



HOUSING- FOCUSED STREET OUTREACH *Framework*



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS



Table of Contents

Acknowledgment	3	Collaboration and Resource-Sharing	31
Executive Summary	4	Integration and Data Sharing	32
Background	7	Coordinate Engagement Strategies	33
Types of Unsheltered Homelessness	9	Combine to form Multidisciplinary	
Summary of Housing-Focused		Outreach Teams	34
Street Outreach Core Elements	10	Warm Handoffs	35
Core Elements of Housing-Focused		Person-Centered Engagement	36
Street Outreach	15	Services and Resources	39
Using Data and Impact Analysis		Adequate Funding	40
to Inform Decision-Making	16	Outreach vs In-reach	40
Data and Impact Analysis	17	Equitable & Culturally	
Strategic Collaboration		Responsive Services	41
and Partnerships	19	Caseloads	42
The Role of Street Outreach		Staffing	43
in the Continuum of Care and		Recruitment, Hiring and Retention	43
Coordinated Entry Systems	20	<i>Recruitment</i>	43
Key Partnerships	21	<i>Hiring</i>	44
<i>Temporary and Permanent Housing</i>	21	<i>Retention</i>	44
<i>Crisis Housing</i>	21	Training	45
<i>Housing Programs</i>	22	<i>Continuum of Care Role in Skills</i>	
<i>Community-Based Health Providers</i>	22	<i>and Professional Development</i>	45
<i>Municipal Departments</i>	23	Flexible Outreach Coverage	46
<i>First Responders</i>	23	<i>Scheduling</i>	46
<i>Considerations for Relationships</i>		<i>Geography</i>	46
<i>with Law Enforcement</i>	26	<i>Urban, Suburban, and</i>	
<i>Business Community</i>	28	<i>Rural Considerations</i>	47
<i>Culturally Specific Organizations</i>	28	Promotion of Community	
<i>Faith Communities and</i>		Health and Safety	48
<i>Faith Based Organizations</i>	30	Comprehensive Preparation	49
Communication	31	Purposeful Engagement	51
		Coordination & Communication	53
		Managing Conflict	54



Housing-Focused Approach Anchored in Housing First	55	Conclusion	64
Embedded in Coordinated Entry Systems	56	Appendices	65
<i>Considerations for Access and Assessment</i>	57	Appendix I: Training Topics	66
<i>Considerations for Prioritization and Referrals</i>	58	Appendix II: Glossary of Terms	67
Housing-Focused Problem Solving	59	Appendix III: Types of Street Outreach	69
Support Document Readiness	60	Appendix IV: Funding Sources for Street Outreach	72
Housing Stabilization Options Exploration	61	Appendix V: Resources	74
Access to Flexible Funds for Securing Housing	63		

Acknowledgment

This Framework is built upon the strength and collaboration of our partners across the country, along with established best practices (refer to the [resource appendix](#)). The National Alliance to End Homelessness extends its gratitude to the more than 50 individuals and service providers who contributed their valuable input through survey responses, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews.

A special thank you to our consultants, Dana Woolfolk and Viam Advising, as well as OrgCode Consulting Inc. For detailed information about the development of this framework, please refer to [page 15](#).

Some links in this document may no longer be accessible due to updates or removals on federal websites. Please check back later, as they may be restored.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Through focus groups, an anonymized survey of street outreach providers, and consultation with national subject matter experts, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (the Alliance) developed this Housing-Focused Street Outreach framework inclusive of a definition and core elements. The Alliance defines **Housing-Focused Street Outreach (HFSO)** as an engagement strategy that prioritizes connecting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to lifesaving, person-centered, and culturally responsive services and resources while actively working towards securing stable and permanent housing solutions.



This approach is characterized by five distinct core elements:



Data and Impact Analysis to Inform Decision-Making. Data helps identify demographic and geographic patterns in unsheltered homelessness and resource gaps. This information should be used to inform strategies. Data is also key to measuring the effectiveness of approaches.



Strategic Collaboration and Partnerships. All street outreach efforts should be coordinated and leverage diverse partnerships within and outside of the Continuum of Care (CoC) to meet the needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.



Person-Centered Engagement. Communities should prioritize building strong relationships, recognizing the dignity of people experiencing homelessness while supporting their autonomy of choice, and helping individuals restore their power.



Promotion of Community Health and Safety. Any Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy should consider the wellbeing of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the broader community, and the dedicated staff who work with the most vulnerable people in our community.



Housing-Focused Approach Anchored in Housing First. Communities should ensure that system-level strategies, beliefs, and practices are aligned with the Housing First philosophy, and that street outreach programming supports transitions from unsheltered homelessness directly into permanent housing (or crisis housing as available and appropriate).



To begin organizing towards a Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy, Continuums of Care (CoCs) must first identify all the different outreach programs operating within their communities.

Outreach providers must come together to coordinate engagement approaches, share resources, align and integrate data.

If possible, providers may combine efforts to form multidisciplinary outreach teams. Throughout this framework we use the language “CoC” to refer to the coordinated system of service providers, administrative entities, and governing bodies

responding to homelessness together within one geographical area. This should be understood to include any service providers engaged in collaborative work to end homelessness and not only those funded by specific homelessness services funding sources.

As unsheltered homelessness continues to grow nationwide, it is imperative that communities strategically align all resources and services.

This coordination elevates communication, streamlines the delivery of life-saving resources, and ensures a unified approach towards permanent housing solutions.





BACKGROUND

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines street outreach as “activities designed to meet the immediate needs of people experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations by connecting them with emergency shelter, housing, or critical services and providing them with urgent, non-facility-based care.”¹ For decades, street outreach has served as the cornerstone for identifying and connecting with the most vulnerable people experiencing homelessness in a community who, for various reasons, may not be able to access existing support systems. Many efforts have primarily focused on providing life-saving resources for those with acute needs. While this remains a critical priority, **it is imperative that communities ensure all street outreach activities are both coordinated and housing-focused** to effectively contribute to the overall goal of ending homelessness.

¹ Note: [Appendix II](#) contains a glossary of common terms referenced throughout the report.



Based on input from people with lived experience of homelessness, street outreach providers, and other subject matter experts, the National Alliance to End Homelessness defines **Housing-Focused Street Outreach** as an engagement strategy that prioritizes connecting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to lifesaving, person-centered, and culturally responsive services and resources while actively working towards securing stable and permanent housing solutions.

This approach is characterized by:



**Data and Impact Analysis
to Inform Decision-Making**



**Strategic Collaboration
and Partnership**



**Person-Centered
Engagement**



**Promotion of Community
Health and Safety**



**Housing-Focused Approach
Anchored in Housing First**

Establishing an effective systemic response to unsheltered homelessness is critical for communities working to end homelessness.

Success hinges on ensuring that the CoC operates efficiently, equitably, and effectively. This involves not only intervening swiftly to support housing solutions but also preventing homelessness before it occurs, all while upholding the dignity and resilience of those facing housing crises. The overarching objective is to make a person's experience of homelessness rare, brief, and one-time. The role of street outreach programming is central to this endeavor and is especially important for local efforts to reduce unsheltered homelessness.

This Housing-Focused Street Outreach framework can help CoC system leaders, outreach providers – including directors, managers, and frontline staff – funders, and advocates effectively address the needs of individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness in various situations, including those living in encampments, vehicles, or other places not meant for human habitation. Many of these recommendations are broader than any singular street outreach team can implement alone, requiring CoC-level investments, planning, and policy change. The Framework can be used as a discussion tool for people to come together across roles and agencies to figure out how to implement and improve Housing-Focused Street Outreach in their community.



Types of Unsheltered Homelessness

Unsheltered homelessness is defined² as a person or family who has a primary nighttime residence in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., park bench, vehicle, subway station, airport, campground, abandoned building). People who experience unsheltered homelessness do so as:

- ▶ Individuals
- ▶ A family unit
- ▶ A group (i.e., in an encampment)

According to a 2020 [report](#) by HUD's Office of Policy Development and Research and the Office of the Assistance Secretary of Planning and Evaluation at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), an encampment has core characteristics which include:

“(1) the presence of structures, (2) the continuity of location, (3) the permanency of people staying there, ... (4) the number of people living together, (5) the presence of personal belongings, and (6) a sense of community or social support”.³

The core elements of this framework are applicable to all types of unsheltered homelessness, including encampments.

People living unsheltered in urban footprints are often more visible (e.g., living in abandoned buildings or public spaces like a park, library, or sidewalk, etc.), whereas suburban or rural unsheltered homelessness is far less visible (e.g., living in vehicles or abandoned buildings, RVs, campgrounds, woods/forest, etc.).

² [CoC and ESG Homeless Eligibility - Category I: Literally Homeless - HUD Exchange](#)

³ [Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost \(huduser.gov\)](#)



Summary of Housing-Focused Street Outreach Core Elements



Using Data and Impact Analysis to Inform Decision-Making serves as a

starting point. Quantitative data helps identify demographic and geographic patterns in unsheltered homelessness, identify resource gaps, determine disparities, and measure effectiveness. Qualitative data is equally important to

help guide broader strategies. These data provide the basis for a data and impact analysis to inform decision-making, which must include:

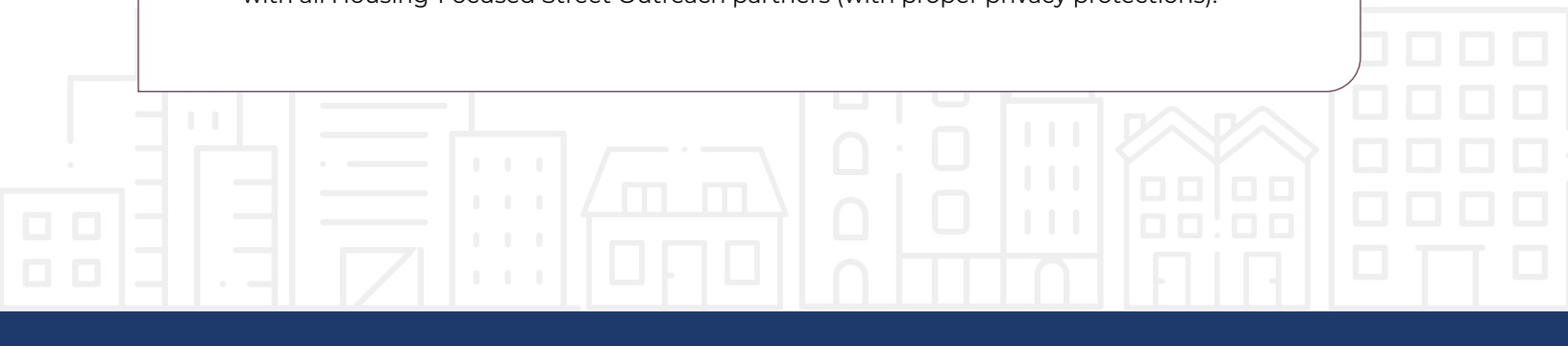
- ▶ **Co-creation of clear data standards** in partnership with people who have lived experience of homelessness regarding storage, sharing and collection of personal data. Staff who are required to input data into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) should receive regular training and guidance.
- ▶ **Ensure data quality and integrity** by updating HMIS for every street outreach engagement with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness (e.g., entry, service provided, exit, etc.).
- ▶ **Use quantitative data to identify gaps and needs**, disparities in access to services or housing, and performance to understand household makeup (individual/family), age or service (youth or veterans), and race and ethnicity.
- ▶ **Solicit qualitative data through community engagement** of traditional homeless response partners and prioritize a plan for outreach to atypical partners (e.g., culturally specific organizations).
- ▶ **Identify immediate and major barriers** to the CoC's efforts to support people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in regaining housing, safety, and stability.
- ▶ **Prioritize the CoC's five most urgent and critical unmet needs** based on the list of barriers.
- ▶ **Develop targeted policy and investment strategies** in partnership with people who have lived experience of unsheltered homelessness that will most benefit the CoC's efforts to rehouse people who are homeless outdoors, ensuring parity in access to rehousing opportunities.
- ▶ **Track permanent housing outcomes**, monitor reductions in disparities, and define additional metrics along the way (such as length of time from unsheltered to housed, services provided, and resources attained).



Strategic Collaboration and Partnerships are critical to a Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy through strong coordination and

leveraging diverse partnerships within and outside of the CoC to meet the needs of individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. To be effective, strategic collaborations and partnerships must:

- ▶ **Foster strong relationships and partnerships** throughout a community (i.e. downtown businesses, libraries, transit staff, hospitals, emergency response teams, etc.) to identify participants in need of engagement and to support transitions out of homelessness.
- ▶ **Provide clarity on expectations** for CoC-related processes, eligibility, and program practices for coordinated entry, emergency shelter, Rapid Re-Housing, permanent supportive housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, and other programs dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness.
- ▶ **Ensure real-time** shelter bed availability, prioritization, and by-name lists are visible to outreach staff and a streamlined process for referrals.
- ▶ **Establish and maintain strong networks** to identify where and how people experiencing unsheltered homelessness can get the services they seek in a culturally appropriate setting and to ensure warm handoffs.
- ▶ **Leverage municipality relationships** inclusive of law enforcement, first responders, and other city/county departments that interact directly or indirectly with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness while clearly defining roles to decrease harmful practices.
- ▶ **Ensure connection** to high quality, appropriate, and culturally responsive services and treatment (physical, mental, and/or behavioral health). Provide supports to ensure follow through, transportation, and appointment reminders.
- ▶ **Identify appropriate inter-team and/or inter-agency communication strategies** to keep all street outreach providers and activities on the same page; include weekly or bi-weekly case conferencing.
- ▶ **Share real-time data** about program participants' locations, statuses, needs, and services with all Housing-Focused Street Outreach partners (with proper privacy protections).





