A VISION FOR SOLVING HOMELESSNESS IN THE REGION

A Comprehensive Roadmap to Solving Homelessness Across the Region

HOUSING FIRST STL

2024

Regional Problems Like Chronic Homelessness Need Collaborative Regional Solutions

East-West Gateway Council of Governments convenes leaders from the city of St. Louis and its seven surrounding counties every month to facilitate planning, collaboration, and the creation of more effective systems for the greater benefit of the St. Louis region. In the summer of 2024, under the direction of its Chair, St. Louis Mayor Tishaura Jones, East-West Gateway's board of directors tasked the agency to begin an intensive regional effort to reduce homelessness. In October 2024, East-West Gateway and its partners, Greater St. Louis, Inc., House Everyone STL, and Think Big! convened a full-day Housing First STL Summit and three-day Practicum. More than 150 leaders representing government, service providers, funders, businesses, health care organizations, faith-based groups, and other stakeholders envisioned an ambitious housing first regional system to solve homelessness.

This ensuing report presents a road map to unite the region and truly realize a future St. Louis region without homelessness. The region is ready to take its first big steps so that no one has to sleep on the streets.

Steering Committee Lead Members

Jim Wild, Executive Director, East-West Gateway Council of Governments

Nancy Cross, Executive Director of Operations, City of St. Louis

Adam Pearson, Director, Department of Human Services, City of St. Louis

Samantha Stangl, Executive Director, House Everyone STL

Kurt Weigle, Senior Vice President & Chief Downtown Officer, Greater St. Louis, Inc.

A Vision for a Region Without Homelessness

Our Commitment

*We are not merely aiming to make incremental progress on homelessness; we are dedicated to **solving homelessness across the region.** This is our vision and promise.*

*While we may not be able to prevent every instance of homelessness, we are committed to building a **system of care** that offers immediate relief and solutions, ensuring that homelessness is a **brief and rare experience** rather than a persistent struggle.*

Building A System of Care

We will construct a comprehensive **system of care** where:
- **No one has to sleep on the streets**.
- Everyone receives the **support needed to stabilize** and **enhance their wellbeing**.
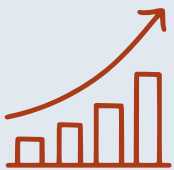
Accountability and Progress

We pledge to:
- **More than triple** the number of households transitioning out of homelessness and securing stable housing and futures.
- Implement clear accountability metrics to ensure **visible, measurable progress**.

Bringing Solutions Directly to People

Our approach will take the **system of care to the streets**, enabling individuals to:
- Move **directly from the streets to housing**, supported by **wrap-around services** tailored for recovery and stability.

Empowering Service Providers

We will:

- **Strengthen and support** nonprofit service providers, allowing them to focus on their **core strengths** and service delivery.
- Foster partnerships across the region to deliver a **full spectrum of services** essential for solving homelessness.

Responsible Stewardship

We are committed to:

- **Effective resource management** by consolidating functions, reducing redundancy, and scaling proven solutions.
- **Leveraging resources** from public and private sectors to maximize impact and efficiency.

United Funding Efforts

We will:

- Bring together **public institutions and private funders** to raise additional funds, supporting our comprehensive system of care across the region.

Serve Local Jurisdictions

Our system will be designed to:

- **Align with local needs** across jurisdictions, ensuring that centralized services and investments serve the entire region equitably.

Sustainable Solutions

This is a long-term commitment, we will:

- Seek **sustainable funding** to maintain a robust system of care that prevents backsliding.
- Ensure the **system of care adapts** to meet the needs of anyone facing imminent homelessness.
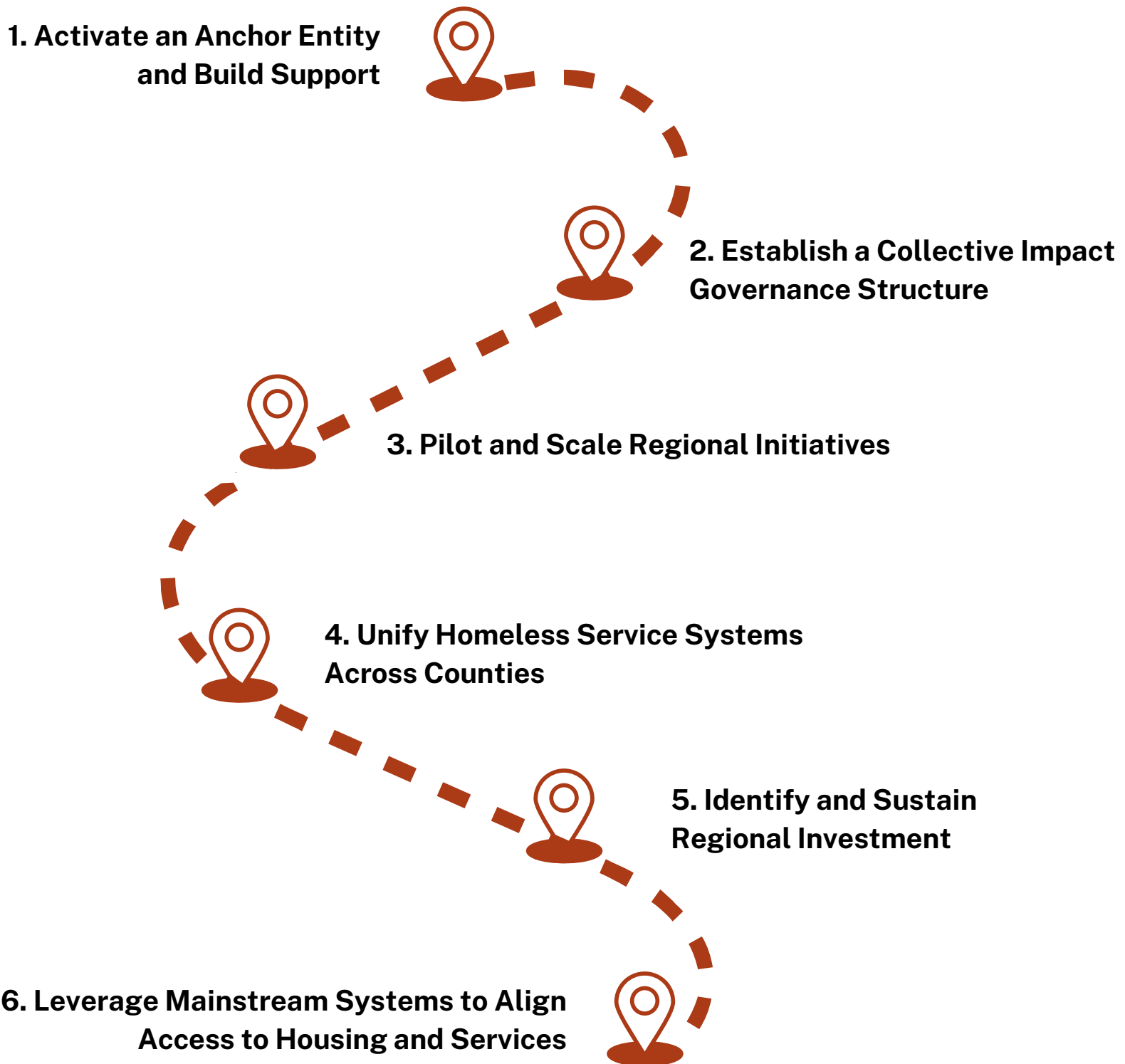
Expanding Housing Accessibility

To make housing attainable, we will:

- **Increase the housing stock** and make **existing housing more accessible**, working to expand options and opportunities for everyone.

