so desire. Please note that you will have to select one of the 3 primary program types to move forward with the evaluation process. If you feel that you have a program that operates in such a way that it closely matches one of the three categories, or are just curious in general about what the evaluation process is like, please feel free to contact us with a short narrative of why you'd like to participate, and we will send you a link accordingly.

**Q: Will certification affect my funding?**

A: At this stage, no. We are working to develop certification as a process that will eventually make it easier and more reliable for funders to identify "high performers," potentially giving certified programs and providers an advantage in future funding proposals. Home For Good is currently investigating how the Standards and Certification can be integrated into its own RFPs, and other funders are paying close attention to the overall development process. One of the main goals of this initial pilot is to ensure that the certification process is fair, valid, and reliable, as deemed by the community of providers that have helped develop it. Until then, it is not likely to be utilized for any funding decisions until that is accomplished.

**Some final suggestions and recommendations before you begin:**

- Read the Standards of Excellence guide, particularly the section on the type of program you are seeking to evaluate. All of the Certifications questions are based on what is within the guide, nothing more, nothing less. And of course read this guide in its entirety, as well as the instructions included in the online Certification evaluation.
- Gather all of your data now, or at least identify where your data is stored so that you can easily access it later. Also gather together any supporting documents you may want to submit.
- Identify the best point people to respond to the various questions the Certification asks. While you may feel you have a comprehensive understanding of how your agency and program works, it doesn't hurt to know who to run a question by at a moment's notice. It is also good to have a second or third set of eyes on your responses before you click "Submit"
- Review the printout of the Certification questions before beginning the actual online form (these will be shared with you by the evaluation team along with this packet). Try to write out responses in a word processing program before actually sharing them online. If your web browser crashes, you lose connectivity, or your computer dies, at least you will have your responses backed up in an offline document somewhere.
- Give yourself plenty of time to complete the survey. You will have a total of 4 weeks to complete the initial submission, so waiting for the last minute will only create unnecessary and completely avoidable stress. You also do not have to complete the survey in one sitting, as the weblink provided to you should allow you to resume at any time during the evaluation period.
- Think of this process as similar to one you would go through for any kind of funding request. Whatever time, attention, and energy you put into that process, please do the same for this one.
- For the purposes of the Pilot, please take lots of notes! If something doesn't work, a question isn't worded correctly, you can't provide the response you want to provide, etc., let us know! This Pilot is not just a chance to see where you stand, but also a chance to make sure that the next phase of Certification is one that you would definitely want to participate in again.

And if you have any thoughts, questions, or suggestions that needs an immediate response, please do not hesitate to reach out to

**Michael Nailat** at [mnailat@unitedwayla.org](mailto:mnailat@unitedwayla.org) or at (213) 808-6448.

**Thank you, and Good Luck!**



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