

# How to Leverage Funding and Technical Assistance to Improve Local Eviction Data

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Court records are the primary data source on evictions in the United States. Local communities extract critical information from these records, including when and where evictions are taking place, and use this information to track evictions, develop effective prevention strategies, and build momentum for policy changes that promote housing security. Despite the importance of this information, the quality and accessibility of eviction court data varies across the U.S.

In the spring of 2021, New America’s Future of Land and Housing (FLH) program and a coalition of housing experts, municipal leaders and court staff released [eight high-level recommendations](#) to improve eviction data infrastructure at the local and national level.

Over the last year, informed by [findings](#) from focus groups with local users of court data, FLH has worked to deepen two recommendations:

- Provide federal funding to advance eviction data infrastructure in local jurisdictions; and
- Provide technical assistance to build a robust eviction data infrastructure in local jurisdictions.

Focus on funding and technical assistance for local eviction data efforts was not accidental. As the generators of court eviction data, most improvements to the quality and accessibility reside with court systems (see, for example, implementing [court eviction data standards](#)). But courts face several [challenges](#) in aligning their data infrastructure and technology systems to meet the public's data needs, and system-wide improvements take time to implement.

All the while, households across the country are continuing to face eviction at alarming rates, and those well-positioned to intervene are often unable to access and use the data that would allow them to do so effectively. In addition to longer-term, system-wide changes to court systems, the urgency of this crisis demands immediate improvements to unlock eviction data access and use today.

Funding and technical assistance can go a long way, and every level of government has a part to play. This includes government actors at the **federal level** (e.g., HUD, Treasury, DOJ, and Congress for appropriation of funding); **state level** (e.g., Governors, state housing agencies, state legislatures); and **local level** (e.g., Mayors, city councils, county board of directors, local housing agencies).

Taken together, these recommendations can help unlock access to court eviction data, and build capacity for local data use in ways that bolster housing security across the country.

## **Provide Federal Funding to Advance Eviction Data Infrastructure in Local Jurisdictions**

Funding is one of the most powerful tools to incentivize the collection and use of court eviction data at the state and local level. These recommendations are intended to increase the availability of funding to localities seeking to collect and use this data in their day-to-day work, and inform the allocation of resources such that data efforts are adequately supported.

### **Recommendation 1: Establish a federal grant program that provides dedicated funding to localities to advance the collection and use of eviction court data.**

**Targeted to:** Federal agencies and Congress (to appropriate funding)

**Description:** A federal grant program designated specifically to advance the collection and use of eviction data would allow localities to invest in capacity building and data infrastructure improvements.

**Key details:** A federal grant program could be competitive, one-time or ongoing, and should be flexible enough to support the range of data-related activities that a locality might undertake, from data collection to investing in data infrastructure. This includes:

- Improving data collection activities, including assessing data collection across local housing entities; developing a coordinated approach to bridging data gaps; building staff capacity to establish memorandums of understanding and other data-sharing agreements with courts; and developing tools and methods to obtain data from public websites.
- Improving data quality and analysis activities, including building relationships with court staff and housing experts to better understand data; increasing capacity to clean and validate critical data fields (e.g., address data); and invest in the technical skills to produce analyses of this data.
- Improving data system infrastructure and interoperability activities include developing infrastructure to house and disseminate publicly-accessible eviction data trends and reporting; working with court systems to implement uniform data standards for collecting and reporting eviction data; and balancing the protection of tenant privacy through record sealing with data access.

**Recommendation 2: State and local government actors should dedicate a portion of flexible or allowable federal funding towards building eviction data capacity and infrastructure.**

**Target audience:** State and local level actors

**Description:** State and local decision-makers should leverage federal funding streams that can be used to pursue a wide range of flexible uses, including eviction-data related activities, and ensure that any funding is obligated before the stated deadlines.

**Key Details:** The State Justice Institute has a [Funding Toolkit](#) for state courts and justice system partners to identify federal and philanthropic funding opportunities. Below are two examples of state- and locally-administered federal funds that could include developing an eviction database as an allowable use:

- The U.S. Department of Treasury’s American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF): In its Final Rule, Treasury issued [increased flexibility](#) for courts, legal aid organizations and other entities to use these funds to help ease court backlogs and for eviction prevention purposes. State and local government recipients of SLFRF must “obligate” their funds by December 31, 2024 in order to preserve the funds for spending through the end of 2026.
- HUD’s [Community Development Block Grant](#) (CDBG): States, cities, and counties use CDBG funds for housing and economic opportunities principally for low- and moderate-income people. Eligible [activities](#) specifically include local planning and capacity building, including “studies; analysis; data gathering; preparation of plans; and identification of actions that will implement plans.”

**Recommendation 3: State and local decision-makers should fund a centralized entity to collect and house eviction data.**

**Audience:** State and local level actors

**Description:** Absent a centralized entity tasked with collection and storing eviction data, data-related activities are often spread across several entities, ad hoc and incomplete. State and local decision-makers should designate and adequately fund a local entity to be responsible for eviction court data collection and reporting.

**Key Details:** This entity could be a local government agency, non-profit, community-based organization or university, and these responsibilities could be integrated into existing job roles and departments or organizations, or created anew. Activities include:

- Establishing pathways to collect eviction data (from courts, public records, or third party vendors);
- Cleaning, standardizing and storing data, in ways that protect data privacy;
- Supplementing or manipulating court data to ensure data completeness and quality;
- Applying or monitoring adherence to court data standards, to ensure consistency of data definitions, documentation, and interpretation;
- Collaborating with and integrating expertise of legal experts and tenant advocates that have local and experiential knowledge; and
- Conducting eviction data analysis, and reporting regular and accurate information to policymakers, researchers, journalists, and the general public.

## Provide Technical Assistance to Build a Robust Eviction Data Infrastructure to Local Jurisdictions

Addressing access and quality challenges with court eviction data often requires specific technical skills and know-how, without which, many of these challenges are insurmountable and impede data use altogether.

### **Recommendation 4: Provide technical assistance to address the challenges localities face in collecting and using eviction data.**

**Audience:** Federal level actors

**Description:** Federal funding for eviction data capacity building should also provide technical assistance tailored to localities specific needs, including the development of tools and resources that have the potential to unlock data access and quality. HUD and other agencies could also explore whether its existing authority to contract with training and technical assistance providers could include assistance with these activities.

**Key Details:** Either in combination or separate from an eviction data grant program, federal funding for eviction data technical assistance should be flexible enough to meet the unique challenges that localities face. Activities that localities could use support with include:

- Assessing the eviction data landscape and identifying data gaps;
- Manually documenting public records (whether from a public website or from physical files);
- Automating manual processes required to work with court data (e.g., cleaning and verifying address information, aggregating case files);
- Developing processes for data-sharing across government agencies and promoting interoperability of data systems.

### **Recommendation 5: State and local entities should support the application of eviction data standards within and across court systems to improve data consistency and interpretability.**

**Audience:** State and local level actors

**Description:** State and local entities should require the implementation of [eviction data standards](#)—a common set of data elements and definitions—to ensure the quality, completeness and consistency of court data statewide.

**Key Details:** State and local actors should develop a phased implementation approach to applying court eviction data standards across courts (see the Arizona [administrative order](#) for the adoption of judicial data elements).

These recommendations, on their own, may be insufficient to improve eviction court data in all the ways that meet local communities needs. But taken together, they can move the needle towards unlocking access to court eviction data and build local capacity for data collection and use.