Person-Centered Engagement prioritizes building strong relationships,

recognizing the dignity of people experiencing homelessness while supporting their autonomy, and helping individuals restore their power. Person-Centered engagement happens when Housing-Focused Street Outreach:

- ▶ **Demonstrate respect and empathy**, acknowledge people's humanity, and avoid judgment or assumptions.
- ▶ **Center equity and culturally responsive services** to meet the unique needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.
- ▶ **Offer a comprehensive array of services** (directly and via referrals) and resources with no preconditions.
- ▶ **Maintain caseloads between 10–14** (never more than 15) for effective engagement and support.
- ▶ **Reflect the population served**, including by hiring people with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness.
- ▶ **Deliver ongoing training** for staff on core competencies and evidence-based best practices.
- ▶ **Prioritize engagement** via mobile outreach in the field (versus site-based in-reach) while maintaining the flexibility to engage the most vulnerable anywhere.
- ▶ **Ensure right fit and continuity with staff** by intentional recruitment, hiring, and retention practices.
- ▶ **Adopt flexible schedules** and strategies to provide services around-the-clock and with full geographical coverage.





Promotion of Community Health and Safety of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the broader community, and the dedicated staff who work with the most vulnerable people in our community should all be considered in any Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy. For this to work, teams must:

- ▶ **Prepare for street outreach activities** before the first engagement, ensuring staff have the necessary resources to promote safety and overall well-being of those served.
- ▶ **Equip staff with the appropriate skillset** through shadowing, providing adequate training (including recognizing signs of escalation and maintaining composure in high stress situations) and having clear and actionable crisis response policies.
- ▶ **Ensure staff follow all safety protocols** including appropriate attire and visual preassessment of street outreach locations.
- ▶ **Approach people** experiencing unsheltered homelessness by properly announcing and introducing street outreach staff, organizations, and their purpose.
- ▶ **Work in pairs, offer supplies, respect personal boundaries**, and treat places where someone sleeps as their home.
- ▶ **Prioritize honesty, transparency, and participant choice**. Respect street outreach staff's local subject matter expertise in engagement activities.
- ▶ **Consistently share location** and schedule with other staff.
- ▶ **Foster a safe and supportive work environment** to prioritize caring for colleagues.
- ▶ **Create a clear channel of communication** for community concerns that get addressed by Housing-Focused Street Outreach.





A Housing-Focused Approach Anchored in the Housing First philosophy is central to the Housing-Focused Street Outreach Framework, aligning

system-level strategies, beliefs, and practices. Street outreach programming should support transitions from unsheltered homelessness directly into permanent housing (or crisis housing as available and appropriate). A housing-focused approach, anchored in Housing First, only works if:

- ▶ **Programming is tied to the Coordinated Entry System** with a clear understanding of who administers assessments and when, and how prioritization works.
- ▶ **Referral processes into housing programs** are clear, efficient, and collaborative.
- ▶ **Prioritization processes are equitable**, incorporating acuity and vulnerability to ensure individuals with the greatest needs are prioritized for available housing opportunities. Note communities should not prioritize unsheltered status alone unless local leaders acquire or allocate additional resources targeted to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- ▶ **Street outreach staff assist participants** in obtaining documents that can expedite placement into crisis housing and permanent housing.
- ▶ **Street outreach staff understand all available housing options** in the community and discuss these options with individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- ▶ **Street outreach programs have access to flexible funding** to help lower barriers to housing and support swift access to housing and stability.





CORE ELEMENTS OF HOUSING-FOCUSED *Street Outreach*

In collaboration with providers nationwide, the Alliance administered surveys, conducted one-on-one interviews, and held focus groups to develop this framework. The Alliance’s engagement spanned diverse geographic regions, involving individuals representing multiple marginalized identities, including some with firsthand experiences of homelessness. Through this effort, the Alliance identified core elements to reorient street outreach programming. The Alliance believes that by adopting these core elements, communities can work to adopt a Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy to effectively reduce unsheltered homelessness.

Before developing a Housing-Focused Outreach strategy, communities should first assess their existing outreach programs (see [Appendix III](#)) and explore available funding streams (see [Appendix IV](#)) that can support outreach efforts. Once this review is complete, or if new programs are created using existing funds, it is essential to ensure that all approaches align with the core elements of Housing-Focused Street Outreach to maximize outreach impact.

Communities should ensure all groups conducting street outreach can coordinate towards the goal of resolving someone’s housing crisis. Teams focused on mental health outreach, for example, provide critical services and should partner closely with other street outreach teams to support transitions to permanent housing, and the services needed to maintain that housing.



USING DATA AND IMPACT ANALYSIS

to Inform Decision-Making

Quality data is critical to conducting a data and impact analysis that will inform decision-making about your community's Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy. The Alliance has developed a companion guide – [Data Collection and Management for Street Outreach Providers](#) – for CoCs to:

1. ***establish clear data standards*** for street outreach;
2. ***employ efficient processes*** and technology for data collection;
3. ***define key performance indicators*** of success; and
4. ***regularly analyze data*** and put it into action.



Communities are required to collect a lot of data from people experiencing homelessness, but might not know how it should be used strategically to inform decision-making. A data and impact analysis will help communities move beyond the primary reliance on quantitative data to develop a Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy.

A data and impact analysis will:

- ▶ **improve a street outreach worker's ability** to do their job well and efficiently;
- ▶ **identify disparities** in access and outcomes;
- ▶ **facilitate collaboration** across street outreach programs and providers;
- ▶ **illuminate success of street outreach programs** and overall system functioning;
- ▶ **spur ideas** for continuous improvements to service delivery; and
- ▶ **hold the homelessness response system accountable** to the people being served by it.

Data and Impact Analysis

Inclusion. CoCs must first seek input from people with previous and current experience of unsheltered homelessness (people who have or who are currently experiencing homelessness outdoors). This input should be prioritized in decision-making. Next, CoCs should identify appropriate local and regional stakeholders to inform the strategic planning process. Given the critical systems operations and service provision already underway, communities may elect to have representatives to this process to share information for and with multiple stakeholders and coalitions.

Quantitative Data. Examine existing street outreach project data in HMIS. If this data does not yet exist or is not good quality, consider alternative sources of information on unsheltered homelessness, like the Point-in-Time Count. Disaggregate the data to understand who is disproportionately impacted by unsheltered homelessness. Based on the results of that analysis, invite additional partners to the table who represent communities and subpopulations disproportionately impacted by unsheltered homelessness. CoCs should prioritize community engagement efforts to identify preexisting connections or plan for outreach to culturally-specific service providers, identity- and interest-based community groups, community organizers, and other formal (and informal) representatives of disproportionately impacted groups across the CoC.

To strengthen data analysis and learn more about how the local homelessness response system is functioning, pair quantitative data with insights from qualitative data.



Qualitative Data. The Human Story Behind the Numbers. Qualitative data provides context to numerical trends and adds nuance that can't be captured in a data point. It resonates powerfully and is a natural extension of quantitative efforts. There are many ways to incorporate qualitative data, ranging from easy to implement to more time-intensive strategies. One way to do this is for case managers to conduct exit interviews and document closing case notes, which can be used to understand how the program worked and can be improved. Qualitative data can be useful to understand barriers to accessing permanent housing, support, and services. From these conversations, providers can then form strategies to address these barriers. [HUD's Qualitative Data 101 Guide](#) provides more information and examples.

Strategies. Based on quantitative data and qualitative community input, three groups that have a disproportionately high risk of experiencing unsheltered homelessness (for example, aging people with disabilities, Black trans men, Alaskan Natives exiting publicly funded institutions) must be prioritized in the strategy. Similarly, any groups who exited unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing and returned within 6 or 12 months should be considered as part of broader strategies. Each CoC should determine subpopulation-specific strategies for people experiencing homelessness that will target investments to align with the universal goal of exiting all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to permanent housing with the supports and services in place for them to maintain it.

Impact, Evaluate, and Refine. Consistently tracking and reporting out data is key to measuring impact and ensuring parity in outcomes.

Data should be reviewed on multiple levels:

- ▶ **individual**, to provide key insights about each participant's journey towards housing;
- ▶ **program**, to learn valuable insights about their own performance; and
- ▶ **system**, to generate new project ideas, bolster requests for funding, and spur policy changes to better serve people experiencing homelessness in the CoC.

Across all levels, data disaggregation will show if people have different experiences due to their race, ethnicity, age, length of time homeless, gender identity, and other characteristics and life experiences. Evaluating data will inform whether strategies are working or need to be modified.

“Qualitative data consists of the thoughts, stories, and experiences of individuals, groups, or communities. It is used to understand needs and develop solutions to problems”.



STRATEGIC COLLABORATION *and Partnerships*

An effective Housing-Focused Street Outreach approach requires strategic collaboration to maximize the limited resources available for people living unsheltered. All street outreach activities should be coordinated throughout an entire Continuum of Care (CoC) and work in collaboration with other interventions throughout that system. This type of coordination reduces duplication of efforts between street outreach programs and across other CoC programs. Street outreach programs may not be the first touchpoint for many – often people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are identified first by other people in the community, such as downtown businesses, library or transit staff, hospital or EMS staff, law enforcement or sanitation staff, school staff, culturally-specific organizations, faith communities, and neighbors. Partnerships both within homelessness services, and with other community-based services, are essential for success of a shared vision of connecting people who are homeless outdoors to permanent housing and the supports and services necessary to maintain housing.



Creating written standards for Housing-Focused Street Outreach will help support collaborative, interagency, and multidisciplinary coordination with a shared goal of getting people experiencing unsheltered homelessness into housing as quickly as possible.

The Role of Street Outreach in the Continuum of Care and Coordinated Entry Systems

Integrating Street Outreach Staff.

Street outreach staff should be integrated throughout the CoC and coordinated entry systems, including governance structures, committees and work groups, case conferencing, by-name lists, and data and performance management.

Federal, state, or even local funding is not a requirement for CoC membership and should not be a barrier to participating.

This will ensure that overall strategies to prevent and end homelessness are inclusive of people living unsheltered from the lens of those who work with them; provide clarity on prioritization and referral processes while receiving input from street outreach staff; co-design standards for Housing-Focused Street Outreach, which detail practice, supervisory, project, and performance guidelines; and forge strong relationships between street outreach teams and other services providers who offer pathways to emergency shelter, transitional

housing, Rapid Re-Housing, Permanent Supportive Housing, and other permanent housing within the CoC.

► **Housing & System Navigation.**

Street outreach programs should have strong relationships throughout their local homelessness response system including coordinated entry systems, emergency shelters, and other available temporary and permanent housing programs. This includes having a clear and shared understanding of how to access these programs, what availability exists at any given time, and how they operate so they can manage expectations to prepare participants for a successful transition.

- ### ► **HMIS Training and Access.**
- Street outreach staff should have initial and ongoing training to support real time access to HMIS to enable them to conduct relevant assessments, input case notes, proactively track referral statuses, and view participant information to enhance service collaboration. Use of HMIS is ideal so that data collected while delivering street outreach services contributes to data quality for service provision and reporting purposes.



Key Partnerships

While street outreach programs may provide a variety of services, they cannot meet the diverse range of needs of everyone experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Strong partnerships can make the work of street outreach more effective in every aspect of the work: in identifying people in need of street outreach services, housing people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and improving the quality of life, health, and safety of people while experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Building partnerships is a core function of street outreach programs but should not take away from providing direct services to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Strong organizational-level partnerships reduce the level of effort on individual staff, make collaboration easier, survive staff turnover, and leverage the expertise of street outreach staff.

While some partnerships may develop organically by recommendations from street outreach participants, strategic partnerships must be identified and cultivated at both the system and program levels. A summary of key partners that can enhance the work of street outreach providers is detailed below; however, not all types of partners are present in every community and this list may not be fully comprehensive.

Temporary and Permanent Housing

CoCs often have a range of temporary and permanent housing pathways for people who are homeless and living outdoors. Key partnerships provide street outreach staff with the ability to facilitate informed decision-making by ensuring people know what they need to make the best choice for themselves – and never by attempting to force or coerce participation in a given program or service. When possible, street outreach staff should have access to real-time information about availability, location, eligibility, and any relevant barriers, restrictions, or program specifications that may impact a participants' choice of whether to engage with that program or not. Back-door referrals to shelter or housing programs that bypass standard prioritization, referral, and match processes should be discouraged, as they are known to contribute to equity issues and disparities in access and outcomes.

Crisis Housing

Every CoC operates differently. Some crisis housing (e.g., emergency shelter, transitional housing, interim housing, etc.) might operate on a first-come, first-serve basis, while others may require placement through coordinated entry. Regardless, all street outreach staff should understand their local referral processes, types of emergency shelter, and establish relationships with operators. Ongoing conversations and relationships between street outreach programs and shelter programs can positively impact community-level planning to address the changing needs of people experiencing homelessness in any given community.

Having the ability to connect people who are living unsheltered and who want an available crisis housing bed when other more permanent options are not available can be lifesaving.



Housing Programs

Housing programs and providers must provide parity in access for both people who are living sheltered and unsheltered. Like emergency shelters, all street outreach staff should understand their local referral processes, types of housing programs, and establish relationships with operators. A strong understanding of the services available with housing programs – both CoC-funded and otherwise – is crucial for street outreach programs to help people living unsheltered explore available options and connect to those opportunities.

Community-Based Health Providers

While not everyone living unsheltered needs or wants to engage with various forms of health treatment, rates of many health conditions (including serious mental illness, reported mental health distress, addiction, and multiple or comorbid health conditions) are substantially higher among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness than both the general population and the population of people experiencing sheltered homelessness.

Street outreach programs must have the ability to connect participants to high quality, appropriate, and culturally-responsive health services and treatment when that is what a participant wants. Healthcare systems are difficult to navigate, especially those providing free and low-cost services; therefore, strong relationships between street outreach programs and community-based health services are crucial for meeting the needs of people living unsheltered. Since people experiencing unsheltered homelessness face steeper challenges in maintaining schedules than their sheltered or housed peers, street outreach staff can support access to healthcare services by staying informed of their participants' appointment and medication schedules and help bridge participants' logistical hurdles or gaps in memory.

Street outreach programs are uniquely positioned to advocate for their participants' needs and may be able to assist in systemwide efforts to expand street outreach funding via mental or behavioral health grants, public health initiative funding, opioid abatement funds, Medicaid billing, or other funding streams.





Municipal Departments

Local municipal departments – parks and recreation, transit, public works, public health, etc. – can directly impact the day-to-day realities of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Partnering with such departments can increase health and safety for people experiencing homelessness while they work towards permanent housing solutions.

Strategic engagement of municipal departments presents an opportunity to align practices with effective strategies for addressing homelessness.

Here are a few examples of ways municipal department partnerships can be leveraged:

- ▶ **Public works departments** can be engaged to support trash collection, provide portable restroom and shower facilities, and provide access to potable water for encampments or areas where people experiencing unsheltered homelessness gather.
- ▶ **Public health departments** can strengthen disease prevention and harm reduction activities in encampments, provide health and hygiene supplies to street outreach providers, fund health focused positions on street outreach teams, and hold public health events targeting services to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- ▶ **Public transit departments** can identify and engage people in need of street outreach services, enact policies to reduce utilization of law enforcement or criminalizing tactics, and increase local uptake of effective strategies for addressing unsheltered homelessness.

First Responders

Many communities are beginning to recognize the power of first responders in communitywide efforts to end homelessness. In this context, first responders include EMS/EMTs, fire departments, police or sheriff departments, and the 911 call centers who dispatch them. In some communities, these first responders may also include mental and behavioral health crisis response teams, and various types of community health staff. In some communities, especially where street outreach efforts are scarce in proportion to the growing crisis of unsheltered homelessness, first responders may be the most likely service providers to engage with people living unsheltered in their community.

Even when robust street outreach services are available, first responders are often dispatched to sites where people are living unsheltered and faced with the reality that their crisis response tools are not adequate to the task of assisting a household to end their homelessness. This makes partnerships with first responders both essential and strategic in efforts to coordinate street outreach efforts across a whole community.





A few key elements of effective partnerships between street outreach providers and first responders include:

Share information about what services are available and their limitations.

Like other partnerships, clarity about who does (and doesn't) offer certain services can make a huge difference in efficacy of interventions, and maybe most importantly, in maintaining trust and relationships with community members. This trust can go a long way for people living unsheltered, who often have had negative experiences with first responders and many other types of service providers. It is imperative that first responders have a strong understanding of what local street outreach services are available, and that they understand how to message those services appropriately when they encounter people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Similarly, it is helpful for first responders to be well-versed in the operations of other parts of the local homelessness response system, including coordinated entry and shelter access. It is common for first responders to overestimate – and therefore oversell – the availability, quality, or speed of homelessness interventions. This type of miscommunication can break trust with individuals and communities who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and ultimately interfere with ongoing efforts to end homelessness in a community. While it is the responsibility of the CoC to ensure that first responders know how the entire system operates, street outreach programs are uniquely positioned to have significantly more contact with crisis response systems, and can help facilitate these partnerships where they do not already exist.

Establish processes for first responders to connect people to street outreach services.

When first responders are dispatched to a crisis, they may not be aware of the housing status of the person involved. Having clear community standards for first responders to assess and flag people's need for street outreach services is a key strategy to leverage their contact with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and increase the reach of street outreach programs. This can better prepare first responders' response to crises related to unsheltered homelessness, and can preserve time and energy by directing people to more appropriate service providers when an acute crisis has been addressed or deescalated.

Some communities choose to embed these assessments into 911 dispatch protocols and engage specific types of first response teams or strategies (such as those targeted to best meet the needs of people living unsheltered). Other communities rely on more traditional 911 dispatch methods and support first responders in making warm handoffs to street outreach services once a crisis is deescalated or a need for longer term services is identified.



It can be very helpful to develop specific protocols for handoffs from different types of first responders and in various common scenarios. Clear role delineation between first responders and street outreach program staff can be very helpful: both for encouraging trust, expectation management, and relationship building with participants, as well as building strong partnerships between different agencies or departments. Each community must base their specific roles and protocols on the specific configuration of resources and programs available within their community. Robust system-level communication between first responders and street outreach services can facilitate development of protocols that work for the community. Ongoing discussion among staff in both sectors about how things are working on the front lines can enhance practice and allow for iterative growth of functional cross-system collaboration.

Partner to establish community-wide messaging to enhance Housing-Focused Street Outreach efforts and reduce burden on first responders when the crisis is homelessness.

Community members often don't know what to do when they see someone experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and their first instinct may be to call 911. In many communities this exacerbates the strain on crisis response systems that are already spread thin, while also increasing the likelihood that people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have encounters with the law enforcement and the criminal legal system, often with devastating consequences. Among other ills, this can contribute to increases in racially inequitable outcomes for people in both housing and criminal legal systems.

Public messaging and communication strategies that direct community members to engage with street outreach services, rather than crisis response systems, can be beneficial to both sectors. Instructing community members to reach out to homeless services (like coordinated entry systems or other central access points) can increase identification of people in need of services while decreasing negative consequences for people experiencing homelessness. Engaging with street outreach services directly also preserves scarce first responder time and energies. In some places, this might look like a publicized, dedicated phone line that directs to street outreach teams, or a centralized list of resources posted on a city or county's website.

While their mission and priorities may be different, finding common ground between crisis response systems and homelessness response systems can be beneficial to both systems' operations and goals. Street outreach programs have a unique vantage point for communicating with and supporting robust relationships with first responders, and should leverage this to the benefit of their participants and community.



Considerations for Relationships with Law Enforcement

Historical and present-day realities make relationships between people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and law enforcement entities complicated. From the devastating impacts of racially targeted policing, disproportionate and inappropriate uses of force, harmful and dangerous police responses to people experiencing mental health symptoms, collaborations between police and immigration authorities, and targeting of queer and transgender people, police often cause harm to communities most likely to experience unsheltered homelessness. Many communities also have statutes criminalizing aspects of daily life for people

experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Police are tasked with enforcing these statutes, which creates ongoing adversarial relationships between police and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in those jurisdictions.

For those reasons, it is extremely important that street outreach efforts be clearly delineated from law enforcement whenever possible, and that any public collaboration between street outreach programs and law enforcement departments be thoughtfully designed and messaged. Any partnerships should be designed with input from people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the community.

In some communities, law enforcement agencies may be the only entities actively identifying and engaging people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and may have designated officers or teams working to do so. It is important for communities to carefully consider what role law enforcement plays in homelessness response.

- ▶ ***If their main role is enforcement*** (issuing citations, etc.), they will have a very limited ability to build the kinds of trusting relationships required to accomplish the goals of Housing-Focused Street Outreach.
- ▶ ***If their main role is to connect people with services and supports***, they are much more likely to be able to contribute effectively to a CoC's efforts to identify, engage, and serve people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Law enforcement officials who seek to engage people experiencing unsheltered homelessness with services in their community should carefully consider the power dynamics inherent in their role and agency affiliation. Wherever possible, they should work to minimize the presence of this power dynamic – for example, doing engagement activities in plain clothes rather than in an official uniform, engaging people without carrying a firearm or other weapons, or using a vehicle that does not display law enforcement insignia. They should also consider the potential for unique challenges in employing effective Housing-Focused Street Outreach practices in the specific context of law enforcement agencies. These challenges may include information-sharing and privacy, conflict management and de-escalation, equity considerations, harm reduction practices, and community partnerships.



In any street outreach partnership with law enforcement, privacy of program participants' information is paramount.

Any participant who does not wish to engage with law enforcement should not be forced or coerced into doing so. Street outreach providers should retain autonomy from law enforcement operations including having the ability to engage community accountability measures for law enforcement actors who engage in harmful behavior towards people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

However, there can be unique benefits to establishing and maintaining positive relationships with local law enforcement departments, especially those with clearly delineated boundaries and roles, including the following:

- ▶ **Establishing practices for law enforcement to give advance notice to street outreach programs when they are planning enforcement actions** that could negatively impact people living unsheltered. These types of actions may include evicting an encampment, increasing citation activities in a certain neighborhood, or newly enforcing a statute criminalizing aspects of unsheltered homelessness (sleeping, camping, parking, etc.).
- ▶ **Accessing individual-level data about arrests and jail time** to establish prioritization for housing resources based on 'high utilization' of public resources pursuant to continued unsheltered homelessness.

- ▶ **Waiving or reducing fees for criminal background checks** required by housing programs or landlords for street outreach participants who might otherwise experience such fees as prohibitively high barriers to obtaining housing.
- ▶ **Building stronger understanding of the experience of unsheltered homelessness** in a community among law enforcement stakeholders who may have unique access to levers of power regarding criminalization at the local level, such as discretion about when and how to enforce local statutes.
- ▶ **Developing champions within law enforcement departments** for adoption of best practices and data driven interventions, rather than criminalization as solutions to the local homelessness crisis. This can, in turn, help to change a community's narrative about homelessness.





Business Community

Ensuring that businesses are aware of street outreach services can drastically reduce their reliance on law enforcement to intervene in their interactions with people experiencing homelessness. Responsiveness to businesses' requests for street outreach support can facilitate strong relationships between street outreach programs and the businesses in their community.

Strong relationships with businesses and business leaders may increase identification and engagement of people in need of outreach services. These interactions may also present opportunities to help businesses better understand how to treat people experiencing homelessness with dignity, while maintaining the safe and orderly environment they require to operate their businesses.

Strong relationships with businesses, business leaders, business districts, and chambers of commerce may help street outreach programs prepare to deescalate potential conflicts between individual business operators and people experiencing homelessness.

Engaging in ongoing dialogue between business leaders and homeless service systems can be beneficial to the whole community.

Demonstrating win-win solutions to conflicts can be powerful partnership- and community-building tools that can directly impact quality of life for people throughout a community. Street outreach programs are often well positioned to mediate these types of conflicts and avail themselves of the relationship building opportunities presented by them.

Additionally, identifying and cultivating champions within the business community who care about homelessness may lead them to engage in active support of a community's street outreach efforts, including:

- ▶ **Providing in-kind donations** or support for street outreach and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the form of supplies, food/ meals, water, access to restrooms, access to meeting space for service provision, etc.
- ▶ **Providing fundraising support** or flexible financial assistance
- ▶ **Providing testimony** about the effectiveness of street outreach programming to support funding requests (municipal, grants, foundation, etc.)
- ▶ **Providing political support** and endorsement for street outreach efforts, including combatting efforts to criminalize unsheltered homelessness

Culturally-Specific Organizations

While many street outreach programs hire and retain diverse staff reflective of who experiences unsheltered homelessness in their communities, it is not always possible to have representation of every culture, community, or experience among street outreach staff. Since people's needs and experiences vary considerably based on a person's race, culture, language, sexuality, gender identity, age, disability, national origin, and/or other dimension of their identity, it is crucial for street outreach programs to stay aware of culturally specific organizations and services available in their community.

Building positive relationships with culturally-specific and grassroots organizations is a great way to ensure street outreach participants have access to affirming and supportive services that meet their needs. Street outreach staff can continue learning about different cultures, while also actively demonstrating their programs' commitment to diversity and their respect for diverse participants in street outreach services.



Street outreach staff who practice cultural humility as they build and maintain relationships with culturally-specific organizations will have increased success building authentic relationships with program participants.

Practicing cultural humility may have the added benefit of enhancing street outreach programs' overall practices and culture of acceptance for their participants as well. Some examples of the benefits of these partnerships include:

- ▶ ***A street outreach worker encounters someone whose language they don't speak.*** Through a partnership with a local immigrant serving organization, they get interpretation support so they can engage the person and learn what services they need. From there, they connect the person to advocates providing relevant services in their first language while the street outreach worker supports that advocate in connecting to CoC-based resources and referrals.
- ▶ ***A street outreach worker encounters a transgender person experiencing unsheltered homelessness and in immediate need of clothing,*** but the program's available clothing donations do not have the sizes and genders of clothing they need. By staying aware of programming at the local LGBTQ center, the street outreach worker can connect that person to center's clothing closet where they intentionally curate donations to include clothing and sizes which may be harder for transgender people to find.
- ▶ ***A street outreach program begins building a relationship with local disability advocates*** so they can learn from them how to access services, accommodations, assistive technology, and benefits that a few of their participants need. In communicating with those advocates, the street outreach staff also begin incorporating more affirming and respectful language practices with regards to their participants disabling conditions.
- ▶ ***Street outreach programs (and coordinated entry staff) with strong relationships with local Black churches*** may do a better job quickly identifying and engaging Black people experiencing homelessness in their communities because of the trust and comfort those relationships can lend to initial service connections. This may contribute to more racially equitable outcomes in street outreach and homelessness services overall.

This is by no means a comprehensive list. Each community should take stock of their populations experiencing unsheltered homelessness, the composition of local street outreach staff, and prioritize building relationships to enhance culturally appropriate service access whenever possible.



Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organizations

In most communities, there are more faith-based organizations than public or nonprofit institutions. They can be critical sites of connection, community building, and material support for people experiencing crises including homelessness. They often have reach and sway in areas that other organizations simply do not, and many are already engaging in some forms of community support via ministries and other programming.

Building relationships between street outreach providers and faith communities can be another way to extend the reach of street outreach programs. These relationships can help to identify and engage more people in need of services, and may also provide opportunities for in-kind or financial support (either for street outreach program funding, or as an available resource for street outreach program participants).



While street outreach programs should be cautious about making assumptions regarding the faith traditions of their participants (and thoughtful in making referrals to faith-based programs that may not be welcoming of all people), street outreach providers should stay familiar with the material supports that different faith-based institutions make available in their communities (hot meals, food pantries, clothing closets, cold weather shelters, financial assistance, etc.). Street outreach providers can leverage their knowledge of the needs of people living unsheltered to encourage faith communities to target institutional resources toward things that have the most significant impacts in support of community efforts to end homelessness.

Many homelessness serving organizations started as religious institutions or interfaith coalitions.

In some communities, faith leaders are (or can be cultivated to be) champions of compassion and the rights of people experiencing homelessness.

Street outreach programs can help keep these leaders up to speed on the shifting realities of unsheltered homelessness in their communities. Faith communities are often sites of community organizing and political power building, especially of the kind with significant impacts on local policy decisions. Strong relationships between street outreach providers and faith communities can encourage their support of adoption of evidence-based solutions to homelessness by their broader communities, and may help pre-empt misguided and paternalistic narratives that use religious ideology to support measures criminalizing homelessness.



Communication

Within a single street outreach program, communication among staff should be continuous with staff operating interdependently. For safety, street outreach should mostly be done jointly and not by a single worker. Street outreach staff should confer frequently. This increases efficiency by reducing duplication of efforts, improves quality of services by leverage diversity of skills among staff, and promotes safety for both participants and staff by sharing real time considerations and conditions.

Across multiple street outreach programs, communication may require more intentional protocols and infrastructure. It is highly advisable to engage in robust coordination efforts across all participating street outreach programs within a geographic area and when realistic across an entire CoC (some Balance of State CoCs may coordinate across regions and not the entire CoC for logistical expediency).

Collaboration and Resource-Sharing

When several street outreach programs are working within a CoC, each is likely to have unique features that can best be leveraged through ongoing collaboration between them. Different street outreach programs may have different specialties, skills, or subpopulation specific knowledge, and each worker and program likely have relationships in the community that can be useful to all of them. Sharing knowledge about community resources, contacts at service providing agencies, skills and techniques for effective engagement, and real time information about things impacting people living unsheltered in the community enhances the services provided by all outreach programs CoC wide. This might include things like:

- ▶ **Keeping shared resource lists** including landlord contact lists
- ▶ **Sharing apartment listings** and housing program openings across outreach programs in real time
- ▶ **Conducing skill-shares** or cross training between programs with different disciplinary focuses
- ▶ **Conferencing in real-time about a participant's needs** with an outreach worker from a different program who has specific expertise related to their situation (youth, veteran, LGBTQ+, medical needs, etc.)
- ▶ **Supporting a centralized street outreach group** where staff can send out relevant resource updates via a shared platform like a mailing list or messaging app

CoCs with highly functional street outreach coordination conduct weekly, bi-weekly, or at minimum monthly case conferencing.

These regular meetings allow for different programs and staff within a CoC or region to operate as a support network for each other and all the participants they collectively serve. (In some settings, street outreach staff meet daily for even closer coordination and to develop and deploy street outreach strategically in real time.) In this way they skill each other up, share real-time resource and community information, flag unintentional duplication of services to the same participant and collaborate to streamline service provision, backfill gaps in knowledge in cases where a participant engages with several different providers at different times, problem solve tough situations, brainstorm solutions and resources for participants in need, and maybe most profoundly important – quickly identify emerging patterns in needs and gaps in services community wide.



Integration and Data Sharing

Having access to real-time data about participants' locations, statuses, needs, and service engagement is ideal for street outreach staff in the field to provide the most effective services. However, it is very important to respect participants' privacy and take care in sharing data and information between staff and across programs.

Data sharing may be accomplished via HMIS or another system. **Ideally, data used for street outreach service delivery integrates with HMIS at some point to facilitate data quality in Coordinated Entry integrations and HUD reporting.** Proactively establishing collaboration protocols can help preempt data sharing issues too, for example:

- ▶ **Define expectations that street outreach programs input all relevant information into HMIS.** Even if individual programs use other systems for their own purposes, there should be an understanding of the common goals across the CoC to reduce unsheltered homelessness – and the necessity of all working from common information.
- ▶ **Set standards to only use a unique ID** (from HMIS or similar system) as opposed to personally identifying information, like someone's name, in all communication and data systems outside of HMIS (texting, group chats, messaging apps, email, etc.)
- ▶ **Clearly define each program's role in a CoC** in terms of the area and/or population they serve. This may also involve establishing guidelines that limit the number of street outreach programs engaging with someone or working in a particular area.
- ▶ **Establish points of contact for each program** so a street outreach worker knows who to reach out to if they have questions about a participant whose circumstances (e.g., location) may have changed and caused them to switch providers.
- ▶ **Implement active case conferencing,** supported by HMIS leads pulling active CE referrals. The use of data as the basis of these meetings puts Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff in a position to drive the housing process forward. Meetings should be limited to people who have signed the confidentiality agreement and are HMIS users to prevent any inappropriate disclosure of information.





A Note About Technology

While street outreach is at its core a relationship-based service and does not require high-level technology for general operation, technology can be extremely helpful in simplifying necessary operations (such as data collection, resource sharing, and territory mapping), and in enabling real-time access to information while in the field. Street outreach providers may find it beneficial to stay in tune with what technologies most help them in their day-to-day operations and advocate for adoption of technologies that enhance street outreach operations community-wide. In some CoCs this looks like enhancements to HMIS to ensure street outreach teams have data, reports, and real-time information that is actionable and useful to their jobs. In others, that means getting tablets for the field, adopting geographic tracking software on street outreach worker cell phones, or having a CoC-wide outreach WhatsApp group or Slack channel.

Geocoding and other cutting-edge technologies may be employed by some CoCs when their functionality enhances service provision or identification of people in need of street outreach services. But technology should never supplant the direct relationship building required to provide high-quality services, and care should always be taken to ensure privacy, safety, and confidentiality for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Coordinate Engagement Strategies

When multiple street outreach programs serve the same CoC, they should work together to ensure a coordinated approach to engaging participants. Programs should divvy up the geography if each team provides similar types and quality of services. Programs who specialize in a specific subpopulation may work across geographic boundaries, and more general programs may need to have protocols or formal relationships in place to facilitate hand offs and connections to subpopulation specific services. For example, a

veteran-specific street outreach program may cover a much larger geographic area than the general street outreach teams operating within their CoC (indeed, some street outreach programs cover and collaborate with many CoCs at once). They may need to have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), Release of Information (ROI), or other more formal procedures in place with general street outreach programs to ensure that anyone identified as a veteran gets the opportunity to avail themselves of the specialized offerings that veteran specific street outreach programs can provide such as VA-specific housing program referrals, benefit advocacy, and healthcare services.



When programs specialize in a specific type of service, it can be helpful to coordinate across programs to ensure participants who require services outside of their scope can be effectively and efficiently connected to a program that has those services available. For example, crisis response street outreach staff who primarily get called out to respond to emergent medical, mental or behavioral health crises would do well to have established inroads for linking a participant to housing and healthcare focused street outreach providers who can offer longer-term engagement once the crisis is addressed.

At the very least, providing clarity about the scope and services available via the various street outreach programs within a CoC – and having up to date contact information to share with participants who want to connect with them – is key to maintaining the positive reputation in the community required for street outreach programs to be effective. This reputation is key both for building trust among people living unsheltered in the CoC, and with housed neighbors and business operators.

Combine to Form Multidisciplinary Outreach Teams

Having a variety of skills and services available within a single street outreach program can help to streamline operations and support high quality services that holistically meet the needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. In some communities this looks like Assertive Community Treatment (ACT), an integrated team-based approach. Communities must ensure that even though each provider making up the multi-pronged approaches may have a different role than housing (e.g., a clinical nurse), the overall efforts and processes are geared towards getting someone housed quickly.

Having the ability to provide a variety of services within one street outreach program may reduce the work that people living unsheltered must do to connect with the variety of services they need.

Many successful street outreach programs employ a mix of staff (either paid or volunteer) from different disciplines, including physical healthcare, mental/behavioral healthcare, housing, and peer support (including people with lived experience of unsheltered homelessness). Successful street outreach programs cite that a diversity of experiences and specialties is key to their programmatic success. CoCs should take stock of existing street outreach programs and activities and think critically about what combinations of services are most impactful and make the most sense in the context of local experiences of unsheltered homelessness. Where feasible, programs should join forces to form multidisciplinary teams that best fit the needs of their unsheltered neighbors.



Warm Handoffs

One key feature of effective service partnerships is strong practices (and sometimes official protocols) for referring or transferring a participant's services from one program to another. This may occasionally happen between street outreach teams when people move between zones within a CoC, require a specialized service, or qualify for subpopulation specific services, but it is most common between street outreach programs and other types of service providers (such as shelter, housing, community-based healthcare, and other services).

When supporting a participant's connection to another service provider a few key elements can make the transition smoother:

1. Familiarity eases comfort and builds trust.

When participants know what to expect, it's easier for them to trust a new provider. A street outreach worker accompanying them on a first visit to a new provider or being present during a first phone call can reduce participant anxiety. Letting them know about the positive relationship between outreach services and the new provider can also help. Offering detailed information about services, location, atmosphere, and logistics, such as documents to bring or what questions to expect, can further alleviate fears and make the transition smoother.

2. Clarity about boundaries and expectations can establish and restore a sense of empowerment.

Participants may worry about providers sharing their information. Being clear about what must be shared for a referral and giving participants control over what is shared is essential to maintaining trust. For people experiencing unsheltered homelessness,

privacy can feel precarious, making sharing information feel risky. Street outreach staff can help participants weigh the benefits (e.g., eligibility for services, faster referrals) against the risks (e.g., safety, law enforcement, discrimination) of sharing information. Participants should decide how, when, and with whom their information is shared.

It's also important to clarify what services the street outreach program can and cannot continue providing after a referral, especially if services must end due to changes in the participant's situation, like moving into housing.

Managing expectations early and gradually can ease the transition and help participants plan for their new settings.

3. Relationships are key!

A warm handoff is more effective when street outreach staff have a personal connection with the provider. Bringing the new provider into the field to meet the participant can help build trust. Since the outreach worker is leveraging their own trust with the participant, having a direct contact at the new provider, even if it's not the exact person the participant will work with, can make the transition smoother.

Maintaining relationships with referral agencies helps outreach staff stay informed about changes that may affect participants. It's beneficial for different outreach workers to maintain key relationships and share information across the team. This approach distributes the workload, leverages individual strengths, and increases the variety of trusted referrals. Coordination across programs can further enhance these handoffs throughout the community.



PERSON-CENTRED *Engagement*

Person-centered engagement is central to Housing-Focused Street Outreach

because a successful street outreach approach requires strong relationships with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Person-centered engagement involves actively listening, prioritizing each person's autonomy, and working with each participant to make decisions and plans that align with their goals and values. Person-centered engagement also requires street outreach staff to see people they are working with through a strengths-based lens, meaning they recognize and uplift each person's unique talents, skills, and assets and engage those aspects of the person as key resources that they can draw on in identifying solutions to problems and unmet needs.



It is crucial to trust the expertise of people experiencing homelessness in shaping their own paths.



Street outreach staff should treat them as equals, building relationships on respect, trust, and cooperation. This fosters an environment where individuals feel safe sharing their needs and accepting help. By respecting their dignity and centering their autonomy in decisions, outreach staff restore a sense of power.

Building trust requires outreach staff to introduce themselves clearly, engage without judgment, and actively listen to understand their experiences. **Consistency, reliability, transparency, and respecting boundaries are key.** Providing practical assistance (survival goods, healthcare referrals, benefits, etc.) helps meet immediate needs and builds the trust needed for addressing larger goals, like permanent housing.

Considerations about Privacy, Respect, and Safety

An essential part of trust and respect is safeguarding people's private information and ensuring they control how it is shared. This applies to data collection, sharing with other agencies, and informal outreach networks. Street outreach programs should have clear policies for secure data storage and communication that protect privacy. Workers must understand privacy laws, such as HIPAA, and inform clients about the reasons for collecting information, who will access it, and any legal obligations to share without consent.

Clients should never be forced to share information, and alternative options like aliases or anonymized records should be offered. When making referrals, providers should obtain consent, with clear explanations of the benefits and risks of information-sharing. Written Releases of Information are ideal, with an option to revoke consent.

Outreach workers should use plain language to explain privacy policies and respect any safety concerns, especially for vulnerable populations. If engaging informal networks, workers must follow the client's preferences on what to share and with whom, in order to maintain trust and respect.



Building relationships takes time and is influenced by personalities, experiences, and context. Initial interactions lay the foundation, but trust and rapport require patience, especially as many may have had negative experiences with service providers. Trust is built through consistency, empathy, and respect, with a key pillar being reliability – keeping promises and following through on commitments.

Incorporating evidenced based practices

- ▶ A trauma-informed approach is crucial for understanding conflicts. Encourage outreach staff to avoid taking behaviors personally and to focus on restoring safety and fostering healthy communication.
- ▶ Harm reduction offers nonjudgmental, life-saving services and referrals that prioritize an individual's health and safety. It also helps reduce stigma and barriers, fostering greater engagement and open communication.
- ▶ Motivational interviewing emphasizes active listening and the use of open-ended questions, fostering autonomy and building trust. This approach helps reduce resistance, supports and understands change, and enhances long-term engagement.

Street outreach staff should be transparent, communicate clearly, and avoid overpromising, especially when systems are complex and answers are uncertain. Being honest about the limits of their power and access is crucial to maintaining trust: assumptions about their influence can harm relationships if left unaddressed.

Actions speak louder than words. In street outreach, demonstrating honesty and reliability is essential for building trust, not just with individuals but also within their networks.

However, trust-building can be challenging, as people experiencing unsheltered homelessness often face trauma and discrimination, which can impact relationship development.

Street outreach staff should allow relationships to evolve naturally, especially where there are forces outside of their control that create additional challenges (like law enforcement actions against homeless individuals or encampments). When possible, street outreach workers can provide support and advocacy when encampments are threatened with eviction: they can help provide ample notice before an eviction is likely to occur, help with packing and transportation, and mitigate other negative impacts on encampment residents.

The goal of Housing-Focused Street Outreach is to help individuals find and maintain housing, with robust support before and after the transition.

Effective warm hand-offs to housing providers and ongoing support for 30–90 days following move-in are vital for successful transitions. *(Note that data policies should be set up to align with program standards for how follow-up is completed. Participants should not be enrolled in both street outreach and a housing program in HMIS at the same time.)*



Services and Resources

Housing-Focused Street Outreach workers offer services without preconditions for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. These services aim to meet immediate needs and facilitate housing access, including providing survival supplies like food, clothing, blankets, and ensuring access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services.

The approach is holistic, connecting individuals to healthcare, transportation, employment, education, legal aid, document procurement, and substance use treatment as needed to enhance long-term housing stability.

Collaboration with other service providers, such as healthcare clinics and housing agencies, helps street outreach programs address diverse participant needs and fosters community relationships. Outreach workers should facilitate access by offering transportation and accompanying participants to appointments.

Despite available services, barriers like transportation issues, lack of identification, rigid schedules, and uncomfortable environments can hinder access. Many individuals may also feel uneasy about attending shelters or day centers. Therefore, **mobile street outreach is essential for reaching those most isolated from support.** Programs should be designed to promote inclusivity and accessibility, providing assistance in the field and community settings. Continuous collaboration among outreach programs within the Continuum of Care (CoC) is vital for improving and streamlining service delivery.



Adequate Funding

To maximize effectiveness of Housing-Focused Street Outreach, securing adequate stable funding is vital. This can be achieved by continual advocacy and pursuit of diverse funding opportunities such as Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Health Care for the Homeless (HCH), Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), Runaway and Homeless Youth/Street Outreach Program (RHY/SOP), Treatment for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (TIEH) and the opioid settlement (see more here: [Funding Sources for Street Outreach](#)). Adequate funding is essential to addressing unsheltered homelessness. It bolsters the capacity of outreach teams, supports the operation of emergency shelters, medical facilities, and housing assistance programs, providing necessary resources to those experiencing homelessness. Adequate and stable funding for Housing-Focused Street Outreach is necessary for longevity of staffing, which is key for ensuring the skills and building the relationships necessary for effective street outreach.

Rehousing is a system-wide effort. If investments in robust street outreach are not paired with investments in permanent housing and re-housing supports, Housing-Focused Street Outreach will not be set up for success.

Outreach vs In-reach

In many communities there are places where people experiencing unsheltered homelessness congregate to access services or meet their basic needs. In-reach services – including those provided



at day shelters, libraries, drop-in centers, soup kitchens, pantries, and similar establishments – provide a familiar and accessible environment for some people experiencing homelessness, especially for people with limited mobility. Staff or volunteers at these sites may provide some of the same services that street outreach programs offer, and there may be significant overlap between participants in street outreach programming and these site-based services. Some street outreach programs partner with such sites in their efforts to identify and engage people needing street outreach services.

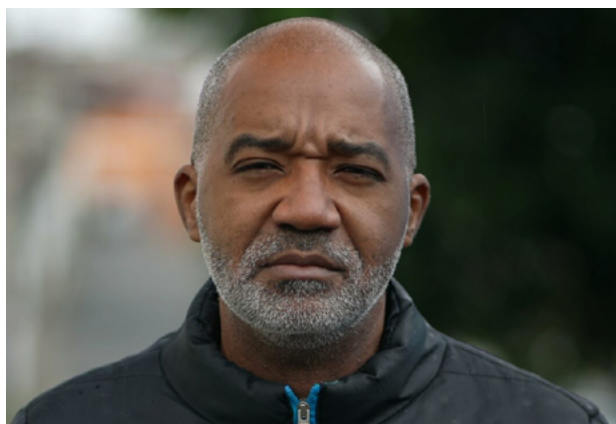
While these relationships with site-based service providers can be helpful, it is important to minimize duplication of efforts by limiting the time street outreach staff spend at these sites. Innovative solutions from mobile outreach teams to providing telehealth services signify a shift towards adaptable and responsive support systems.



In general, street outreach efforts should mostly be conducted in places where other programming is not reaching.

Often times, the people most in need of street outreach services are also most likely to experience barriers to accessing site-based services such as transportation and mobility issues, sobriety requirements and other behavioral barriers, and breaches in trust or conflicts with staff or other program participants that prevent continued engagement. These sites may be a great place to meet with a street outreach participant who decides they are most comfortable having case management appointments there, or to have the staff there keep an eye out for someone a street outreach worker is trying to locate who is known to go to meals or get their mail there; however, these locations should not be the primary place where street outreach happens.

If site-based service providers are primarily serving people experiencing unsheltered homelessness it may be beneficial to encourage their involvement in system-level unsheltered case conferencing or coordination meetings. Ensure that these providers have or develop the capabilities to offer similar referrals and service-connections as street outreach, rather than expending scarce street outreach resources at their locations.



Equitable & Culturally Responsive Services

Street outreach programs should approach their work with an equity lens, providing low-barrier access to services and centering equity in organizational culture. **Staff must be supported in understanding the systemic inequities impacting people experiencing homelessness, particularly marginalized groups like BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+, and veterans.**

This involves providing tools to deepen cultural awareness, reduce disparities, and support equitable housing outcomes.

Street outreach programs should regularly evaluate their practices and disaggregated outcome data to address any disparities that arise. Cultural responsiveness, including diversity across race, gender, and language, should be prioritized within staff teams to better engage diverse populations. Partnerships with culturally-specific organizations can help fill gaps in knowledge and ensure safe, affirming service delivery.

Self-reflection, cultural humility, and continuous learning are crucial for outreach staff.

These practices foster respect, empathy, and trust with program participants. Staff should actively learn about participants' cultures and identities, avoid assumptions, and address barriers caused by discrimination. Training on civil rights and advocacy skills can empower staff to better support their participants and advocate for changes to harmful systems.



Caseloads

When managing caseloads, it's important to recognize that not everyone Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff engages with will always be on an existing caseload. To avoid burnout and maintain effectiveness, caseloads must be kept manageable. Regular supervision can help establish when it is appropriate to reassess and rebalance caseloads, ensuring quality service for clients and support for staff.

Caseloads should typically remain between 10–14 participants to ensure effective engagement; larger caseloads risk diminishing service quality and increasing staff stress.

Before officially adding someone to a caseload, outreach workers should build a relationship and have a clear understanding of the people they serve. A balance between engaging new individuals and supporting those on existing caseloads is critical, with programs providing clear processes for this.

Caseload management varies based on geography, resource availability, and the needs of individuals. Intensive support requires smaller caseloads. Decisions about prioritizing services should be consistent across programs, considering equity and practicality. Factors like community resources, vulnerability, and immediate needs should guide enrollment and waitlist decisions.

Street outreach staff also need to engage with people not yet on their caseloads, offering limited services while building relationships. To manage time and prevent burnout, staff should set and be supported in setting healthy boundaries, streamline workflows, and balance direct engagement with other tasks such as data entry and case notes. Resource availability in the community significantly impacts caseload management, and partnerships with community-based services can expand program capacity. Regular evaluation of service delivery, standard caseload management, and partnerships with community-based services can maximize program reach.





Staffing

It is important to assemble a street outreach team with a broad spectrum of skills, experiences, education, and identities. By carefully selecting team members with backgrounds in social work, psychology, healthcare, mental health, substance use, and peer support, organizations can create a dynamic and diverse team capable of addressing the complex needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Incorporating people who have lived experience of unsheltered homelessness into the workforce of street outreach programs can significantly improve how those programs provide services.

People with insight from their firsthand experiences can shape outreach strategies that more closely align with the needs of people still experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and thus may increase a program's effectiveness.

One of the central pillars of trauma informed care is peer support: being offered services by a peer reduces people's fears of being judged by that service provider, makes it easier to relate and build trust, and may even provide a person with hope that their situation can improve. Ensuring that peers are a part of the street outreach workforce can significantly improve the quality of services. People's willingness to engage with services may also decrease the time required to build trusting relationships.

Peers working in street outreach programs sometimes describe a significant difference in their fluency and ease in navigating the dynamics they encounter in their work than their

colleagues without lived experience of unsheltered homelessness. Peers' lived experience may equip them with tools and confidence to deescalate and navigate situations safely, especially in moments of tension or conflict where it is more likely that a person's response will be driven by instinct rather than careful thought. Since situations that require split-second decision making under stress are ripe for activation of implicit bias, the presence of peers may also be a way to interrupt inequities and improve equitable outcomes for street outreach program participants.

Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention

Recruitment

Street outreach programs should not rely solely on traditional job applications when recruiting staff. To reach a diverse pool of candidates, it is essential to use various recruitment channels such as online job boards, social media, community organizations, and partnerships with universities and workforce development programs. Word of mouth remains a powerful recruitment tool and offering referral bonuses can enhance this effort. Job postings should use inclusive language, clearly outline the skills required, and emphasize opportunities for growth.

Housing-Focused Street Outreach work is not entry-level; it requires a high degree of skill, experience, and empathy.

Hiring practices should reflect the complexity of the role, and compensation should match the required expertise. Potential candidates may come from social services or related fields, and outreach programs can expand recruitment through targeted marketing and job fairs.



Hiring

Hiring people with lived experience of homelessness may require providers to reevaluate recruitment practices, reduce barriers like criminal record prohibitions or degree requirements, and focus on relevant personal and professional experience.

Reducing bias in hiring is critical. Decisions should be made by a diverse team using clear, written priorities aligned with the job description.

Open discussions about bias, implicit bias training, and avoiding over-reliance on automated tracking systems can further promote equity in hiring.

For interviews, standardizing the format, sharing questions in advance, and focusing on empathy and understanding of homelessness can ensure a fair process. Lived experience should be weighted equally with professional credentials, and organizations may consider empathy screenings or field visits as part of the interview process.

Retention

Street outreach programs must prioritize retention strategies to maintain a stable workforce and better serve people experiencing homelessness.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness' Workforce Survey highlights the importance of retention, as wages often lag behind the cost of living. Competitive compensation, regular raises, bonuses, and benefits like employee assistance programs and access to mental health services are essential to retaining staff. Offering professional development, career advancement opportunities, and mental health support further demonstrates commitment to employees' growth and well-being.

It is strongly recommended to incorporate shadowing sessions with experienced street outreach staff as part of the onboarding process. This collaborative learning approach can significantly enhance the preparedness and effectiveness of street outreach programs, ensuring new staff develop the skills and confidence needed to excel in their roles.

A positive work culture is critical for retention. Practices like celebrating achievements, encouraging teamwork, promoting emotional intelligence, and supporting work-life balance contribute to a healthy environment. Diversity, equity, and inclusion should also be woven into daily operations to ensure all staff feel respected and supported.

To prevent burnout and secondary trauma, it is vital to maintain reasonable schedules, provide necessary tools, and offer flexible work options. **Encouraging staff to take time off and providing shared spaces for reflection and support can help staff process their experiences.** Trauma-informed supervisory practices, combined with tools and training for leadership, further strengthen resilience among outreach workers.





Training

As times change, so do the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs must continually invest in training and supervision to ensure their staff's effectiveness and resilience in the field. At minimum, street outreach staff should receive training on trauma-informed care, crisis and conflict de-escalation, and resolution strategies, harm reduction, Mental Health First Aid, First Aid, Housing First principles, housing problem-solving, cultural humility, and how to conduct a risk assessment before entering a new area.

It is also important that staff with lived experience receive ongoing support responsive to their specific needs.

Some of the situations they encounter may be triggering or re-traumatizing. Staff with lived experience may have additional training needs, including specific elements of engaging others such as boundaries (especially navigating dual relationships), privacy, documenting encounters, and deeper training on secondary trauma, triggers, and transference, including how that may show up in their work, and strategies for resilience, self-care, and community care.

Street outreach programs should include on-the-job training and shadowing opportunities to newer staff, alongside more formal trainings. Programs should support continued learning through supervision and co-learning spaces (like team meetings or case conferences) to facilitate staff's ability to apply what they learn into their practice. Depending on local conditions and needs, street outreach programs may want to prioritize specific types of training that are most relevant to the populations, conditions, or concerns that arise in their work. Programs

should also tailor training to street outreach staff's expertise, building on their strengths and filling in technical or relational gaps in their experience or training to date.

Please see [Appendix I](#) for a general list of trainings that street outreach programs should prioritize. The list provided there is a starting place and may not include all trainings relevant in each local context.

Continuum of Care Role in Skills and Professional Development

Continuums of Care (CoCs) are often a critical resource for ensuring consistency of services, as well as supporting professional development across homelessness interventions. CoCs should include street outreach program staff in all systemwide training, professional development, and technical assistance opportunities. This supports street outreach staff in building and maintaining the necessary skills to deliver high quality services and supports potential career advancement for frontline staff.

Providing professional development opportunities is essential for carving out pathways into leadership within the field. Some ways this can benefit street outreach programming and services systemwide include:

- ▶ **Street outreach staff participate in training** and cross-train with other providers in their system, growing shared language and diverse skills across the system.
- ▶ **Street outreach staff build and retain strong networks** so they can identify where and how a participant can get any service they are seeking in a culturally appropriate setting.
- ▶ **Learning together** builds trust making partnership management between street outreach and other programs smoother and easier overall.



Flexible Outreach Coverage

One of the main functions of Housing-Focused Street Outreach within a CoC is to ensure that every person experiencing homelessness in a community is accounted for, regardless of where they spend their time. To achieve that, street outreach programs should strive to maximize their reach and availability to meet people wherever they are. Considering flexibility and local context, street outreach programs should consider the geographical and temporal coverage practices that will best ensure that no one is left without the ability to access services.

Scheduling

Because people experiencing unsheltered homelessness often experience barriers to accessing services on a schedule or within business hours, it is important to offer street outreach services outside of a traditional 9am-5pm day. Street outreach programs should adopt flexible schedules and strategies such as staggering staff work hours, utilizing volunteers during non-traditional hours, maintaining on-call staff for weekends and nights, and establishing staffing patterns that span seven days a week, including early mornings and late nights. Where full 24/7 coverage is not feasible, schedules should be set and adapted in response to the engagement needs and patterns of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Geography

A CoC's Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy should ensure that street outreach programming and services reach the entire geography of the CoC. This may be done by a single program or by a combination of programs; programs should coordinate to establish a regular schedule and to reduce duplication of efforts.

To ensure full geographic coverage, prioritize street outreach staff's time in places where other services are not reaching (such as sidewalks, streetcorners, wooded areas, underpasses, abandoned properties, parks, highway on/off ramps and rights of way, and even distant or secluded places).

It is important to extend street outreach services beyond day shelters, libraries, drop-in centers, soup kitchens, pantries, and similar establishments where services are already available.

It may also be helpful to have a street outreach presence at community events and meetings to ensure that the community is aware of these services and may assist in connecting someone new to services. The overarching goal should be to reach people experiencing unsheltered homelessness wherever they are and provide help in accessing housing, healthcare, employment, and other services.





Urban, Suburban, and Rural Considerations

In urban communities where the population numbers are higher and homelessness is more visible, street outreach staff often concentrate on downtown areas, city parks, public transportation hubs, healthcare facilities, and other locations where people experiencing homelessness tend to gather. For these reasons, urban street outreach staff may need more training in navigating denser encampments and the political dynamics among many people living together unsheltered.

In contrast, street outreach teams in suburban and rural communities need to be savvier about identifying people because they face specific challenges related to the geographical remoteness of their communities. There are more wooded and remote areas where people may hide from public view, and staff may struggle to safely get to them. Suburban and rural street outreach teams should also keep a list of key contacts who are privy to the whereabouts of new people experiencing homelessness in the community or organizations that provide other types of support and who may be able to identify people they serve who are living in unsheltered locations.

Access to services also varies between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Street outreach teams in urban communities may be able to offer more options to connect people with the services they need. However, waitlists may be much longer for accessing these services, (i.e., a shelter bed) and systems may be more complex and less transparent to navigate.

In suburban and rural areas, access to services may be more limited. Street outreach staff may have to fill some of the gaps in service delivery and/or spend much more of their time driving between sites and potentially transporting clients to other service locations. This will impact staffing needs and caseloads, as well as how street outreach programs deploy their staff's time and efforts.

In each type of geography, street outreach programs will need to partner with other local organizations to address gaps in service delivery and work together to make services more accessible.



PROMOTION OF COMMUNITY

Health and Safety

Promoting health and safety is vital in Housing-Focused Street Outreach efforts, which aim to connect unsheltered individuals to essential resources, life-saving interventions, and ultimately permanent housing solutions. To effectively achieve this, street outreach programming must prioritize the safety and well-being of those they serve, the broader community, and the dedicated staff involved in engagement roles. Housing-Focused Street Outreach programming focuses on the following key main areas to uplift health and safety:

- ▶ Comprehensive Preparation
- ▶ Purposeful Engagement
- ▶ Coordination & Communication
- ▶ Managing Conflict



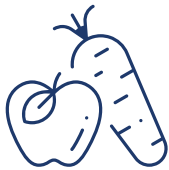
Comprehensive Preparation

Ensuring the well-being of both street outreach personnel and the communities served is vital to Housing-Focused Street Outreach initiatives.

Before starting outreach efforts, communities and programs must undertake thorough preparations to promote health, safety, and the adoption of evidence-based practices.

This requires equipping street outreach providers with key resources, services (both in-house and external), and the required skills and knowledge to adequately address safety and health concerns.

Housing-Focused Street Outreach providers must be equipped with an array of resources designed to bolster safety and overall well-being for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. These resources encompass, but are not limited to:



Food and water



Clothing and blankets



Access to harm reduction tools

(including naloxone, safe needle disposals, participation in safe needle exchange programs, distribution of condoms, and more)



First aid equipment



Bus passes or gas cards



Hygiene kits
(toothbrushes, deodorant, clean wipes, menstrual products, hand sanitizer, etc.)



Trash bags and locations for places to dump trash



Local access to shower and restrooms



Furthermore, staff members engaged in Housing-Focused Street Outreach activities should undergo comprehensive training covering various essential topics (see [Appendix I](#) for a list of suggested trainings).

It is essential to avoid hurried engagement, even before starting outreach. **Pre-outreach preparations should include thorough assessments of the targeted areas to identify potential safety risks, including a visual assessment of any potential environmental risks or structural hazards.** Through these pre-outreach assessments, street outreach programs can better ensure the safety of both their staff and the people they want to assist.

Moreover, it is crucial to consider various preparatory factors, including adherence to appropriate attire guidelines. This entails avoiding open-toe shoes and excessive jewelry, and instead opting for weather-appropriate attire that is both practical and comfortable. By dressing appropriately, staff can mitigate the risk of injuries and maintain safety while actively participating in Housing-Focused Street Outreach activities.

Consideration should also be given to ensuring the outreach staff are easily identifiable. This can include a uniform or pieces of clothing that say “Outreach” and the organization’s name/logo, and/or a name badge identifying one’s employer and role as a street outreach worker.





Purposeful Engagement

Ensuring the safety of both street outreach staff and people experiencing unsheltered homelessness hinges on deliberate and positive engagement practices.

Here are key strategies to uphold safety during Housing-Focused Street Outreach efforts:

1. Gather Pre-engagement Information

Gathering information is crucial when entering unfamiliar territory or interacting with new individuals. Try to gather ample information through the mapping of a known encampment, information from street outreach teams, HMIS, and/or 311 data. This data can inform outreach approaches, aid in curating potential engagement strategies, and identify any known triggers to navigate interactions as effectively as possible.

2. Introduce Yourself

When approaching people or areas for engagement, outreach staff should clearly announce themselves, including their organization and role. It's important to approach slowly and respectfully.



3. Work in Pairs

Whenever possible, street outreach staff should avoid conducting outreach activities alone. Instead, it is ideal to go in pairs or as part of a team. Be mindful not to approach in groups of 3 or more; it can be intimidating. Diversity within a street outreach team (including race, ethnicity, and gender expression) can enhance rapport and effectiveness of the programming.

4. Offer Supplies

Street outreach staff should offer necessary or requested supplies and resources to individuals in need – during the initial engagement, and as needed through ongoing engagement. These supplies could include food, water, hygiene kits, and other essentials.

5. Choose High-Visibility Areas

Street outreach staff should initiate conversations in high-visibility areas that still afford some privacy. Staff should choose places that are out of earshot of others for private conversation, but within sightlines of the rest of the street outreach team and other community members like a clearing, picnic area, parking lot, lobby of a public building (library, fast food restaurant, etc.), or public right of way (sidewalk, grassy patch along highway entrance, subway platform, etc.). If necessary, outreach staff should ask if the person would prefer to speak in a more visible location. When possible, providers should avoid meeting with anyone in a tent, inside an abandoned building, or inside houses when conducting street outreach activities.

6. Respect Personal Boundaries

Street outreach staff should maintain an appropriate distance during engagement to respect the boundaries of the people they are engaging with. This helps prevent potential safety issues and fosters a sense of trust.



7. Treat Sleeping Locations as a Home

If someone is asleep when outreach staff arrive at their sleeping location and it's not an urgent matter, street outreach staff should return later. When entering an area where it seems someone resides, and they don't emerge, street outreach staff should refrain from intruding into their personal space.

8. Prioritize Honesty, Transparency, and Participant Choice

Street outreach staff should be transparent and prioritize autonomy and respect for the choices of people they engage. Staff should avoid making commitments beyond their control. They should actively communicate respect for each person's decisions at all stages of engagement, including the choice not to engage immediately with the services being offered.

9. Trust Street Outreach Staff Intuition

Street outreach staff should allow their instincts to guide the duration of interactions. It is an important skill for street outreach staff to be able to discern when it's appropriate to respectfully conclude the conversation or interaction, with the understanding that it can always be revisited later.

By adhering to these principles of purposeful engagement, street outreach staff can cultivate safer environments for both them and the people they serve, fostering trust and rapport in the process.





Coordination & Communication

Beyond thorough preparation and safe engagement, additional measures are vital for ensuring safety, including transparent coordination and effective communication.

Here are key considerations:

1. Maintain Clear Location Awareness

Ensure that the street outreach staff locations are well-documented and shared within the organization or with other relevant providers. This can be achieved by maintaining an accurate calendar and schedule that indicate locations and durations of street outreach activities. Utilizing technology (such as trackers in vehicles or phones, or employing apps with geocoding features) can enhance location transparency and coordination.

2. Consistency in Ongoing Engagement

Maintain consistency in street outreach efforts and availability when making ongoing plans with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Consistency and reliability in engagement builds trust and stability in relationships, contributing to the safety and effectiveness of street outreach endeavors. Consistent engagement could mean conducting street outreach activities at regular standing times and locations, like going back to the same place at regular intervals. It can also mean simply ensuring that street outreach staff keep any commitments they make about the times and locations they will be available to provide services.

3. Collaborative Coordination

Coordinating with other street outreach programs familiar with the surroundings – and establishing clear and defined roles between staff who are engaging in the same areas – minimizes confusion and enhances response capabilities in unforeseen incidents.

4. Release of Information

To ensure safe and appropriate communications, providers must obtain a signed Release of Information (ROI) agreement with other providers or individuals. This ensures transparency regarding who information is shared with, and maintains consistency in the type of information exchanged. Additionally, this document upholds privacy, security, and confidentiality standards, safeguarding sensitive information and ensuring that it is only accessed by authorized parties.

5. Safe and Supportive Team Environment

Keeping an open and honest communication line among street outreach staff is important for promptly addressing safety concerns, staying vigilant and responsive to the needs of colleagues, and having the ability to transfer people's service provision needs between caseloads when necessary.

6. Universal Communication and Transparency

Create opportunities for community stakeholders (i.e., online, by phone, or through in-person meetings) to share concerns or observations, and ask questions that are quickly addressed by outreach programs or other designated entities. Share public data through dashboards and other avenues to demonstrate the status of efforts performed.

By implementing transparent coordination and fostering effective communication channels, street outreach programs can enhance safety, streamline operations, and better serve people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, ultimately creating a more supportive and secure environment for all involved.



Managing Conflict

Just like in any other setting, crises or conflicts can arise during street outreach efforts. It's crucial to ensure that all team members are equipped with training in crisis de-escalation and can maintain composure under pressure. During these challenging situations, having clear protocols in place is paramount. These protocols should outline what steps to take and who to contact, and follow a safety plan designed to safeguard both the outreach staff and the people they are assisting.

A part of managing conflict is recognizing the initial signals of escalation to avert crises from reaching their peak.

Employing interventions such as removing oneself from the situation, lowering the stakes or pressure of the interaction, or relocating the conversation can help retain relationships while attending to safety in the moment. If conflicts frequently escalate to crisis levels, it may be a good idea to rethink preparation practices and training needs for the street outreach staff involved.

Maintaining composure and understanding trauma-informed practices is key to effective de-escalation. It's essential to remain calm and respectful, with neutral affect, and to refrain from passing judgment or escalating tensions by demonstrating strong or reactive emotions such as anger, frustration, fear, or overwhelm. Raising one's voice or taking a physically aggressive stance should be avoided at all costs. By staying level-headed and bringing calm energy to the scene, street outreach staff can prevent the situation from worsening and create an environment conducive to resolution.

Internal protocols should address both immediate safety and long-term planning once safety is reestablished. It's crucial that street outreach staff adhere to internal protocols and follow established steps to determine whether any further crisis response measures are necessary once the immediate incident has been resolved. This may include completing an incident report, safety planning regarding service delivery to people involved in the incident, and seeking out additional resources to address the situation effectively.

Outreach efforts should avoid restricting services for individuals. Instead, they should prioritize removing staff from situations that become unsafe and carefully plan future engagements to ensure safety. It is important to have a pre-established relationship with local crisis response entities, such as the police, fire departments, or mobile mental health services. These partnerships should prioritize clear lines of communication and mutual understanding, and promote safety for everyone involved. By fostering these relationships, street outreach programs can facilitate smoother collaboration and prompt access to additional support when needed.

By prioritizing crisis management training, clear protocols, and maintaining a calm and respectful demeanor, street outreach staff can navigate challenging situations with confidence and ensure the safety and well-being of everyone involved.



HOUSING- FOCUSED APPROACH

Anchored in Housing First

Effective street outreach is housing-focused. This means that street outreach programming is structured in alignment with the Housing First philosophy and all street outreach staff espouse a strong belief (from first engagement) that safe, stable housing constitutes the best foundation for a person to achieve stability. Street outreach programming is structured on the belief that there should be no preconditions to entry into programming and into permanent housing (including participation in shelter or street outreach services) and therefore work to remove or reduce barriers to housing experienced by program participants and all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness whenever possible.



Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff should consistently convey their conviction that safe and stable housing is essential for ending homelessness and fostering healing. This message should be woven into all interactions, whether with program participants, community partners, or broader community stakeholders. Street outreach staff should support participants in a manner that recognizes that progress towards personal goals – including vocational and recovery-oriented goals, among others – are easier and more likely to be achieved and sustained when a participant has stable housing. This includes an understanding that shelter (including transitional housing and other crisis housing) is not housing – and does not offer the full benefits that permanent housing provides – but may offer relative stability for participants who wish to access it. Ideally, street outreach programs are embedded within a whole system that operates in alignment with Housing First through transitions from unsheltered homelessness directly into permanent housing.

The following components are essential for operating street outreach programming in a Housing-Focused way.

Embedded in Coordinated Entry Systems

To ensure Housing-Focused Street Outreach providers are best positioned to support their participants' transitions into stable housing, street outreach staff should be well versed in the requirements and processes for local housing program referrals and enrollments throughout their geography as well as light touch housing supports, such as move-in cost assistance. All housing programs participating in Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) via referral and prioritization should also be familiar with the scope and availability of street outreach services within their Continuum of Care (CoC). Street outreach programs can support appropriate prioritization of their participants for housing program referrals by staying up to date with their CoC's prioritization protocols and ensure all relevant participant data is recorded on time, accurately, and completely in HMIS (or other CES data system).





Considerations for Access and Assessment

Communities should consider the most appropriate role of street outreach staff in conducting Coordinated Entry assessments for housing referral prioritization purposes.

- ▶ For CoCs covering **large geographies** and/or with few public transportation options, it is strongly advisable to equip street outreach programs with assessment capabilities to ensure geographic coverage of Coordinated Entry throughout the entire CoC.
- ▶ In CoCs with significant capacity to conduct Coordinated Entry assessment activities **remotely** (via phone or video chat), it may be more advantageous to equip street outreach staff with technology to facilitate connection to centralized CES assessment while in the field.

- ▶ In areas with large populations of people experiencing **unsheltered homelessness**, it may be advisable to equip street outreach staff with assessment capabilities to ensure quality real-time data is available for both service provision and system evaluation purposes.



In areas where unsheltered homelessness is unusually prevalent or there are large numbers of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, Point-in-Time Count data often shows large discrepancies between unsheltered population numbers and numbers of people included in CES and on by-name lists that prioritize referrals for housing programs. In these areas, communities should develop system-wide strategies for engaging people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in available services. These strategies should include coordinated efforts to increase street outreach capacity, expand coverage to the entire geographic area served by the CoC, and expedited CES assessment activities for all people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Strategies for reaching and assessing more people will vary depending on local context, but may include: expanding existing street outreach program staffing and CES assessment training; encampment-based engagement and assessment events; mapping of PIT Count and CES data to identify geographical areas to target with assessment activities; or leveraging partnerships with organizations serving specific subpopulations underrepresented in existing assessments.



Considerations for Prioritization and Referrals

CoCs should ensure people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are incorporated into Coordinated Entry System (CES) protocols, referrals, and prioritization processes including for entry into all participating short- and long-term housing programs and opportunities. Equitable access to CES interventions (diversion, housing problem-solving, light touch financial assistance, etc.) and assessment for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness should be addressed in CES protocols and standards.

Communities should be careful to avoid any potentially disparate impacts of using unsheltered status itself as a prioritization criterion.

Communities should ensure prioritization considers both high acuity and vulnerability, ensuring that those with the most pressing needs receive appropriate considerations.

Additionally, CoCs should thoroughly assess their current housing interventions' scale and availability. If necessary, communities must make substantial investments in housing interventions to expedite the transition of people from unsheltered conditions to stable housing.

Coordinated Entry System standards should include guidelines to support successful transfer of participants from street outreach programs into Rapid Re-Housing and Permanent Supportive Housing programs, such as clarity of prioritization criteria and documentation requirements, delineation of responsibilities between programs during such transitions, and data to track and evaluate the frequency and success of transitions from street outreach programs into housing programs relative to similar transitions out of shelter.

While CoCs should ensure policies that promote equity throughout referral and prioritization processes, street outreach staff play a key role in ensuring these equitable processes are available for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in the referral and enrollment phases of participating housing programs. For example, if a housing provider typically offers to meet new enrollees at the shelter to complete enrollment paperwork, street outreach staff can help ensure similar offers are extended to their new enrollees by working with participants and housing providers to identify safe and convenient locations for such activities.

Prioritizing unsheltered status for housing referrals

In general, it is only advisable to target housing program resources exclusively to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness if and only if those resources are new and will not reduce exits from homelessness for people within a CoC's sheltered population. Examples of this include such innovative collaborations as a campaign to house folks living in an encampment subsidized by a business district where the encampment is located. Or a new public private partnership between a health system and CoC targeting housing resources to high utilizers of costly ER services while experiencing unsheltered homelessness.



Housing-Focused Problem-Solving

All efforts should be made to ensure street outreach program participants access safe housing as quickly as possible. Street outreach staff should be skilled in using [Housing-Focused Problem-Solving](#) techniques to support participants in thinking creatively about all options for safe housing available to them. This may include tapping into their social and familial networks, and/or bringing in institutional or system resources (financial assistance, transportation, mediation, etc.) to support the exploration of any options participants choose to pursue.

Housing-Focused Problem-Solving should be attempted prior to any assessment or referral to housing.

It should also focus on empowering participants to lean into their strengths and identify potential housing solutions outside of formal housing

programs. It is important to persist in these conversations as street outreach staff build trusting relationships with participants, since housing options available via these informal relationships may shift and change significantly over time, and participants may share more relevant information about these relationships as street outreach staff build stronger rapport with them.

Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff should support creative solutions to any housing barriers that become apparent during the problem-solving process.

Creativity and flexibility in problem solving and application of available resources is key because of the unpredictability and diversity of participants' life circumstances. In many cases, reestablishing or repairing relationships and trust may be as vital as identifying monetary or other logistical resources in turning participants' ideas into viable housing options. Conversation, advocacy, and mediation are therefore important tools for effective Housing-Focused Problem-Solving.



Support Document Readiness

Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs should assist participants in obtaining any needed documents to execute their individual housing plan goals and apply for the housing opportunities of their choice. Street outreach programs should also consider providing or identifying safe storage options for those documents. Street outreach staff should be skilled in navigating identity document processes and systems, have relationships with local identification documentation offices, and have access to funding sources to assist participants in paying for documents not available for free. At minimum, street outreach staff should be prepared to assist participants in obtaining birth certificates, photo identification, and Social Security cards, and help them navigate proof of income documentation required for many housing options.

Ideally, Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs stay aware of the types of documents commonly required in housing and lease-up processes in their community, and develop the skills and relationships necessary to support participants in obtaining them. This skillset includes processes and requirements for documenting literal homelessness and chronicity based on both federal and local definitions, so participants have timely access to housing programs that require it. Each CoC and each program has specific requirements that may vary from federal definitions, so community-level knowledge is essential for this documentation to serve its intended purpose of accelerating housing timelines. It is also helpful for street outreach staff to receive training and support in understanding ADA and other Fair Housing and tenancy protections, as well as the documentation required to assert those rights during a tenancy selection and lease up process.

Less common documents that street outreach staff may need to assist participants in acquiring include:

- ▶ **Immigration related documents:**
 - Consular IDs
 - Faith IDs
 - International birth records
 - Visa / immigration status documentation

- ▶ **Other forms of ID:**
 - Student IDs
 - Name Change Documentation (*Marriage certificate, court records, divorce decrees*)

- ▶ **Income and benefit related documents:**
 - Proof of income
 - Proof of benefits (*cash and non-cash*)
 - Bank statements
 - Veteran discharge paperwork or DD-214

- ▶ **Disability related documents:**
 - Proof of disability
 - Medical records
 - Service animal documentation
 - Emotional support animal documentation of need

- ▶ **Domestic violence related documents:**
 - Documentation from victim service provider (*especially in re: DV related eviction, credit, or criminal records*)
 - DV court records
 - Police reports
 - Credit report dispute records



Housing Stabilization Options Exploration

Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs should support a robust understanding of the local housing context and all available types of housing, housing subsidies, and housing supports in the community – both within and outside of the homelessness services system. **Street outreach staff should have a general understanding of where housing is available and of the features of neighborhoods where participants are most likely to encounter housing options.**

Additionally, any community-wide initiatives (such as landlord databases, risk-mitigation funding, and other system-wide landlord engagement tools) should be fully available to street outreach programs and their participants.



Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff should have a clear understanding of referral and application processes for available housing subsidies and support programs, including average wait times, eligibility requirements, and prioritization practices. They should be prepared to help participants understand what kinds of support different types of housing programs provide, including the scope of subsidies, intensity of services, and duration of the program.



Housing-Focused Street Outreach staff should be prepared to assist participants in comparing different types of housing and housing programs and supporting them in making informed decisions about which housing opportunities they choose to pursue. Street outreach staff should receive training in Fair Housing, tenant rights, and tenancy screening barriers; they should also understand the components of lease-up processes for public and private housing options.

Programs should support staff in developing fluency in reading and understanding lease terms, tenant rights and responsibilities, and how they apply in different housing types and scenarios.

They should be adept at flagging discriminatory and/or predatory lease terms and negotiating favorable outcomes for participants with landlords. This may be achieved via robust training for all street outreach staff, specialized housing staff embedded in street outreach programs, or via strong partnerships with other providers who have strong technical skills in housing and a willingness to share it as needed.



Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs should support a broad definition of housing and housing program options to include (some of these options are only available in certain states or municipalities):

- ▶ **Market rate rentals**
(house, duplex/multiplex, apartment, trailer home, etc.)
- ▶ **Shared housing:**
 - With roommates with shared lease
 - With roommates on separate leases
 - With family/friends who own their home
 - With family/friends who rent in the private market
 - With family/friends who rent with a subsidy *(project based or voucher/tenant based)*
 - Single room occupancy/Boarding houses
 - Recovery/sober Housing
 - Housing Cooperatives
- ▶ **Income Based Subsidized Housing options:**
 - Public Housing
 - Site Based Housing Choice Vouchers *(Section 8)*
 - Site Based USDA Rent Assisted Housing
- ▶ **Low Income Housing Tax Credit Housing**
- ▶ **USDA Rural Development Housing**
- ▶ **Population specific housing options:**
 - Senior Housing *(may include people with disabilities)*
 - Disability Housing
 - Veteran Housing
 - HIV/AIDS Housing
 - Recovery/sober Housing
 - Youth-specific Housing
 - Reentry Housing
- ▶ **Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)**
- ▶ **Joint Transitional Housing/Rapid Re-housing (TH/RRH)**
- ▶ **Other limited term subsidy and rent assistance programs**
- ▶ **Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)**
- ▶ **Other permanent housing vouchers:**
 - Housing Choice Voucher *(HCV aka Section 8 vouchers)*
 - Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS *(HOPWA vouchers)*
 - Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV)
 - Medicaid or healthcare funded housing vouchers
 - Local or municipal housing vouchers
- ▶ **Assisted living and nursing home facilities**



Access to Flexible Funds for Securing Housing

To facilitate transitions from unsheltered locations directly into permanent housing, Housing-Focused Street Outreach programs should have access to flexible funding for all costs related to accessing, securing, and moving into permanent housing. This should include costs traditionally associated with securing housing (e.g., application fees, holding fees, background check fees, administration fees, security deposits, pet deposits, first month's rent, utility deposits, and last month's rent), as well as other costs that might constitute a barrier to a participant's housing. This may be achieved via funding within street outreach programs or through partnerships with programs or organizations with flexible funding available.



Examples of expenses to remove housing barriers include, but are not limited to:

- ▶ Paying off old eviction or landlord judgment debt
- ▶ Paying off old utility debt
- ▶ Storage for belongings that participants can't bring into housing
- ▶ Travel or transit to a safe housing option out of town
- ▶ Purchase of item(s) which would resolve an interpersonal conflict that is keeping them from otherwise safe housing
- ▶ Payment of fines or fees to close court cases or otherwise reduce impact of criminal justice involvement on tenancy screening
- ▶ Crate/kennel, licensing, and/or spay/neuter for a pet or support animal
- ▶ Installation of physical accessibility feature

Additionally, for program participants who move into housing without another program supporting them, it is essential that street outreach programs have access to resources and referrals for furnishing a home. Again, this may be achieved within the program or through referral pathways or partnerships with other organizations who provide home furnishings, household goods, and household supplies.



CONCLUSION

The Housing-Focused Street Outreach framework presented by the National Alliance to End Homelessness serves as a comprehensive and strategic approach to address the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. By prioritizing person-centered engagement, the Housing-Focused Street Outreach framework emphasizes the importance of building respectful, empathetic relationships that acknowledge the dignity and humanity of those served. This framework is further bolstered by adherence to the Housing First philosophy, ensuring that street outreach efforts are seamlessly integrated into the community's Coordinated Entry System to facilitate successful transitions into permanent housing.

By integrating core elements such as **person-centered engagement, a Housing First approach, community health and safety, strategic collaboration, and data-informed decision-making**, the Housing-Focused Street Outreach framework offers a holistic and effective pathway to reducing unsheltered homelessness and improving the well-being of vulnerable populations.



For the successful implementation of Housing-Focused Street Outreach, the Continuum of Care must foster coordination and collaboration among various street outreach programs and community partners. By integrating services and leveraging resources, these organizations can create multidisciplinary teams that enhance the efficacy of their outreach efforts.

Data-driven strategies are crucial in identifying patterns, measuring outcomes, and continuously improving service delivery.

Ultimately, the Housing-Focused Street Outreach strategy is an adaptable model that aims to not only provide immediate relief to those experiencing homelessness, but also to establish long-term, sustainable pathways out of homelessness to promote community well-being and safety.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX I:

Training Topics

List of Recommended Evidenced-Based Practice Training Areas:

- ▶ Assertive Engagement
- ▶ Housing First
- ▶ Motivational Interviewing
- ▶ Harm Reduction and Overdose Reversal
- ▶ Trauma Informed Care, including understanding Secondary/Vicarious Trauma
- ▶ Mental Health First Aid
- ▶ Crisis De-escalation
- ▶ Culturally Responsive Care, including topics of race equity, LGBTQIA2S+ populations, and recognizing bias
- ▶ Substance Use Disorder Management
- ▶ Housing Problem Solving
- ▶ Fundamentals of addressing domestic and sexual violence
- ▶ First Aid/CPR
- ▶ Critical Time Intervention
- ▶ Working with people with lived experience of homelessness.



APPENDIX II:

Glossary of Terms

Acuity: In housing-related service assessments, acuity refers to an increased level of care needs that require greater resource allocation and more intensive service support to access housing and remain successfully housed ([US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)).

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):

The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in several areas, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and access to state and local government programs and services ([U.S. Department of Labor](#)).

Continuum of Care (CoC): A regional or local planning body that coordinates the homeless response system's housing and services funding (no matter the source) for homeless families and individuals ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).

Crisis Housing: Crisis housing includes options such as emergency shelter, Safe Havens, and Transitional Housing.

Cultural Humility: A process of self-reflection and discovery in order to build honest and trustworthy relationships. It offers promise for researchers to understand and eliminate health disparities, a continual and disturbing problem necessitating attention and action on many levels ([National Library of Medicine](#)).

Culturally Responsive: Involves understanding and appropriately including and responding to the combination of cultural variables and the full range of dimensions of diversity that an individual brings to interactions. Cultural responsiveness requires valuing diversity, seeking to further cultural knowledge, and working toward the creation of community spaces and workspaces where diversity is valued ([America Speech- Language-Hearing Association](#)).

Harm Reduction: An evidence-based approach that is critical to engaging with people who use drugs. Harm reduction equips people with life-saving tools and information to create positive change in their lives and potentially save their lives. Harm reduction is a key pillar in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ([Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)).

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS): A local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families at risk of and experiencing homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards ([US. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)).



Homeless Response System: All organizations working in the community directly or indirectly addressing homelessness.

Housing First: A homeless assistance approach that prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, thus ending their homelessness and serving as a platform from which they can pursue personal goals and improve their quality of life. This approach is guided by the belief that people need basic necessities (like food and a place to live) before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues ([National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)).

In-Reach :Providing services at existing locations where people experiencing homelessness may already seek services, such as day/night shelters, drop-in centers, institutions (hospitals/jails), libraries, soup kitchens, etc.

Outreach: Providing services on the street, or in parks, abandoned buildings, bus stations, campgrounds, and other unsheltered settings.

Participant: An individual enrolled in a Housing-Focused Street Outreach program.

Vulnerability In housing-related service assessments, vulnerability often refers to the level of increased exposure to harm a household face if remaining unhoused ([US Department of Housing and Urban Development](#)).



APPENDIX III:

Types of Street Outreach

The chart below provides a general sense of types of street outreach programming in communities but may not be exhaustive.

General Street outreach

General street outreach programming is designed to connect individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness to emergency shelter and housing solutions; it also provides immediate, life-saving interventions. In many communities, these street outreach workers are responsible for conducting Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) assessments and are integrated into the broader CoC.

Clinical Street Outreach

Clinical street outreach encompasses health-, mental health-, substance abuse-, and co-occurring-focused outreach. This may include street medicine initiatives, where medical professionals operate mobile medical vans or deploy street outreach specialists to deliver healthcare services to those who are unable or unwilling to access traditional clinic settings or local healthcare systems. Clinical street outreach also provides linkages to voluntary mental health or substance abuse services for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI); place-based substance use disorder treatment focused on safety and harm reduction; mental health and substance use treatment; connection to main-stream resources; coordination of housing and supportive services' and integration with the Coordinated Entry System.

Subpopulation-Focused Out-reach

Subpopulation-focused outreach typically consists of funding and resources targeted towards veterans, youth, or people with disabilities experiencing homelessness. This may include direct outreach for justice-involved veterans with mental health or substance use issues at risk of homelessness. Veteran-specific outreach can help identify homeless veterans in encampments, shelters, drop-in centers, and other community locations to provide connections to VA-specific engagement and resources. Street-based education and out-reach for youth encompasses survival aid, treatment and counseling, crisis intervention, and follow-up support for homeless, runaway and street youth. Disability-focused outreach facilitates connections between individuals experiencing homelessness with disabilities and income through Social Security.

**Local
Community-
Based
Out-reach**

Religious organizations, mutual aid organizations, and other community groups provide essential support to people experiencing homelessness through light-touch street outreach services (e.g., food, toiletries, clothing, and other essential items). Unlike some other street outreach programs, community-based outreach initiatives are often not integrated into the formal Continuum of Care but maintain strong connections with the community they serve. These efforts can help individuals maintain safety and dignity while experiencing homelessness, and may also build community, relationships, connections, and a sense of belonging with and among people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

**Direct
Encampment-
to-Housing
Outreach**

With an increase in unsheltered homelessness, encampments have expanded, which has resulted in emerging strategies for direct encampment-to-housing strategies. Currently, there is not a dedicated funding source for direct encampment-to-housing outreach; instead, many communities engage in coordinated community investment planning, braiding together a range of federal, state, and local, and philanthropic funding.

**Place-Based
Out-reach
(In-Reach)**

Place-based outreach involves delivering services to specific sites or locations where people experiencing unsheltered homelessness may frequent. These locations might include libraries, drop-in centers, day shelters, soup kitchens, pantries, and similar establishments. This programming isn't tailored to a specific population. Location-centered in-reach typically offers a broad range of resources and services to anyone in need who presents at the site, and is often geared towards immediate crisis response within the vicinity it serves.

**Crisis Response
Outreach**

In some communities, law enforcement, fire departments, EMS, mobile mental/behavioral health teams, or other providers are trained to respond to crisis situations involving people experiencing homelessness. These providers are embedded in community-level emergency response dispatch systems like 911, 988, or 411/311/211. Their engagements are driven by crisis calls from the community, including from people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and the services they offer are usually short-term with the goal of resolving the immediate crisis. Occasionally, these programs include referral or follow up service components to support connection with community-based services.

**Non-Crisis Law
Enforcement
Homeless
Out-reach
Teams (HOT)**

Some communities do not have non-profit led street outreach; the only out-reach that may be occurring in those communities is law enforcement with dedicated personnel assigned to a Homeless Outreach Team (HOT). While a lot of the work resembles more general outreach, there is no disputing the power dynamics at play in the exchanges with people experiencing homelessness, and between law enforcement and other parts of the system of care.



**Peer-Led
Organization**

Organizations led by individuals with lived experience of homelessness leverage their personal experiences to assist others currently facing homelessness. Through their guidance, individuals receive support, connection to essential services, and assistance in securing housing.

**Multi-
disciplinary
Street
Outreach
Teams**

Multidisciplinary street outreach programs bring together professionals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, including peer support workers, behavioral health specialists, and physical health practitioners. By combining different skill sets and perspectives, these programs can provide comprehensive support tailored to the complex needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Multidisciplinary work is best when roles, expertise, and expectations are clarified.



APPENDIX IV:

Funding Sources for Street Outreach

The chart below provides a general sense of funding sources available to support street outreach programming but may not be exhaustive.

General	
Sources	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ <u>Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)</u>▶ <u>Continuum of Care Supplemental to Address Unsheltered and Rural Homelessness (Special NOFO)</u>▶ Local government funding▶ Philanthropic funding	<p>These sources primarily fund general street outreach programming which is designed to connect individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Emergency shelter, housing solutions, and provide immediate life-saving interventions. In many communities, these street outreach workers are responsible for conducting Coordinated Entry Systems (CES) assessments and are integrated into the broader CoC.



Clinical	
Sources	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ <u>Health Center Program (330 Grant)</u>▶ <u>Medicaid/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act</u>▶ <u>Project for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)</u>▶ <u>Treatment for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness (TIEH)</u>▶ <u>Opioid settlement or State Opioid Response (SOR)</u>	<p>These sources primarily fund clinical street outreach which encompasses health-, mental health-, substance abuse-, and co-occurring-focused outreach. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Street medicine initiatives, where medical professionals operate mobile medical vans or deploy street outreach specialists to deliver healthcare services to those who are unable or unwilling to access traditional clinic settings or local healthcare systems.▶ Linkages to voluntary mental health or substance abuse services for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), place-based substance use disorder treatment focused on safety and harm reduction, and mental health and substance use treatment, connection to mainstream resources, coordination of housing and supportive services, and integration with the Coordinated Entry System.

Subpopulation-Specific	
Sources	Description
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ <u>Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program</u>▶ <u>Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO)</u>▶ <u>Runaway and Homeless Youth Street Outreach Program (SOP)</u>▶ <u>SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR)</u>	<p>These sources exclusively fund subpopulation-specific outreach and targeted towards people experiencing homelessness who are also Veterans, youth or have disabilities. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ Direct outreach for justice-involved veterans with mental health or substance use issues at risk of homelessness and identification of homeless veterans encountered in encampments, shelters, drop-in centers, and other community locations to provide connections to VA-specific engagement and resources.▶ Street-based education and outreach, survival aid, treatment and counseling, crisis intervention, and follow-up support for homeless, runaway and street youth.▶ Disability-focused outreach facilitates connections between individuals experiencing homelessness with disabilities and income through Social Security.



APPENDIX V:

Resources

[Core Components of Outreach 2019](#)

[Effective Street Outreach: From Unsheltered to Housed](#)

[COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Housing-Focused Outreach](#)

[COVID-19 Planning and Response: Lessons Learned from Outreach Workers](#)

[Closing the Gap: Homelessness to Housing Webinar Series – Street Outreach](#)

[Promoting Safety in Street Outreach – National Health Care for the Homeless Council](#)

[COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Guidance for Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining People with Lived Experience and Expertise of Homelessness](#)

[COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Equity Capacity Building: Hiring, Supervision, Training](#)

Some links in this document may no longer be accessible due to updates or removals on federal websites. Please check back later, as they may be restored.

endhomelessness.org

(Tel) 202.638.1526

(Fax) 202.638.4664

thecenter@naeh.org



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS