ORANGE COUNTY CONTINUUM OF CARE BOARD CANDIDATE INTEREST FORM

INTEREST FORM: PART ONE

1. Name *

> Nishtha Mohendra

2. If you represent a specific organization in Orange County, please list your organization & role: *

> Families Forward. Chief Program Officer

3. Pronouns (for example: she/her, he/him, they/them, xe/hir):

> She/her

6. What qualities, skills, and experience do you bring that would help the CoC Board to further its work in ending homelessness and furthering effectiveness and collaboration within the work of the Orange County CoC? *

> Ending homelessness in Orange County is not just a professional mission for me—it is a deeply personal commitment to ensuring that every individual and family has the stability, dignity, and opportunity they deserve. In my role as Vice Chair of the CoC Board and Chair of the Policy, Procedures & Standards Committee—alongside active service on the HMIS Ad Hoc, Domestic Violence, CES Steering, Housing Opportunities, and Vision Ad Hoc Committees—I bring a rare combination of strategic leadership, operational expertise, and deep commitment to equity and accountability. These are precisely the qualities the CoC Board needs to advance its mission of ending homelessness in Orange County.
>
> Strategic Leadership & Systems Thinking
> The Board provides governance, oversight, policy alignment, and resource prioritization across the homeless response system. My experience leading complex service portfolios—including emergency shelters, rapid rehousing, prevention, and permanent supportive housing—gives me an executive lens to identify system inefficiencies, align funding streams, embed best practices, and drive measurable results. With extensive experience navigating ESG, CDBG, HOME, CoC, and HUD funding, I translate strategy into operational realities.
>
> Data-Driven & Performance-Focused
> The CoC Board relies on accurate, timely data to inform decisions. Over three years, I have strengthened our data culture, including helping bring live dashboards to life for real-time insights across Orange County. My oversight of HMIS and dozens of affordable housing units ensures that system strategies are not just plans on paper but produce measurable improvements for people experiencing homelessness.
>
> Collaboration & Systems Integration and Relationship building
> Ending homelessness requires coordination across outreach, assessment, shelter, transitional and supportive housing, and mainstream resources. My work across committees and partnerships with government agencies, providers, funders, and lived-experience leaders has broken down silos, aligned strategy, and fostered shared ownership. I have actively engaged stakeholders—including the Commission to Address Homelessness, Board of Supervisors, and OC legislative delegation—to elevate the cause and advance policy. I excel at cultivating trusted partnerships, convening diverse stakeholders, and leveraging networks to advance system-wide solutions.
>
> Equity, Lived Experience & Person-Centered Approach
> A high-performing CoC Board centers dignity, equity, and the voices of people with lived experience. I bring a unique perspective grounded in social justice, front-line work, and housing services. I have championed trauma-informed, culturally responsive practices and was honored to help launch a first-of-its-kind compensation model for lived-experience board members this year.
>
> Results-Oriented & Accountable
> Vision must translate into measurable outcomes. I bring the discipline, operational acumen, and persistence to set benchmarks, track outcomes, and ensure accountability. I am committed to helping the CoC Board not only set ambitious goals but also implement the mechanisms to achieve them.
>
> Especially in current times, as the CoC Board adapts to shifting funding environments, increasing demand, housing market pressures and equity imperatives, it needs board members who not only understand the complexity but are ready to act—to lead through change, drive coordination, and deliver measurable progress. I believe I bring exactly that mixture of vision, operational strength, collaborative leadership and equity focus—and I would be honored to continue serving to further the Board's work of ending homelessness in Orange County.

7. While having a conflict of interest does not make you ineligible to serve on the CoC Board, it helps CoC staff for record keeping purposes. Do you have any current conflicts of interest or previous ties to any agency that is a recipient or sub-recipient of CoC funding in the Orange County CoC?

   Examples of conflicts might include: Current or former staff, Board member, volunteer or client/participant at a CoC-funded agency, etc.

   For further information on what constitutes a conflict of interest, please visit this link: https://ceo.oc.gov/sites/ceo/files/2024-06/CoC%20Conflict%20of%20Interest%20Policy%20and%20Form%20Final.pdf

   For a current list of CoC-funded agencies, please visit this link: https://ceo.oc.gov/sites/ceo/files/2025-10/FY2024%20CoC%20Program%20NOFO%20Awards.pdf *

   ◉ Yes

   ○ No

   ○ I'm not sure

8. If yes or not sure, please describe the potential conflict(s) of interest:

   I work at a housing provider organization that receives CoC funding for Rapid Rehousing Program(s)

9. Are you able to commit to attending at least 75% of CoC Board meetings each year? The CoC Board meets monthly, in person, currently every fourth Wednesday from 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m., though that time is subject to change. *

   ◉ Yes

   ○ No

   ○ I'm not sure

10. Are you able to commit to serving on at least one CoC committee, working group, or ad-hoc committee, and to attend at least 75% of that committee, working group, or ad-hoc's meetings each year? This is usually 1-2 hours per month for in-person or virtual meetings, though, depending on the group you choose to participate in, the time commitment could be higher. *

   ◉ Yes

   ○ No

   ○ I'm not sure

11. We want to make sure that people who are elected to the Board have the support from their employer, agency, or group they represent (if applicable) to fully participate in the CoC Board.