Roadmap to Uniting the Region and Realizing a Future Without Homelessness

1. **Activate an Anchor Entity and Build Support**

2. **Establish a Collective Impact Governance Structure**

3. **Pilot and Scale Regional Initiatives**

4. **Unify Homeless Service Systems Across Counties**

5. **Identify and Sustain Regional Investment**

6. **Leverage Mainstream Systems to Align Access to Housing and Services**

Roadmap to Uniting the Region and Realizing a Future Without Homelessness

1. Activate an Anchor Entity and Build Support

Engage with Key Stakeholders

- Identify and reach out to influential groups, including government agencies, business leaders, philanthropic organizations, service providers, and communities affected by homelessness. Through targeted engagement, share the vision and roadmap, articulating the long-term regional benefits. Emphasize that solving homelessness can only be accomplished by working together and highlight the tangible outcomes for each group.

Define and Empower an Anchor Organization

- Select a leading organization that is trusted across the region and well-positioned to drive the initiative forward. This organization will champion the vision and host the regional governance structure, serving as the primary connector for diverse stakeholders and as a centralized hub for communication and coordination. The anchor entity's credibility and influence will be critical in aligning various groups and maintaining momentum.

2. Establish a Collective Impact Governance Structure

To create a truly regional solution, implement a **Collective Impact Governance Structure** that encourages participation, collaboration, and accountability among all stakeholders.

Build a Diverse and Inclusive Governance Team

- Our governance team will bring together representatives from regional governments, philanthropy, business leaders, nonprofits, service providers, and most importantly, individuals with lived experience of homelessness. This diverse group will ensure that decisions are informed by a wide range of perspectives and expertise.

Apply Core Principles of Collective Impact

- This governance structure will be rooted in the core principles of collective impact.
    - A shared vision that unites all participants around common goals.
    - Shared metrics to measure progress and accountability.
    - Mutually reinforcing activities where each partner contributes based on their strengths.
    - Open, transparent communication to keep everyone aligned and informed.
    - A backbone organization to manage coordination and maintain focus on the shared vision.

Create Clear and Inclusive Pathways for Engagement and Improvement:

To enable all stakeholders to participate meaningfully, structure the governance with multiple levels of involvement.

The Collective Impact Governance Structure is designed not as a single decision-making body but as a **network of collaborative groups** that work in concert toward the shared vision.

This approach enables continuous engagement, where every stakeholder — whether a government official, business leader, service provider, or community member — has a clear role and pathway to participate in shaping and implementing the regional response to homelessness.

This structure ensures that the voices of all stakeholders are heard and that everyone has a defined role in advancing the shared vision of ending homelessness. By fostering collaboration at every level, we create a governance model that is inclusive, responsive, and effective in driving sustainable regional impact

- **Steering Body**:
  - The Steering Body will include **leadership representatives** from key sectors and jurisdictions. This group will hold the vision, set strategic direction, assemble resources, and remove barriers to progress. Their role is to ensure that the overall initiative stays on track and adapts to emerging needs.

- **Regional Backbone Agency**:
  - Coordinating agencies will act as **bridges between the Steering Body and on-the-ground efforts**, serving as facilitators, translators, and connectors. They ensure that the vision set by the Steering Body is communicated effectively, that resources are deployed efficiently, and that feedback from local efforts is brought back to the leadership level for continuous improvement.

Roadmap to Uniting the Region and Realizing a Future Without Homelessness

- **Work Groups**:
  - Work groups will focus on specific areas such as **policy development, service delivery innovation, housing access,** and **community engagement**. These groups will include **service providers, technical experts, and individuals with lived experience** who work together to test and shape policies and practices that build the regional system of care. Work groups provide a hands-on opportunity for stakeholders to influence program design, refine implementation strategies, and identify new solutions.

- **Public Engagement Forums**:
  - Hold r**egular public forums** where community members can engage directly with the governance structure. These forums will be designed to inform the public about progress, gather feedback, and encourage broader community involvement in the initiative.

Communicate goals and progress through a coordinated messaging and reporting strategy

Develop a communication plan that educates the region on the issues and plans, instills confidence in the effort, identifies the ways people can engage, and transparently reports on results.

