

STAR Expansion Committee

Charter and Proposals for Expansion

Introduction

Since 2017, there have been community-led efforts to bring a non-police crisis alternative to Denver, CO inspired by programs across the country, including in Eugene, Oregon. In 2019, a delegation from Denver that included community advocates, service providers, representatives from the Denver Police Department and 911, and the Caring for Denver Foundation traveled to Eugene, Oregon to learn about the CAHOOTS program and experience its infrastructure and history. After returning from Eugene, the Denver Police Department convened a workgroup to initiate a process to create a model influenced by CAHOOTS. The workgroup was successful in launching the STAR - Support Team Assisted Response pilot program on June 1st, 2020. With the pilot launch and community facilitation charged to DASHR - Denver Alliance for Street Health Response and Jason Vitello, the workgroup shifted its regular meetings to receive quarterly updates while creating a new, smaller subcommittee with the explicit goal to create a plan for expanding the STAR program.

Difference Between Charter and Proposal

The charter, which includes mission, vision, goals, and values reflects the collaborative efforts and discussions of the STAR Expansion Committee and serves as a document that solidifies collective vision and hopes for the STAR program, especially as it continues to expand.

The proposal component of this document offers recommendations from the STAR Expansion Committee for implementation of the STAR program beyond its pilot phase. The STAR Expansion Committee discussed at length what they hope to see from the STAR program and measures of long-term success and decided, through consensus, what the full program should look like. Adherence to the recommendations would rely on continued accountability from the STAR Expansion Committee as much of its membership were involved with the STAR Workgroup since and even before its founding and are critical to its long-term success.

CHARTER

Mission

To provide an immediate and situationally appropriate response option for the people of Denver, that is a trustworthy and reliable alternative to traditional 911 response. This response will be a part of a larger holistic and community-driven source of support for those same people and seeks to be trauma-informed and culturally-responsive.

Vision

The STAR program will be a 24/7, full city model that sends the right resources and responses to the right situations in a timely manner as a community-owned alternative to traditional 911 responses.

Goals

This committee has established a set of short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals for the STAR program. This will help to influence the direction of STAR expansion. Adherence to future goals will hinder on adherence to former goals as well (goals in the short-term should apply at all phases of the program).

Short-Term (1 year)

- To be a community-driven program that is culturally responsive and trauma informed.
- To expand the current service radius of STAR access in accordance with data that proves where the need is
- To fund community-based service organizations as a way to ensure integrity and trust in the program

Mid-Term (2-5 years)

- To reduce repeat calls for individuals by connecting them to longer-term services and support
- To expand the public narrative to ensure that STAR is a resource that people know about and use

Long-Term (5-10 years)

- To have an alternative emergency response that is accessible to all of Denver as a 24/7 program

Values

The following values are those that are collectively shared by the membership of the STAR Expansion Committee. Expansion for the STAR program should reflect and be held accountable to these values, established by those who were instrumental in its launch.

- Community-Driven Control
 - CAHOOTS was a program that was initially started out of community efforts to create immediate response to urgent needs. Community-driven component of this program continues the spirit with which CAHOOTS was created that should in turn be embodied by the STAR program.
- Culturally Responsive
 - A program that is culturally responsive will include responders and providers who share lived experiences and identifies with Denver’s diverse population. In doing so, the program will be more trustworthy and responsible to the community that it serves.
- Linguistically specific
 - A program that fosters the many languages that are spoken by the community it serves will ensure that people will trust and rely on the program to serve their needs.
- Holistic Care
 - Key to success for the STAR program is the recognition that the van itself is just one mechanism that lives within a continuum of care and support to people who are in crisis. Holistic care ensures connecting those in crisis with long-term support, services, and treatment to reduce repeat calls.
- Do no Harm
 - The STAR program shall commit to a “do no harm” approach. In addition, the STAR program itself will use a harm reductionist approach recognizing that not every crisis can be “resolved” in the moment, but rather navigated and creating trust with the person in crisis to help them continue through programs and services that meet their needs.
- Healthy de-escalation
 - The STAR program will commit to de-escalation as a guiding principle of engaging with individuals and communities in crisis.
- Problem resolution
 - The STAR program is dedicated to identifying, navigating, and solving problems that they encounter through serving individuals in crisis.
- Healthy outcomes
 - The STAR committee acknowledges that much of what the program will respond to will be public health issues and social determinants of health. Because of that, the STAR program will be dedicated to improving the health of those they engage with as components of improving community health.
- Community empowerment and resilience

- STAR will be dedicated to community empowerment and resilience through building trusted relationships and connecting people to services and support. Additionally, the program will be community-owned and driven as a mechanism for investment from community members in the program itself.
- Self Determination
 - Communities are supported in self-determination to decide and build safety, survival, and thriving. The STAR program acts as a vehicle towards empowerment and support.
- Alternatives to Policing
 - The STAR program sends clinicians and medically-trained responders to crisis instead of armed law enforcement officers with badges and ability to arrest.
- Non Violence
 - The STAR program is committed to non-violence and de-escalation.
- Trauma-informed
 - That the program should have a trauma-informed approach to incorporating the needs of individuals impacted by systemic violence and trauma that they experience as the result of both systemic and personal harm. This program acknowledges that individuals served by the STAR program are disproportionately impacted by violence and trauma and should be driven by their needs first and foremost.

PROPOSALS

High Priority Components of Expansion

The following are components of the expansion of STAR that the Expansion Committee believes are critical to success and to adherence of the values outlined in the charter.

- Funding for community-based organizations that are led by Black, Latino, indigenous, and people of color and also members of the LGBTQ and disability community.
- Community nexus that vets proposals, maintains community trust in the program through oversight and regular meetings with providers, leads community awareness and outreach, and provides a channel for individuals with lived and living experience to drive the program (steering committee or board). Board should be entirely composed of community members and people with lived experience.
- Preference given to collaborative proposals versus competitive proposals for implementation of the expanded program
- Community ownership of the program through empowering community-based service organizations and accountability mechanisms to keep the program loyal to the values that have been established in this charter.

Structure

Proposed structure that takes into account the implementation of a community advisory body.

- Through 2021 approved budget, funds will be directed to DDPHE for implementation of STAR expanded program.
- DDPHE is to coordinate with community accountability nexus(advisory committee) for vetting and approving proposals for facilitation of STAR program
- DDPHE will coordinate with 911 for logistics and administrative responsibility of program
- Community nexus(advisory committee) will meet monthly to track data, gather public input and share updates, and work on alignment to values in this document
- Community nexus (advisory committee) works with DDPHE to establish and maintain continuum of care
- Organizations approved to run the program will have the agency to run and maintain their own programs and areas - they are accountable to DDPHE for reporting and evaluation

Expansion

It has been a request of council members, community that have been part of the process with STAR, and the public to expand the STAR program to serve more than its current service area. However, it should be noted that expansion of the program should happen responsibly and according to the immediate needs of Denver's residents to ensure a successful program. Also noting that the \$1.4 million that was added to the budget for 2021 would need a lot more to run a successful program that truly expands to the areas that have been requested by council and the public.

That being considered, the use of data around calls that could be eligible for STAR should factor heavily in designs to expand the STAR program to serve additional areas, and should also inform responsible use of funding for the program. While a 24/7 model that serves all police and council districts is an aspirational goal for many on the STAR expansion committee, that would need considerably more resources and is likely a long-term vision. However, in addition to data informing geographic expansion of the STAR program, this committee suggests two other components to consider for expansion.

- Building up versus building out: With requests to expand to other geographic areas in Denver, expansion has mostly been defined as expanding the service area for STAR. However, the expansion committee offers the concept of building up the program in its current service area as well to ensure that the needs of the community are being met and that there is infrastructure around the van itself that serves those in crisis. "Building up" is in accordance with the value, "Holistic Care"..
- Demographic expansion: While the STAR program is intended to be accessible and meet the needs of all residents in Denver, Colorado, there is an additional need to serve communities disproportionately impacted by the criminal justice system and other systemic harm. Therefore, in considerations for geographic expansion, there should also be heavy consideration to expand the program to serve communities that include, but are not limited to, BIPOC communities, those living with disability, and unhoused individuals.

Use of Funds

In 2020, the city of Denver approved \$1.4 million to expand the STAR program. This committee insists that expansion and use of those funds be data-driven. Some data that has come out of the STAR program was an evaluation report conducted by data from 911 calls and STAR service calls for the Caring for Denver pilot grant. One suggestion

in that evaluation report is that the \$1.4 million be used to fund four vans and six teams of two people each. While this committee agrees that vans and additional response teams will be critical expenditures, we also suggest some funds being dedicated towards training and supplies for the van. This is in accordance with the “build up versus out” concepts illustrated in the section above.

Timeline

This serves as both a documented history of the STAR program as well as proposed timeline for expansion. Expansion notes will have an asterisk next to them and serve only as ideas for a 2021 timeframe.

- May 24-26, 2019 - Denver delegation visits Eugene, Oregon
- June 7, 2019 - Initial meeting of Workgroup following Eugene visit
- June 1, 2020 - Launch of STAR pilot program
- June 26, 2020 - DASHR selected as community facilitator
- August 27, 2020 - STAR Workgroup meetings move to quarterly updates
- November 9, 2020 - Mayor’s budget approved by City Council, dedicating \$1.395M to STAR expansion
- February 2020 - Evaluation completed of initial six months of STAR pilot
- January 1, 2021 - DDPHE receives funds from city for STAR expansion
- January 1 - June 30, 2021 - Continuation of STAR pilot
- January 1 - March 1, 2021 - Collaboration with DDPHE to build RFP for full program*
- February 1 - April 1, 2021 - Creation of community nexus to help advise and hold program accountable to the values of this charter*
- April 1 - May 1 - Accepting, reviewing, and approving proposals for expanded program in collaboration with community nexus*
- June 1, 2021 - Launch of expanded program*

Conclusions

The STAR program represents a transformative opportunity to reimagine crisis response and direct the right tools to the right situations while serving as a force multiplier in responding to safety concerns in the city of Denver. More than that, it represents an unprecedented and unfamiliar collaborative endeavor on behalf of government and community. The program has already received incredible attention from the public and from other cities looking to implement something similar to STAR for their respective municipalities.

This document is the result of at least eighteen months of collaboration, meetings, and envisioning something that had not existed before in Denver. It is also the insistence of this document and those who worked to create it that as the STAR program grows and expands its impact on residents in Denver, that it continues to adhere to principles and values outlined by those responsible for launching the program. This document also insists that critical to the success of STAR and programs that follow it will be the codified role of community members to determine their needs and what must be components of efforts to serve those needs.