   If applicable: is your employer, agency, or the group you represent aware that you plan to run for a CoC Board seat? *

   ◉ Yes

   ○ No

   ○ Not Applicable (N/A): I'm not affiliated with or representing a specific employer, agency, or group. I would be participating in the CoC Board on my own time.

12. If applicable: does your employer understand the full commitment that you're making to the CoC Board, including time commitments to meetings, potential time away from work, and responsibilities you'll hold? *

- ⦿ Yes

- ◯ No

- ◯ Not Applicable (N/A): I'm not affiliated with or representing a specific employer, agency, or group. I would be participating in the CoC Board on my own time.

13. Do you currently live or work in Orange County? Please select all that apply. *

- ☑ I live in Orange County

- ☑ I work in Orange County

- ☐ I do not live or work in Orange County

14. As part of the CoC Strategic Plan, the CoC Board adopted the following strategies to accomplish in Year 1 of implementation, which occurs from October 1, 2025 – September 30, 2026 (see September 24, 2025, CoC Board meeting agenda on the CoC webpage https://ceo.ocgov.com/continuum-care):

a. Assess Staff Training Needs (Objective 1A)

- Asses the staff training landscape and needs to develop a plan to fill gaps, align practices, ensure accountability in using best practices, and deliver on the promise to ensure people feel like they're being treat with dignity and respect.

b. Update Written Standards (Objective 1B)

- Review and update Written Standards to more intentionally embed key principles, align with evidence-based approaches, and support achieving system performance goals.

c. Elevate Lived Experience Leadership (Objective 1D)

- Embed deeper support for people with lived experience to get compensated, gain expertise, and hold decision-making power.

d. Develop a Policy Agenda (Objective 2D)

- Develop or adopt a policy agenda to measurably improve the resources and performance of the CoC.

e. Improve Data Collection and Analysis (Objective 3A)

- Develop and implement data collection and analysis processes that seek to hear people's experiences in the system, understand holistic system performance, and address gaps in our understanding of people's experiences and outcomes.

f. Plan for Coordinated Investments (Objective 4B)

- Conduct a strategic coordinated investment planning process to map current funding resources, analyze current funding impacts, and identify gaps.

g. Evaluate Coordinated Entry System (CES) (Objective 5B)

- Conduct a Coordinated Entry System evaluation.

Which of these strategies resonates with you most, and where would you like to contribute to supporting these strategies? *

The strategy that most resonates with me is Objective 4B – Plan for Coordinated Investments. In today's landscape—where public funding is uncertain and the demand for housing solutions is urgent—strategic alignment of investments is both a moral and operational imperative. As leaders, we cannot afford fragmented efforts or redundant systems. We must be deliberate in mapping where dollars flow, where gaps persist, and how every funding decision advances the goal of ending homelessness, not merely managing it. Most recently I have led and participated in strategic advocacy to ask for this exact support from Board of Supervisors. Currently a plan is being formulated and I am hopeful we will have some bridge funding plan that will be ready to share with the public by December 2025.

As Vice Chair of the CoC Board and Chair of the Policy, Procedures, and Standards Committee, I've championed greater transparency and coordination across multiple funding sources, pushing for data-driven decision frameworks that connect funding outcomes to system performance. I've also supported cross-committee collaboration—particularly between the CES Steering and Housing Opportunities Committees—to ensure our investments are guided by need, evidence, and equity.

I'm equally inspired by Objective 1D – Elevate Lived Experience Leadership. I have consistently advocated for embedding lived expertise within decision-making bodies—not as symbolic participation but as compensated, empowered leadership. Through my work on the Policies, Procedures and Standards Committee, Domestic Violence Committee and HMIS Ad Hoc Committee, I've helped encourage new mechanisms for people with lived experience to co-design training, provide real-time feedback on system barriers, and shape policy discussions from the ground up.

Strategic plans succeed only when we stay determined to translate intention into impact. In these uncertain times, it's not enough to have a plan—we need leaders who will operationalize it with discipline, compassion, and clarity. That's the commitment I bring to this next term of service

15. Please discuss one (1) significant challenge to addressing homelessness in Orange County. If you could wave a magic wand to address this challenge, what would your solution be? *

A significant challenge to addressing homelessness in Orange County is the persistent scarcity of affordable and accessible housing, particularly housing that meets the diverse needs of families, youth, survivors of domestic violence, and individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. This shortage is compounded by rising rents, limited funding, and systemic barriers that slow the development of new housing or restrict access to existing resources. Without adequate housing options, even the best supportive services cannot achieve long-term stability for people experiencing homelessness.

If I could wave a magic wand, my solution would be a comprehensive, "Housing for All" approach that integrates housing creation, supportive services, and system-wide coordination:

1. Accelerate Affordable Housing Development: Streamline permitting processes, incentivize private developers through public-private partnerships, and prioritize innovative housing models—such as modular units, adaptive reuse of existing buildings, and mixed-income developments—tailored to meet the needs of diverse populations experiencing homelessness.

2. Embed Supportive Services by Design: Housing alone is not enough. Each development would integrate on-site or accessible mental health care, job training, financial literacy, and health services. This ensures people not only obtain a home but have the tools to maintain stability, achieve economic mobility, and eventually transition into market-rate housing where appropriate.

3. Strengthen System Coordination: Coordinated entry, real-time data sharing through HMIS, and alignment of HHAP, ESG, CoC, and other funding streams would create a holistic view of housing availability, service gaps, and population needs. This approach would maximize efficiency, reduce duplication, and ensure resources are targeted where they can have the greatest impact.

4. Community Engagement & Destigmatization: Addressing NIMBY sentiments through education campaigns and involving neighbors in planning processes would be essential to integrating affordable housing solutions successfully into communities across Orange County.

This "magic wand" solution is ambitious but grounded in evidence-based practices and operational realities. By simultaneously expanding housing stock, embedding comprehensive supports, and improving system coordination, Orange County could meaningfully reduce homelessness, strengthen outcomes, and create a more equitable, sustainable system that truly serves its most vulnerable residents.

INTEREST FORM: PART TWO

It is important to the Orange County CoC to ensure that the CoC Board is representative of the people in our community who tend to experience homelessness. To that end, we would like to know more about your personal/professional identities, experiences, and background.

This form will be viewed by the CoC Nominating Ad Hoc members and CoC staff helping to facilitate this process (10 total people). Please only share what you feel comfortable disclosing to this group. Note, however, that any information provided to the County through this form could be required to be disclosed if someone were to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

The CoC Nominating Ad Hoc will review all completed interest forms and will determine the full list of qualified candidates who will run for election to the Board. The full CoC general membership will then vote to elect new Board members, and information about those candidates will be posted publicly on the CoC Nomination and Election webpage. If you are included in the list of qualified candidates to participate in the election, you will have an opportunity to choose and consent to the information shared about you publicly. We will not publicly disclose any information included on this form without your consent.

Personal Identities & Experiences

16. Have you experienced homelessness? *

○ Yes

◉ No

○ Prefer not to answer

17. If you answered "yes" to the question above, please check all of the following that apply and that you feel comfortable disclosing.

☐ I have experienced homelessness in the last 5 years.

☐ I have experienced homelessness as a person under 25 years old in the last 5 years.

☐ I have experienced homelessness as an adult on my own or with a partner, but without children in my household.

☐ I have experienced homelessness as an adult with at least one child in my household.

☐ I have experienced homelessness as an older adult (age 62 or older)

☐ Prefer not to answer

☑ Not Applicable (N/A)

18. What is your race and/or ethnicity? Please select all that apply. *

☐ Black or African American

☐ Indigenous or Native American

☑ Person of Color (including but not limited to people who are: Asian, Asian-American, Pacific Islander, Native Hawaiian, Latino/a/e/x, Central American, South American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, North African)

☐ Mixed race

☐ White

☐ Prefer not to answer

☐ Other

19. Are you 2SLGBTQQIA+ (2-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual/aromantic, +)? Please check all of the following that apply and that you feel comfortable disclosing. *

☐ Yes - I'm 2SLGBTQQIA+ based on my sexual and/or romantic orientation (e.g., I'm lesbian, gay, bi, pan, queer+)

☐ Yes - I'm 2SLGBTQQIA+ based on my gender identity and/or expression (e.g., I'm trans, non-binary, intersex, gender fluid, 2-spirit, gender non-conforming+)

☑ No, I'm not 2SLGBTQQIA+

☐ Prefer not to answer

Personal or Professional Background & Experiences

We are seeking people with an array of meaningful connections, whether personal or professional, to key partners and systems in our community. For example, you could be currently employed by one of these types of partners, or you could be currently participating in services/programs or previously participated in services/programs from one of these types of partners.

21. Please select all of the entities or areas with which you have **past and/or current** personal experience or **current** professional experience. *

- [ ] Veteran/military service-focused agency or programming
- [x] Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Program funded agency or recipient agency
- [ ] Public Housing Agency (PHA)
- [x] Domestic violence agency or programming
- [ ] Education field / McKinney-Vento liaison
- [ ] Behavioral health field
- [ ] Health care field
- [ ] Transition-Aged Youth (TAY) Agency
- [x] Family Agency
- [x] Homeless system programs: Diversion
- [ ] Homeless system programs: Street Outreach
- [x] Homeless system programs: Prevention
- [x] Homeless system programs: Emergency Shelter
- [x] Homeless system programs: Rapid Rehousing
- [x] Homeless system programs: Permanent Supportive Housing
- [ ] Faith-based organization or community
- [x] Affordable housing development background
- [ ] I have no personal or professional connections to any of these