Common Agenda (Vision + Theory of Change) and Shared Metrics

Alignment, Policy, Strategy	Backbone(s)	Partner Driven Action		
Steering Body	Emergency Rehousing System	Work Groups	Work Groups	Work Groups
	Attainable Housing Solutions	Work Groups	Work Groups	Work Groups
	Cross-Sector Stabilization Services	Work Groups	Work Groups	Work Groups

3. Pilot and Scale Regional Initiatives

Learn and Refine before Scaling

- Use small-scale pilot programs to assess the effectiveness of various rehousing strategies. Collect data on outcomes, identify best practices and refine approaches based on real-world results. These pilots will help reduce homelessness on a small scale and provide valuable insights for scaling up to a comprehensive, regional initiative that meets the diverse needs of all communities.

Launch an Inaugural Rehousing Initiative

Roll out targeted rehousing programs across the region to build a comprehensive system of care that addresses specific community needs. For instance:

- Some jurisdictions may prioritize rehousing for individuals living on the streets.
- Others may focus on transitioning people from shelters into stable housing.
- Certain areas may concentrate on preventing individuals and families from entering shelters in the first place.

Each approach will be adapted to local conditions but rooted in a coordinated regional initiative that implements rehousing strategies under a unified governance structure.

4. Unify Homeless Service Systems Across Counties

Establish a Regional Data Management Infrastructure

- Develop a centralized data system to support emergency rehousing functions across counties. This will involve merging each Continuum of Care's (CoC) Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Coordinated Entry and Exit System (CES) data into a unified platform. With this infrastructure, real-time sharing of information about individuals needing assistance and resource availability will become seamless, significantly enhancing coordination and response times across the region.

Enhance Regional Visibility and Efficiency

- By consolidating data and processes, the region will gain a holistic view of homelessness demand, enabling a coordinated approach that reduces duplication and optimizes resource allocation. This unified system will position the region to streamline service delivery, reduce costs, and ensure that people in need are matched with available resources more accurately and promptly.

4. Unify Homeless Service Systems Across Counties Continued

Utilize Regional Data for Strategic Insights and Data-Driven Decision-Making:

- With a centralized data system in place, the backbone organization can provide the governance structure with regular reports on outcomes, impacts, and strategic insights. This data will be used to identify trends, evaluate program effectiveness, and inform evidence-based decisions. Such an approach will allow for continuous refinement of policies, more effective resource allocation, and scaling of successful solutions.

Coordinate Compliance Efforts:

- Transitioning to a centralized system requires careful navigation of federal regulations, particularly as the region currently operates with seven distinct CoCs. Work groups will be activated to address regulatory needs, working closely with legal and regulatory experts to ensure compliance and facilitate a smooth transition to a unified regional system.

5. Identify and Sustain Regional Investment

Assess Needs and Gaps:

- Conduct a comprehensive analysis of the data assembled from each of the region's seven CoCs to understand current needs, available resources, and service gaps. Use technical assistance to deduplicate and interpret the information to build an accurate picture of regional demands, capacities, and shortfalls. This analysis will provide a foundation for making informed, targeted investments.

Assemble Resources and Calibrate Investments:

- Secure funding from diverse sources, including federal grants, state and local budgets, philanthropic organizations, and private sector contributions. This investment will be used to strengthen each jurisdiction's capabilities while ensuring that resources are leveraged for maximum regional impact. Investment strategies will be coordinated to avoid redundancy and maximize the effectiveness of each dollar spent.

5. Identify and Sustain Regional Investment Continued

Drive Strategic Investments that Support Scaling Efforts:

- Utilize the collective impact governance structure to engage new public-private partnerships and create funding mechanisms that can support a transformational investment. This structure will help coordinate the efforts of different funders and ensure that investments are aligned with the overall vision. Significant one-time investments will be needed to achieve meaningful reductions in unsheltered and long-term homelessness.

Secure Sustainable Funding Sources:

- While initial investments may rely on grants and partnerships, our long-term goal is to identify stable funding streams that will sustain the regional system of care at scale and prevent backsliding. These might include public funding allocations, dedicated taxes or levies, and endowments. A stable financial foundation will ensure that the region's system of care is maintained over time and can continue to meet evolving needs.

6. Leverage Mainstream Systems to Align Access to Housing and Services

Expand Housing Accessibility:

- To support individuals exiting homelessness, it is essential to increase the availability of affordable housing throughout the region. This will involve close collaboration with local governments, regional housing authorities, developers, and community organizations to expand the housing stock, streamline access to existing units, and maintain affordability. This coordinated effort will align with the regional system of care, ensuring that permanent, sustainable rehousing options are available for all individuals in need.

Enhance Service Accessibility:

- Public mainstream systems provide a wide range of critical services, including physical and mental healthcare, substance use treatment, income support, and workforce development. Additionally, nonprofits deliver stabilizing and supportive services to low-income households. Connecting these services effectively to individuals exiting homelessness is vital for promoting housing stability and preventing future homelessness. Integrating mainstream services with the regional emergency rehousing system will be a gradual process, requiring an opportunistic yet systematic approach. This integration should follow the establishment of the regional system of care to maximize its impact and sustainability.

Theory of Change Driving Regional System of Care

Theory of Change: Strategies to Solve Homelessness

This theory of change provides the strategic framework for addressing homelessness across the region by focusing on four key strategies, each with defined outputs, outcomes, and impacts. The approach is designed to tackle the root causes of homelessness, accelerate rehousing, and increase stability for those at risk.
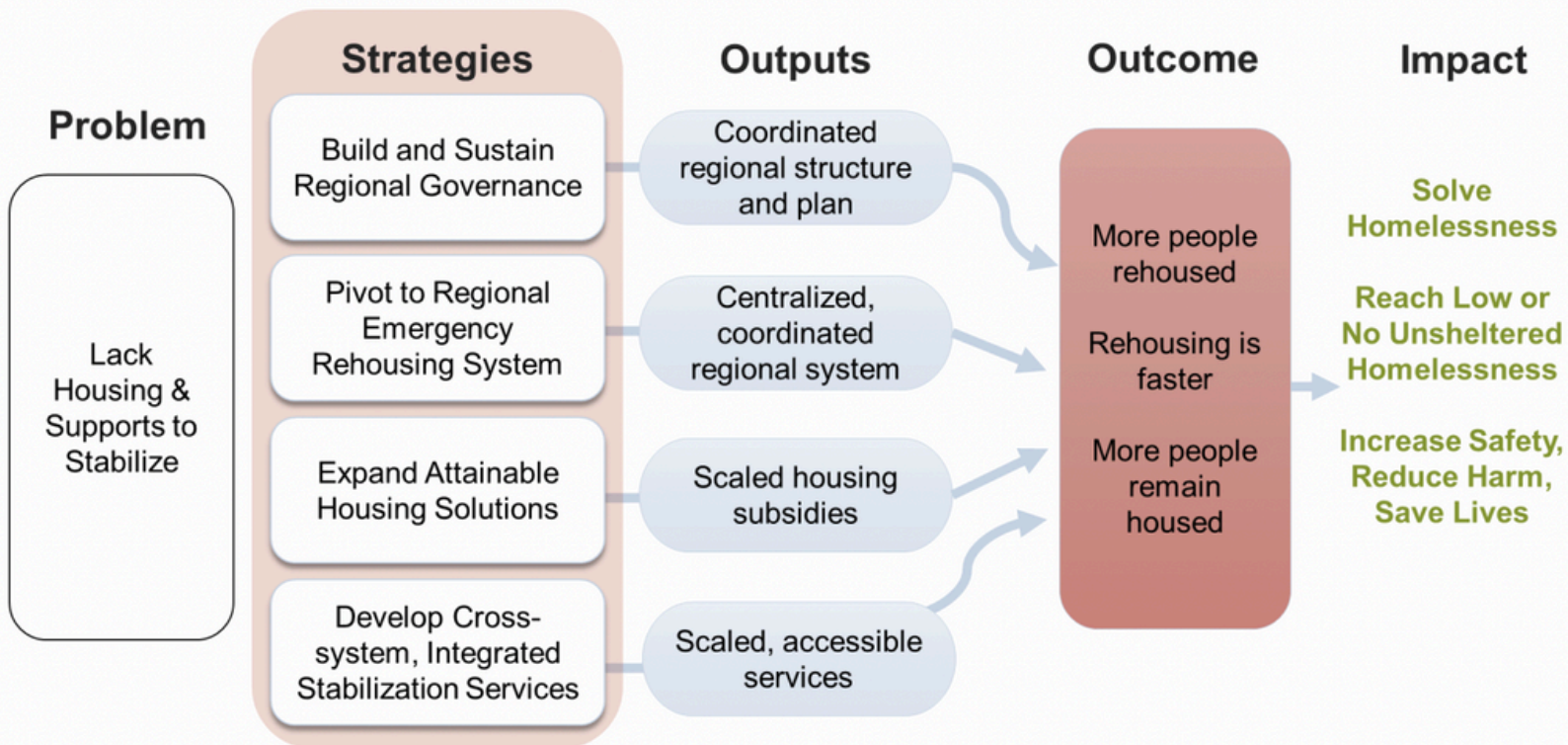
The theory of change demonstrates a holistic approach to addressing homelessness, with each strategy directly contributing to the regional goal of reducing and ultimately solving homelessness. By aligning outputs, outcomes, and impacts, this framework ensures that all efforts are coordinated, efficient, and focused on delivering meaningful, measurable results. The framework will serve the region and continue to evolve as the region builds its system of care and leans deeper into the root causes of homelessness.

Immediate Next Steps

Identify Anchor Organization by Spring 2025
We will:
- Define and Empower an Anchor Organization: Select a leading organization that is trusted across the region and well-positioned to drive the initiative forward.

Identify Backbone Organization by late Spring 2025
We will:
- Establish coordinating entities will act as bridges between the Steering Body and on-the-ground efforts, serving as facilitators, translators, and connectors.

Create Steering Group for Funding
We will:
- Work with regional funding groups being led by GSL, HESTL and government to create Housing First Funding Initiative.

System Data Collection
We will:
- Work with all 7 CoCs towards a system of data collection to build out metrics for next steps.

Create Steering Group for Housing
We will:
- Develop a centralized, coordinated housing and rehousing system to manage and expedite housing placements.

Create Work Groups
We will:
- Work groups will focus on specific areas such as policy development, service delivery innovation, housing access, and community engagement. These groups will include service providers, technical experts, and individuals with lived experience who work together to test and shape policies and practices that build the regional system of care.

Public Engagement Forums
We will:
- Hold regular public forums where community members can engage directly with the steering committee.
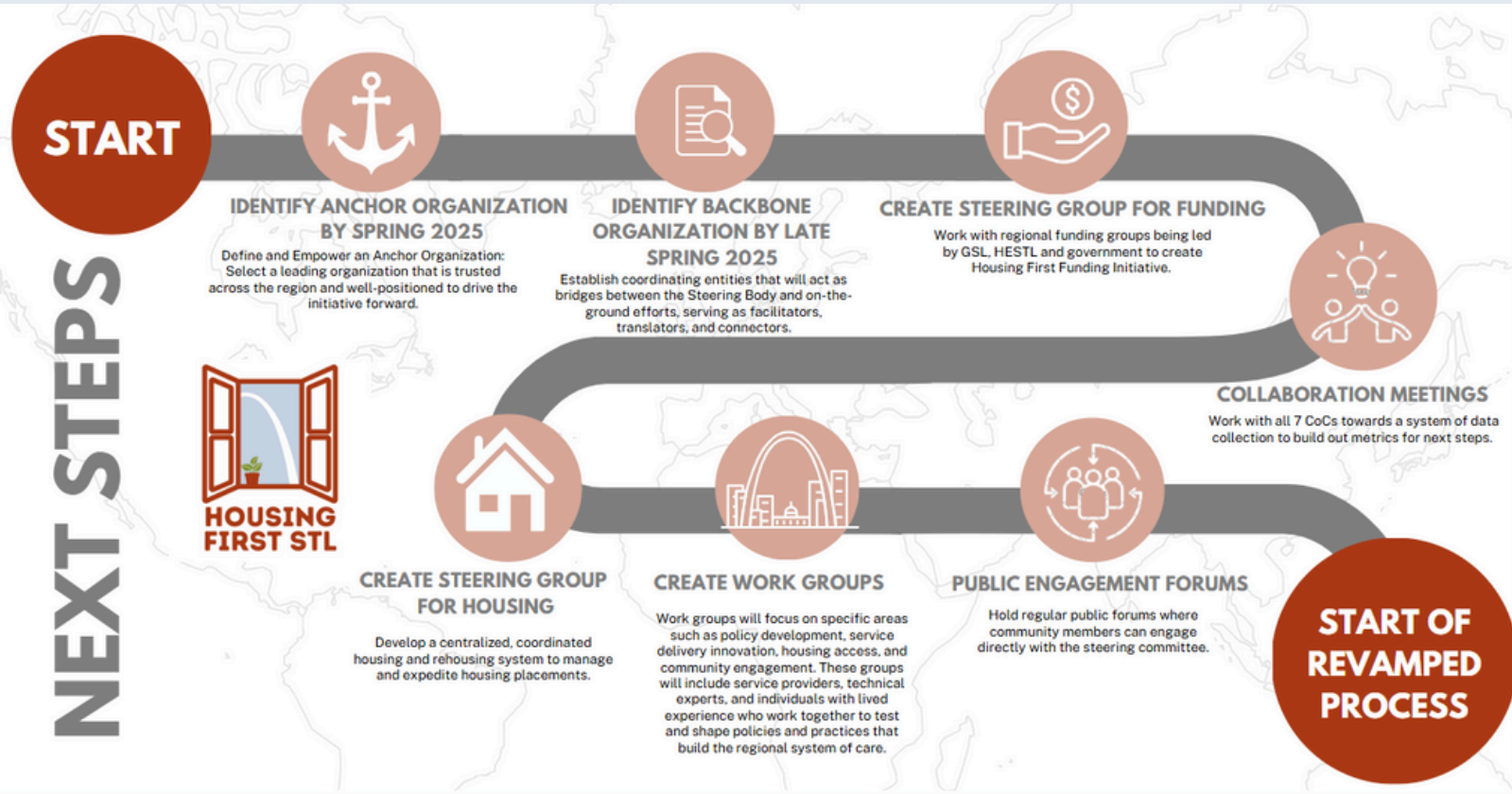
HOUSING FIRST STL

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NEXT STEPS

START

IDENTIFY ANCHOR ORGANIZATION BY SPRING 2025
Define and Empower an Anchor Organization: Select a leading organization that is trusted across the region and well-positioned to drive the initiative forward.

