



Case-by-Case: A Tip Sheet for Processing Scenarios for Homeless Liaisons

Homeless Liaisons play a critical role in guiding the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Act, including responding to questions and complaints. These questions and complaints may be raised by program administrators, school staff, and parents and youth experiencing homelessness. By responding effectively to the issue at hand, Homeless Liaisons provide clear and consistent information to all involved parties, ensure compliance with the mandates of federal law, and bring about the greatest benefit for vulnerable children and youth.

To respond effectively to technical assistance requests, Homeless Liaisons must determine the nature of the issue, if additional information is needed, and if other people should be involved in the conversation. After determining the best approach for responding to the issue, Homeless Liaisons then must implement the approach, which may include gathering additional information, reflecting on available information, taking thoughtful action, and debriefing for lessons learned.

The framework below will assist Homeless Liaisons in managing a request from intake through resolution.

Step 1: Take in information from the initial call or email.

Upon initial contact, the nature of the issue at hand must be determined, and if the issue is even one that would be governed by the McKinney-Vento Act.

Consider the following questions:

- What do you know about the issue at hand? Do you need additional information? If so, what questions do you need to ask to help you understand the situation more fully?
- Is the issue at hand one that would be governed by the McKinney-Vento Act? If so, what section(s) of the law is relevant?
- Would the issue be addressed most effectively at the SEA or LEA level?
- What can be done to avoid a dispute? If a parent has expressed a desire to file a dispute, what steps do you need to take to ensure that the state dispute process is being followed?

Step 2: Gather Information

In most instances, the initial contact raises a number of questions that bear further investigation. The time taken to identify the right questions and gather answers will facilitate the actual processing of the request. You will need to determine the best sources for information, keeping in mind that certain types of inquiries could violate provisions of the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and that a variety of perspectives may be needed to understand the issue.

Consider the following questions:

- What additional questions do you have?
- Who could provide relevant information?
- How can you gather information in a sensible and strategic manner, showing consideration for involved parties and ensuring that privacy is not violated?
- Of the information gathered, what is most critical to understanding the issue? What is not important?

Step 3: Reflect

After gathering information, you will need to review the information in light of federal, state, and local law and policy. Then, you will need to determine the nature of the request: is it one of compliance, involving a potential violation of the McKinney-Vento Act or related legislation; is it one of confusion, wherein one of the involved parties simply needs more information about the requirements of the law; or is it one of complexity, wherein the issue at hand is not resolved explicitly in the legislation or guidance? Each of these types of requests may require a very different type of response. Also, keep in mind that the reflection process may generate additional questions along the way, creating the need to gather additional information. Thus, steps 2 and 3 may be cyclical, at times.

Consider the following questions:

- What is the central issue at hand? Are there secondary issues? If so, what are they?
- What other laws, policies, or programs may be involved?
- Would you benefit from receiving input from other professionals in the field of homeless education, such as the State Coordinator?
- Who else may need to be involved in reviewing the case (e.g., the legal department, administrators from other programs such as ESE, etc.)?
- Will you need the approval of others to proceed? If so, how will you go about getting it?
- How will you deal with people who may be resistant to implementing the proposed solution?
- Is the best interest of the child at the center of the discussion?

Step 4: Move toward Resolution

After reflection, you will need to decide what type of resolution is needed and how best to implement the resolution.

Resolutions can take the form of:

- providing information,
- guiding a school administrator, guidance counselor, or others in thinking through the scenario,
- identifying programs that warrant closer coordination with the McKinney-Vento program,
- discussing the situation with other program administrators involved to ensure clear understanding of the law, or
- ensuring that an issue that reaches the status of a formal dispute is resolved in keeping with the state dispute resolution process.

Moreover, resolutions do not necessarily have to be a zero-sum outcome, wherein if one party benefits, the other suffers. Look for ways to foster negotiation and compromise, when needed; leverage resources among programs, when appropriate; and keep the dialogue focused on ensuring students receive all services to which they are entitled under McKinney-Vento.

Step 5: Debrief for Lessons Learned

It is important, especially in difficult or contentious cases, to review the process and outcome, and determine what went well and what may need to be done differently in the future. You also may want to debrief the situation with others involved to help them improve their or their school's process for handling complex situations.

Consider the follow questions:

- Has this type of issue arisen frequently? If so, are there school administrators or staff or other parties that would benefit from information or technical assistance?
- Are there policies and/or practices that should be reviewed and revised to prevent this type of situation from recurring? Does a new policy need to be developed or a new practice implemented?
- Are there programs about which you need more information in order to be able to understand implications for determining eligibility and providing services under McKinney-Vento?
- Does the issue have any implications for LEA monitoring?
- What could you do differently in responding to similar situations in the future?

Analyzing requests and scenarios effectively is a learning process; yet, with practice and reflection, you can gain confidence in your ability to respond effectively to requests for assistance or guidance.

(This tip sheet is based on a scenario processing activity conducted at the State Coordinator preconference at the 2013 NAEHCY conference.)