

# Approaches to Funding Centralized Services: Lessons Learned from the Understanding the Value of Centralized Services Study

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## STUDY BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contracted with MEF Associates and their subcontractor, Mathematica, to conduct the *Understanding the Value of Centralized Services (VOCS) Study*, starting in September 2020. The VOCS study is a broad inquiry to explore the advantages, disadvantages, and costs of providing multiple social services at a single location for families with low incomes.

The VOCS study includes three main components: consultations with interested individuals and experts to inform every phase of the study; a targeted literature review; and qualitative data collection with three *centralized community resource centers (CCRCs)*, which we define for the purposes of this study as *brick-and-mortar locations where individuals can apply for or receive multiple services and/or benefits that are funded by the federal government*. The literature review examined the existing body of research on centralized services. It also identified gaps in the existing research, one of which was information on the funding strategies of CCRCs.

This brief provides insights into how the CCRCs we visited as part of the VOCS study fund their centralized services. This brief outlines each CCRC's distinct funding approach to provide examples or frameworks for practitioners seeking to better understand the various ways funding can support centralized service provision. For more information on study activities, see the [VOCS project page](#) on ACF's website.

As part of the VOCS study, we visited three CCRCs in March and April 2022. Findings in the brief draw on our conversations with staff and clients at the CCRCs.

- **Blackfeet Manpower One-Stop Center (Blackfeet Manpower)** is a Tribal organization located on the Blackfeet Nation Reservation in Browning, Montana, with two satellite offices in neighboring towns. Blackfeet Manpower supports its clients to achieve financial stability in a manner aligned with the Tribe’s values, providing services such as cash assistance, employment supports and training, Medicaid enrollment, and family strengthening services. The organization served more than 3,000 clients in the year preceding the visit.<sup>1</sup>
- **Neighborhood Place** is a collaborative of public-sector agencies located in the Louisville, Kentucky, Metro Area. Four agencies—the Louisville Metro Government (Offices of Resilience and Community Services and Public Health and Wellness), Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), the Kentucky Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), and Seven Counties Services—provide client-facing services at seven Neighborhood Place locations. Neighborhood Place services include food assistance, energy assistance, child welfare and violence prevention services, and school and family intervention services. Across all locations, Neighborhood Place serves about 100,000 clients annually.
- **Wayne Metro Community Action Agency (Wayne Metro)** provides services at more than 50 sites throughout Detroit and Wayne County, Michigan, co-locating staff at Wayne Metro buildings and Head Start centers as well as municipal buildings, schools, and offices of elected officials. The services provided by Wayne Metro include utility assistance, Head Start and Early Head Start, financial education, and food assistance. The organization serves about 70,000 clients each year.

For more information on the sites, see the VOCS Site Briefs on the [VOCS project page](#) on ACF’s website.

This brief describes each CCRC’s funding sources and approaches, how CCRCs handle shared costs across programs, how funding has changed over time, the implications of funding structures for service delivery, and key takeaways for practitioners considering how to fund their own centralized services efforts.

## FUNDING SOURCES AND APPROACHES

Each CCRC that participated in qualitative data collection in the VOCS study uses various funding sources to provide multiple services in a single location, though their approaches vary considerably.

### FUNDING SOURCES

Each of the three CCRCs receives funding from many federal, state, local, and other sources to provide services at their centralized locations and meets the needs of the populations it serves. All three CCRCs receive funding from the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG) and COVID relief packages.<sup>2</sup> Two of the three CCRCs receive funding related to income supports, employment supports, food assistance, child care assistance, and utility assistance. Each CCRC also receives unique funding streams to serve its specific population, such as tribal funding for Blackfeet Manpower, public school funding for Neighborhood Place, and housing supports for Wayne Metro. Exhibit 1 includes a detailed list of the primary funding sources for each CCRC.

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<sup>1</sup> Each CCRC provided data on the number of clients served. The way these data are calculated may vary based on organizational structure and types of services provided.

<sup>2</sup> We use the term “COVID relief funding” to refer to funding received from the American Rescue Plan and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act’s Coronavirus Relief Fund.

## Exhibit 1. Primary Funding Sources by CCRC

<b>Blackfeet Manpower</b>	<p><b>Federal funding through Public Law 102-477<sup>3</sup></b> (about 75% of total budget): Child Care and Development Fund, CSBG, General Assistance, Native Employment Works, Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)</p> <p><b>Other federal funding:</b> Vocational Rehabilitation, ACF discretionary grants (e.g., teen pregnancy prevention), COVID relief funding</p> <p><b>State funding:</b> Medicaid, State Work Activity Program</p> <p><b>Tribal funding:</b> Veterans services</p>
<b>Neighborhood Place</b>	<p><b>Louisville Metro Office of Resilience and Community Services</b></p> <p><i>Federal:</i> COVID relief funding, CSBG, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)</p> <p><i>State:</i> Kentucky General Fund</p> <p><i>Local:</i> Other general city funds, such as bonds</p> <p><b>Louisville Metro Office of Public Health and Wellness</b></p> <p><i>Federal:</i> Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children</p> <p><i>Local:</i> Healthy Start (home visiting)</p> <p><b>Jefferson County Public Schools:</b> Public school funding (<i>federal, state, and local</i>)</p> <p><b>Kentucky Department for Community Based Services</b></p> <p><i>Federal:</i> Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, child care, Medicaid, TANF, Social Services Block Grant</p> <p><b>Seven Counties Services<sup>4 5</sup></b></p> <p><i>Federal:</i> Medicaid and Medicare, other grants (e.g., Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)</p> <p><i>State and local:</i> Various grants</p> <p><i>Other:</i> Private donations</p> <p><i>Because Neighborhood Place has no shared budget, and instead each partner agency at Neighborhood Place contributes to the overall costs, we list funding sources by agency receiving the funding. Neighborhood Place does not track the percentage of funding contributed per agency.</i></p>
<b>Wayne Metro</b>	<p><b>Federal funding</b> (about 80% of total budget):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>U.S. Department of Agriculture: Summer Food Service Program</li> <li>U.S. Department of Education: Afterschool and summer programs</li> <li>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: Child and Family Services Plan, CSBG, Community Development Block Grants, Head Start, LIHEAP, Low Income Household Water Assistance Program</li> <li>U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development: Emergency Solutions Grant Program, Family Self Sufficiency Program, Home Funds, Resident Opportunity Funds</li> <li>U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Federal Emergency Management Agency Emergency Food and Shelter Program</li> <li>U.S. Department of Treasury: COVID relief funding</li> </ul> <p><b>State funding:</b> Great Start Readiness Program</p> <p><b>Local funding:</b> Water Residential Assistance Program</p> <p><b>Foundation and other grant programs</b></p>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Public Law 102-477, see Box 1.

<sup>4</sup> Seven Counties Services 2016 Annual Report. Issuu. (2020, January 7). [https://issuu.com/centerstone9/docs/scs\\_annual\\_report\\_2016\\_new](https://issuu.com/centerstone9/docs/scs_annual_report_2016_new)

<sup>5</sup> Melissa Bailey, D. of C. (2021, September 21). Seven Counties Services Awarded \$5 Million SAMHSA Grant. <https://blog.sevencounties.org/seven-counties-services-awarded-5-million-samhsa-grant>

## APPROACHES TO FUNDING FOR CENTRALIZED SERVICES

The CCRCs are able to support centralized services through a variety of funding arrangements (see Box 1 for definitions).

### Blackfeet Manpower: Blended and Braided Funding

Blackfeet Manpower uses a combination of blended funding for services that fall within Public Law 102-477 (“477”) and braided funding that includes other federal, state, and Tribal funding streams. Under 477, Blackfeet Manpower receives funding from several federal agencies through one consolidated budget from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as described in Box 1. Before a policy change in 2017, federal policy required that the Tribe track funding separately by source for this consolidated budget. Now, Blackfeet Manpower is able to fully blend 477 funding into one budget that is reported only to BIA instead of submitting the budget to multiple federal funding agencies. Services are still distinct—each service at Blackfeet Manpower has an administrator who oversees operations, and participants enroll in a specific service (e.g., Tribal TANF, WIOA)—but frontline staff are able to provide services funded by different sources. Under this blended funding model, Blackfeet Manpower has maximal flexibility to move funds from one service to another, and minimal staff time is required to track how funds are used.

About a quarter of Blackfeet Manpower’s funding comes from sources outside 477. Funding for programs outside 477 is braided rather than blended. A particular funding stream covers the associated program’s staff time and client services, and it may also contribute to shared costs, such as administrative staff and building maintenance. For example, the Vocational Rehabilitation grant from the U.S. Department of Education covers client support services, salaries of the Vocational Rehabilitation administrator and counselor, a portion of Blackfeet Manpower’s administrative staff time, and about a quarter of the utility costs for Blackfeet Manpower’s offices.

Blackfeet Manpower’s finance team oversees budgets, financial grant compliance, and day-to-day management of expenses, in collaboration with the director and program administrators. The leadership team makes decisions regarding budgets and proposals for new grants in partnership with the Tribal Council, which is the governing body of the Blackfeet Tribe, and oversees resources, programs, services, and tribal land management. All of Blackfeet Manpower’s funding flows through the Tribe’s finance department.

### Box 1. Funding Definitions

**Braiding** is weaving together funds from various sources to support centralized program goals, but funds are tracked separately. Generally, braiding federal funds does not require statutory authority.<sup>6</sup>

**Blending** is pooling funds from different sources without tracking each funding source separately, so the funding source becomes indistinguishable in the overall budget. Blending federal funds typically requires statutory authority.<sup>6</sup>

**Public Law 102-477 (“477”)** allows Tribes to combine funding for federal employment, training, and related services from several agencies: Department of the Interior, Department of Labor, and Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>7</sup> Public Law 115-93, the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Consolidation Act of 2017, amended the 477 law to allow Tribes to blend 477 funding rather than tracking spending by funding source.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Butler, S., Higashi, T., & Cabello, M. (2020, April 8). Budgeting to Promote Social Objectives—A Primer on Braiding and Blending. Washington, DC; Brookings Institution.

<sup>7</sup> Division of Workforce Development. U.S. Department of the Interior Indian Affairs. (n.d.). <https://www.bia.gov/bia/ois/dwd>

<sup>8</sup> Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Consolidation Act of 2017, Public Law 115-93, December 18, 2017 (2018). bill.

## Neighborhood Place: Cost Neutral, Separate Funding by Agency

Each partner agency at Neighborhood Place covers the cost of its own programs, including staff salaries, overhead, and client services. Agencies maintain their own budgets and cover the wages of staff who are co-located at Neighborhood Place locations, which function as the “front door” for service provision (i.e., staff deliver client-facing services at Neighborhood Place locations). Because operating Neighborhood Place does not add or reduce ongoing costs for the partner agencies relative to the cost of providing services at alternate locations, Neighborhood Place considers its model cost neutral. Neighborhood Place does, however, incur up-front costs associated with building or renovating a new location, so partner agencies leverage different sources of funding (see Box 2) to open a new location.

### Box 2. Leveraging Funding in Practice: How Neighborhood Place Built a New Site

The City of Louisville owned a piece of land next to a school and sold it to Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) for \$1 when JCPS was seeking a location in a community where it identified a need for Neighborhood Place services. The city paid for construction of the new Neighborhood Place building through a bond, but because JCPS owns the site, it leverages resources from the nearby school for ongoing needs (e.g., maintenance).

In addition to agency-specific funding for program and staff costs, each agency contributes to the “partnership costs” of Neighborhood Place. Louisville Metro Government and JCPS each fund Neighborhood Place–specific staff as well as facility costs for some locations. The state contributes funding from the Kentucky General Fund for shared operational costs, such as supplies, minor renovations to buildings, and staff training. Though this amount of funding is relatively small, it is critical to Neighborhood Place operations because it is flexible and covers expenses not allowable under other funding streams. Staff view partnership costs as similar to the costs they would incur providing services at separate locations (e.g., facilities, supplies,

administrative staff) but instead are pooled and shared among the partner agencies for Neighborhood Place.

Because funding is separate for each agency, commitment to a shared mission, communication among agencies, and collaboration at all staff levels are critical. Neighborhood Place has two committees that oversee funding and finances. In each committee, representatives from the partner agencies collaborate to ensure buy-in and equal participation in decisions regarding funding. First, the Operations Committee, a group that includes management from all partner agencies, oversees the day-to-day operations and finances of the Neighborhood Place locations. Second, a Finance Committee, made up of higher-level leadership staff from the partner agencies, convenes when budgetary issues require additional funding outside the regular budget.

## Wayne Metro: Braided Funding

Wayne Metro braids funding from various federal and non-federal sources. Staff from Wayne Metro direct clients to services using a call center and universal application, so staff work across programs and funding streams. Their time is assigned to particular funding streams based on the time spent working on those programs. To manage numerous funding streams, Wayne Metro has developed systems to track staff time and spending. Wayne Metro assigns every grant or funding stream a grant accountant or coordinator to ensure it is meeting specific requirements of the funding.

As described in the next section, Wayne Metro often shares space with partner organizations that provide the space free of charge or at a minimal cost.

Wayne Metro is also intentional about using funds from different sources. This CCRC uses more restrictive funding first and reserves the more flexible CSBG funding to meet program needs not allowable under other funding streams.

## FUNDING FOR SHARED COSTS

To effectively centralize services, the CCRCs have had to find ways to cover shared costs, such as employing staff across multiple programs, building and maintaining shared physical space, and developing and operating central data systems.

### STAFF

#### **Two CCRCs—Blackfeet Manpower and Wayne Metro—share staff costs across programs.**

Many staff at Blackfeet Manpower and Wayne Metro work across more than one program. To fund these shared positions, the organizations charge a percentage of staff time to different funding streams based on the responsibilities of the staff member. Blackfeet Manpower splits the cost of administrative staff, including the director, deputy director, finance staff, human resources, maintenance, security, and receptionists, across funding streams. Wayne Metro has infrastructure in place to track administrative and frontline staff time spent working on different programs and grants, and staff time is allocated to those funding streams accordingly.

**At the other CCRC—Neighborhood Place—staff work directly for one agency.** Unlike the other CCRCs, at Neighborhood Place each staff member, including those in administrative positions, works for only a single agency. For the most part, staff specialize in their own agency's programs, but a few positions focus on the holistic needs of the Neighborhood Place location. For example, the site administrator, a Louisville Metro Government employee, oversees the location and encourages collaboration across all staff at that location; nevertheless, the administrator formally supervises only staff within their same agency. Other responsibilities, such as front desk duties, are shared among staff from different agencies.

### PHYSICAL SPACE AND DATA SYSTEMS

**CCRCs take advantage of existing spaces and infrastructure, when possible.** For instance, Wayne Metro uses multipurpose buildings housing multiple programs or co-locates its staff in partners' existing buildings to extend their geographic reach without having to invest in additional office space. Neighborhood Place has chosen locations near schools so it can leverage school district resources such as maintenance staff.

**Up-front investment is often necessary to prepare the physical space or systems for coordination.** A large investment is often required at the outset of centralization, which can be a challenge from a funding perspective. However, staff describe a longer-term reduced cost per client at a CCRC compared with other service delivery methods. For Neighborhood Place, opening a new site often requires partners to contribute beyond their regular budgets for a building or renovations, which can require a new funding source such as a city bond. Wayne Metro had to make an up-front investment to develop its universal application and to build out a data system that could accommodate the needs of multiple programs. This CCRC drew from the more flexible funding sources, such as CSBG and foundation funding, and used Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding to launch the application during the COVID-19 pandemic. At Blackfeet Manpower, finding funding for a larger office space, which is one of the organization's immediate goals, has presented a challenge.

**CCRCs often split the costs of office space and utilities among programs.** Similar to the way CCRCs fund shared staff, they also split costs for space among programs that use the space. For instance, Blackfeet Manpower splits the cost of utilities based on the relative size of the programs. At Neighborhood Place, each partner agency covers overhead costs of office space for its own staff. Wayne Metro spreads the costs for a building with office space for multiple programs across the programs based on number of staff. If the building also houses specific programming (e.g., a school for Head Start), that program pays for the space directly, based on square footage.

## CHANGES OVER TIME: CENTRALIZATION AND FUNDING

All three CCRCs are well established and have served their communities for decades. They have been able to withstand changes in funding levels and sources over that time.

**CCRCs manage the ebbs and flows of changing community needs and funding availability over time by developing new partnerships and capitalizing on various funding opportunities.** All three CCRCs have been operating for decades—Neighborhood Place for almost 30 years and Blackfeet Manpower and Wayne Metro for more than 50 years. Over time, the CCRCs have adapted to changes in funding availability by expanding and changing their service offerings, and they seek funding that aligns with community needs. For example, Blackfeet Manpower received a 5-year grant from ACF to run a teen pregnancy support and prevention program in partnership with local high schools. Wayne Metro staff described how they developed their financial literacy program in the wake of an economic downturn when banks were required to make community investments as part of government bailout terms. Adding new services and funding streams is a natural progression for a CCRC that already provides multiple services in a single location.

**Policy changes or turnover in elected officials can impact funding.** Each public sector partner agency at Neighborhood Place is led by an elected official, so changes in administrations at the local and state levels can result in different budget priorities. Because Neighborhood Place is seen as a cost-neutral investment, with minimal costs resulting from the centralization effort itself, staff believe it has been insulated from major budget cuts. At Blackfeet Manpower, a federal policy change in 2017 allowed the organization to blend rather than braid 477 funding, which means it is able to centralize staff functions without spending additional time tracking how staff spend their time.

**Staff report that centralizing services has helped their CCRCs secure new funding.** In applications for new grants, the CCRCs typically highlight how they collaborate and centralize services, which they say strengthens their proposals for new funding opportunities. In particular, Wayne Metro staff noted that providing data on their ability to identify and address client needs through centralized services has been useful for grant applications. Moreover, all three CCRCs were well positioned to distribute COVID relief funding, listed in Box 3, which became available during the

### Box 3. Types of COVID Relief Funding Distributed by CCRCs<sup>10</sup>

**Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (2020)** included Coronavirus Relief Fund to cover state, local, and Tribal government expenses associated with the COVID public health emergency.

**American Rescue Plan (2021)** included State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, which could be used to respond to the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic, and an Emergency Rental Assistance Program to assist households unable to pay rent and utilities because of pandemic hardships.

<sup>10</sup> Assistance for State, Local, and Tribal Governments. U.S. Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/coronavirus/assistance-for-state-local-and-tribal-governments>

pandemic, because of their established infrastructure (i.e., having accessible offices in multiple neighborhoods and processes for determining eligibility across multiple programs) and reach and reputation within their communities. The pandemic led to an influx of funding in all three sites. Wayne Metro’s budget expanded more than fourfold between 2020 and 2022, from \$60 million in fiscal year 2020 to \$250 million by fiscal year 2022. One staff member at Neighborhood Place described the COVID relief funding as the largest flow of funding she will likely see in her career.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR SERVICE DELIVERY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

Each CCRC’s funding structure and the requirements of funding streams are critical to the organization’s service delivery model. The funding structures help or hinder CCRCs’ efforts to centralize different program elements.<sup>6</sup>

- For Blackfeet Manpower, blending funding through 477 gives the organization greater flexibility across a set of services. In particular, blended funding allows for more centralization of staff functions, which means staff spend their time on direct service provision rather than on tracking funds or how they spend their time. At the time of data collection, Blackfeet Manpower was in the midst of consolidating staff roles so a client can fill out one application and attend one eligibility meeting to access any 477 service.
- At Wayne Metro, requirements of different funding streams dictate data needs and restrictions, which makes sharing a data system more complicated. However, the organization invested resources to develop a more sophisticated data system, compared with the simple online forms and spreadsheets it once used, that can be customized to fit grant requirements. Thus, programs are able to share data. A single data system and universal application allows clients to learn about and apply for multiple services without providing duplicate information to multiple staff.
- Separate funding, coupled with a separation of staff (i.e., staff work for a single agency) and data systems, means Neighborhood Place relies more on coordination among agencies than on full consolidation of services, including conducting warm handoffs between staff and developing processes to share client data among programs. Clients who access multiple services interact with different staff for each of those services, but the clients in our focus group felt the various staff worked well together. To collaborate effectively, a shared mission and vision are critical. The partner agencies work together to identify funding needs and funding sources within their own agencies. In addition, finding resources for larger projects (e.g., building or renovating a new site) is one way the agencies demonstrate their commitment and buy-in to the partnership.

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<sup>6</sup> The conceptual model that guides this project is available in our final report, which can be accessed on the project website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/understanding-value-centralized-services>.



In Box 4, we identify four key takeaways related to the funding of CCRCs.

#### Box 4. Key Takeaways

- **Centralizing services does not require a certain funding model.** Each CCRC is able to centralize services using a funding approach most appropriate for its organization and the funding available. Some approaches, such as braided funding, require an investment in staff time and systems both to meet funding requirements and to offer a streamlined experience for clients.
- **Funding streams dictate what is or is not allowable, and these requirements are hugely important in how CCRCs structure centralized services.** In the case of 477 funding at Blackfeet Manpower, blending funding has made centralizing services and other functions easier. At Wayne Metro, funding is braided rather than blended, which does not prohibit centralization but requires finance staff to track what is spent on which program. Wayne Metro’s data team also customizes the data system to meet the various requirements of funding streams so the intake experience is streamlined from the client perspective. Neighborhood Place keeps funding separate, so staff functions are not shared among agencies, but leadership find alternative ways to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing across staff from different agencies. Because restrictions on allowable uses exist for most funding streams, identifying at least one flexible funding stream is critical. For instance, Neighborhood Place uses a small contribution from the Kentucky General Fund to pay for expenses, such as supplies and annual staff training, which cannot be covered by other funding streams.
- **Flexible up-front investment is often required, either to develop the physical space needed or to build systems to centralize efficiently.** Wayne Metro used flexible CSBG funding and COVID relief funding to build out its data system and universal application, while Neighborhood Place has used sources such as city bonds to pay for the buildout of a new location.
- **Flexible and varied funding approaches are helpful for centralization because they allow CCRCs to withstand changes over time and to adapt services to meet client needs, especially in a crisis.** Changes in program funding over time can present a challenge or an opportunity. According to CCRC staff, providing centralized services can help secure new funding—understanding broad community needs and providing multiple services to address those needs is often attractive to funders. In the past few years, a huge amount of COVID relief funding was directed to the CCRCs. They were well positioned to receive and distribute relief dollars given their strong community reputations, established screening processes for multiple services, and staff with experience helping clients to navigate various services.

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