IDENTIFY BACKBONE ORGANIZATION BY LATE SPRING 2025
Establish coordinating entities that will act as bridges between the Steering Body and on-the-ground efforts, serving as facilitators, translators, and connectors.

CREATE STEERING GROUP FOR FUNDING
Work with regional funding groups being led by GSL, HESTL and government to create Housing First Funding Initiative.

COLLABORATION MEETINGS
Work with all 7 CoCs towards a system of data collection to build out metrics for next steps.

HOUSING FIRST STL

CREATE STEERING GROUP FOR HOUSING
Develop a centralized, coordinated housing and rehousing system to manage and expedite housing placements.

CREATE WORK GROUPS
Work groups will focus on specific areas such as policy development, service delivery innovation, housing access, and community engagement. These groups will include service providers, technical experts, and individuals with lived experience who work together to test and shape policies and practices that build the regional system of care.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT FORUMS
Hold regular public forums where community members can engage directly with the steering committee.

START OF REVAMPED PROCESS

Steering Committee Contact Information:
East West Gateway Council of Governments:
https://www.ewgateway.org/
Greater St. Louis Inc.:
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City of St. Louis:
https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/
House Everyone STL:
https://houseeveryonestl.org/

HESTL — HOUSE EVERYONE STL

EAST-WEST GATEWAY Council of Governments

GREATER ST. LOUIS INC.

THE COMMON SEAL OF THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS