

High-Quality Data on Unsheltered Homelessness

How to Get It, and
What It Can Do for You



Panelists



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Session Description

Understanding more about *who* exactly experiences *unsheltered homelessness* is key to designing an *effective* homelessness response system.

This session will describe different *mechanisms for collecting* and *using data*, focusing on the central *importance* of *high-quality* street outreach *data*.

Learning Objectives

The power of data...

Highlight what insights can be gained from robust data on unsheltered homelessness.

Harvesting data for understanding...

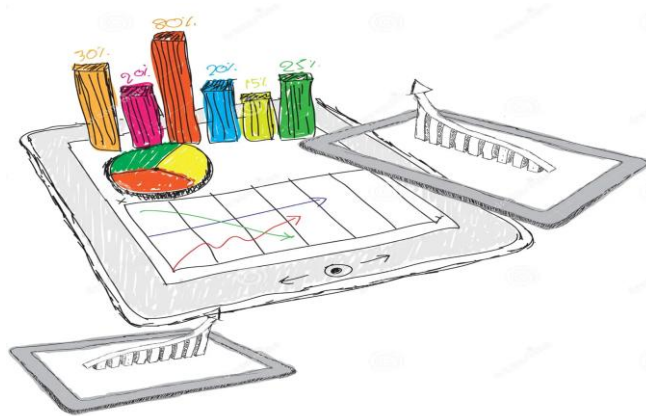
Review potential data sources, focusing on the importance of street outreach data and best practices for improving quality & coverage.

Equitable data for a more holistic picture...

Explore other mechanisms for improving local understanding of unsheltered homelessness, such as utilizing the PIT, incorporating GIS data, and learning from other data sources (like I&R Lines).



What is the Importance of Data



Data



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What?: Key Points

Why Accurate Data is Critical

Understanding Scope and Trends
Targeting Interventions

Driving Community and Policy Change

Informed Policy Making
Accountability and Transparency

Data as a Tool for Equity

Identifying Disparities
Engage Culturally Relevant Partners
Amplifying Lived Experiences



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Street outreach data collection & management

endhomelessness.org/outreach



HOUSING- FOCUSED STREET OUTREACH

Framework



National Alliance to
END HOMELESSNESS

Housing Focused Street Outreach

Housing-Focused Street Outreach (HFSO) is 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



Strategic Collaboration and Partnerships



Person-Centered Engagement



Promotion of Community Health and Safety



Housing-Focused Approach Anchored in Housing First

Why is street outreach data important?

Individual

- Provide key insights about each participant's housing journey
- Improve a street outreach worker's ability to do their job well

Program

- Identify disparities in access to services & outcomes
- Learn valuable insights about organizational performance

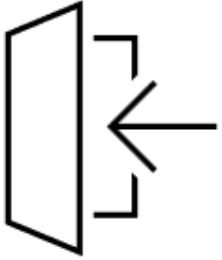
System

- Facilitate collaboration across street outreach programs
- Generate ideas to improve service delivery
- Bolster funding requests
- Spur policy changes to better serve people experiencing homelessness in the CoC

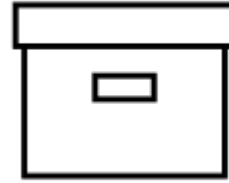
How can we work towards data we can have confidence in?

- Establish clear data standards for street outreach programs
- Employ efficient processes & technology
- Define key performance indicators
- Regularly use the data & put it into action

Establish clear data standards for street outreach



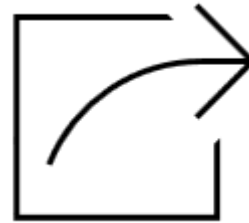
Data entry



Data storage



Data quality



Data sharing



Grievance policy

Example policies to set standards around

- Who enters data into HMIS?
- When are new participants entered?
- When are participants exited?
- Do we collect any information beyond the HUD-required Universal Data Elements?

Employ efficient processes & technology

Paper forms

Respect participants

- Practice informed consent!
- Limit access to files
- Shred/securely file forms & notes
- Do not take participant files home

Align with HMIS

- Use standard forms that align with HMIS data elements to make data entry faster & easier

Set standards

- Write it down - don't rely on memory

Technology

- Practice informed consent!
- Explain why technology is used, where info goes & who sees it
- Encourage dialogue about it

- Choose technology that feeds directly into HMIS or has upload functionality

- Establish protocols for secure use of tech
- Have a backup plan if tech fails!

Define key performance indicators

OUTPUTS

- Services
- Engagements
- Referrals
- Connections

OUTCOMES

- Exits to permanent housing
- Length of time homeless

and set benchmarks!

Regularly analyze data & put it into action

- Inform staff performance evaluations
- Brainstorm internally to improve **programs**
- Identify racial disparities in the data
- Identify **system** gaps in services
- Find new ways to incorporate data - like *qualitative data*
- Engage in continuous cycle of performance improvement



Encampment Data

Considerations for data collection and
use from encampment settings



Street Outreach in Encampments

Encampments are described as “informal communities formed by people experiencing homelessness who have nowhere else to go”.

Communities often develop a local definition of encampment, which may be characterized by the number of people residing within a site, the number of structures on the site, the length of time the site has existed or a combination of these and other factors.

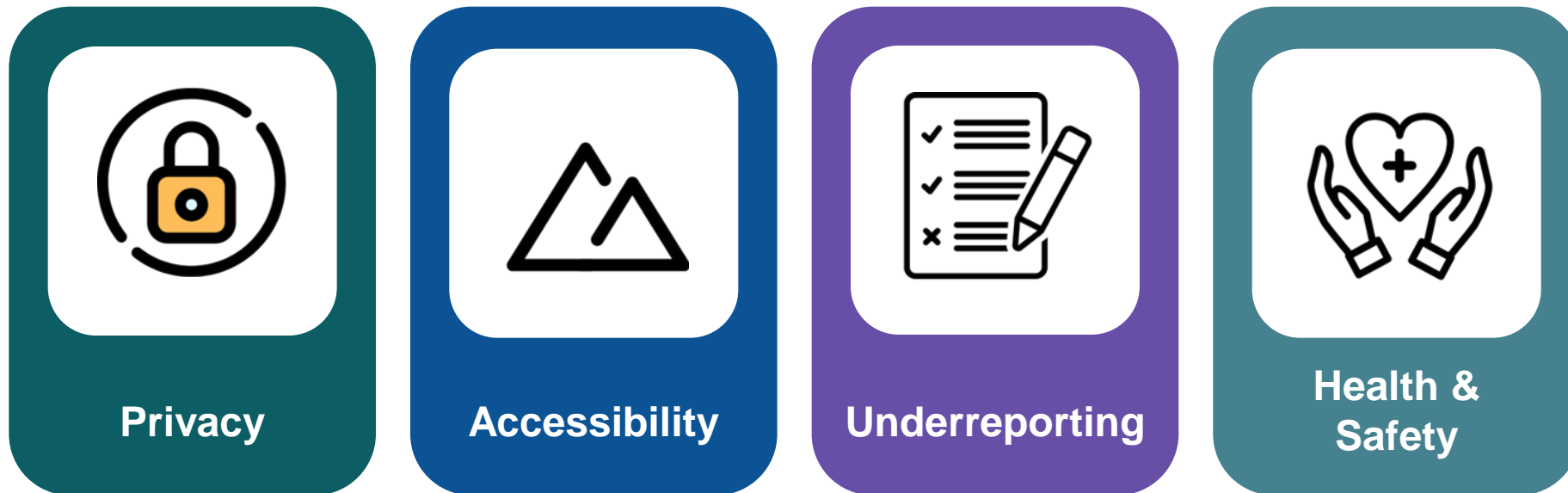


Source: [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) (USICH)

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Street Outreach in Encampments

Street outreach in encampment settings may require adoption of unique or modified data collection practices in response to the conditions of the encampment environment. Special considerations should be made for issues related to:



How is Encampment Data Used?

As with street outreach data, encampment data is useful at the individual, program, and system level. Encampment data uses include:

- coordination of service delivery and linkage to resources
- strategic resource allocation
- targeted encampment response strategies
- encampment site prioritization
- coordination among outreach teams
- policy design
- tracking outcomes and trends
- assessing impact of interventions



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Encampment Data Collection: Promising Practices



Establish a **shared definition** of encampment.

Create a **reporting channel** through which the community can inform the homeless response system of an existing encampment site.

- Ex: [City of Tucson Homeless Encampment Protocol & Reporting Tool](#)
- Ex: [LAHSA Homeless Outreach Portal](#)



Develop an **encampment site assessment process** to better understand their geography, number of residents and/or structures, and the prevalence of risk factors impacting residents. This could include data collected through **observation** and **engagement with residents**.

Encampment Data Collection: Promising Practices



Coordinate outreach teams to help ensure outreach coverage for residents at all known encampments sites.



Leverage HMIS to record which encampment site an individual resides in. Build out reports that can be sorted by encampment site to track outcomes and assess progress at each site.



Collaborate with outreach teams, victim service providers and housing providers to **develop data collection workflows** specifically for entering encampment data in HMIS.

Encampment Data Collection: Promising Practices



Look for **trends** that indicate whether encampment sites are growing or more encampments are popping up. In either case, consider developing and implementing a **community-wide encampment response strategy**.

- [Unsheltered Data Collection Strategies: Case Studies](#)
- [Dallas Street to Home Initiative](#)



When designing an encampment response strategy, start with a **landscape assessment** using existing data sources beyond HMIS as well.

- Public reports, law enforcement responses, local expertise
- Conversations with folks experiencing homelessness, direct service provider staff, EMS responses, public health officials

Encampment Data Use: Promising Practices



Where multiple encampments sites exist and outreach resources are limited, develop a **site prioritization protocol** to determine which site to prioritize and use data to support site selection.

- [Encampment Prioritization Tool](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)



Use encampment data to support **policy decisions** and **resources allocation**, and to **advocate for additional funding** to support encampment response efforts. Use both *qualitative* and *quantitative* data!

Encampment Data Use: Promising Practices



Evaluate the impact of interventions and **refine approaches** in response to what the data tells us. Use both *qualitative* and *quantitative* data!



Public-facing dashboards are tools that can inform the community of the progress being made to house people in encampments and make data easy to understand for a large audience.

Encampment Response Resources

The following resources may be useful as your community considers developing or refining a community-wide approach to encampment response.

- [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) (USICH)
- [Encampment Resolution Guide](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)
- [Encampment Prioritization Tool](#) (UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative)
- [Exploring Homelessness Among People Living in Encampments and Associated Cost: City Approaches to Encampments and What They Cost](#)

Community Highlight

Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County

Lead Agency of the TX-700 CoC



Toni Benson-Atkinson

**Director of Program
Operations**

CFTH Houston



Lead agency for the TX-700 Continuum of Care (CoC)

- AKA- The Way Home
- Consists of Harris, Montgomery, and Fort Bend County

Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) lead

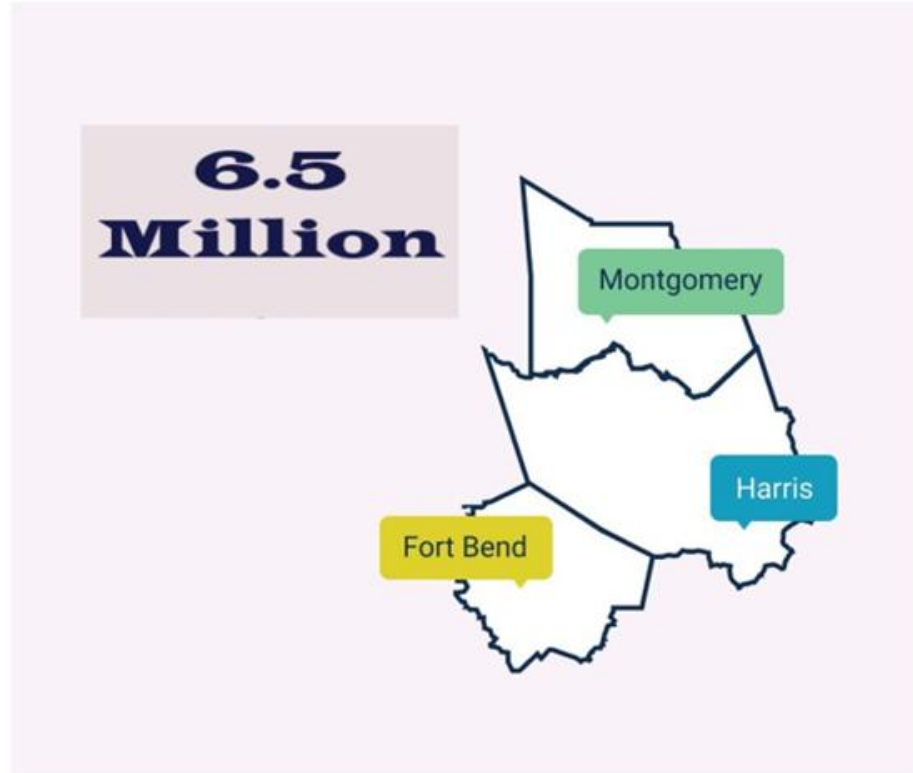
Coordinated Access Lead

The Way Home is:

- The collaborative model to prevent and end homelessness in Harris, Fort Bend, & Montgomery Counties
- Comprised of 100+ stakeholder partners from all sectors of the community
 - Nonprofits
 - Government
 - Philanthropy
 - Faith-Based Organizations



Everything is bigger in Texas

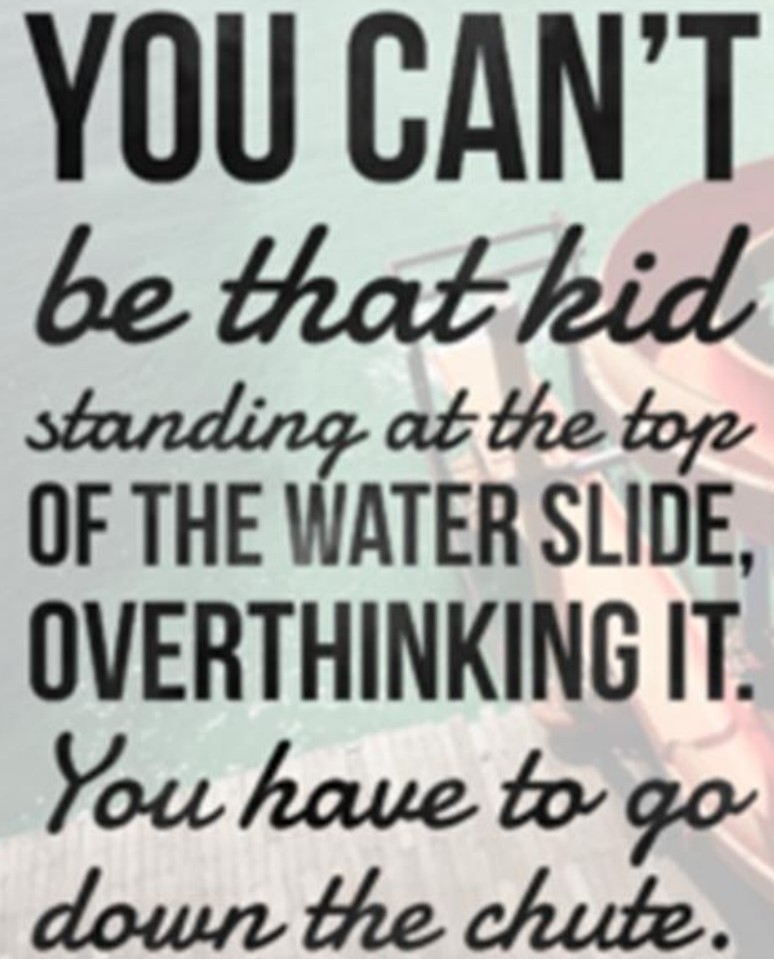


The Way Home CoC

- Harris, Fort Bend and Montgomery Counties consists of 3,739 Sq Miles- more than 2X the size of the state of Rhode Island
- Harris County alone is large enough to fit the cities of Austin, Boston, Chicago, Dallas, New York City and Seattle with room to spare.
- The City of Houston itself is roughly the same size as the entire island of Oahu.

New Approaches to Data Collection

- In-Reach
- Show The Way
- Neighborhood Analyses
- Mini PIT's-
 - Downtown
 - Youth



YOU CAN'T
be that kid
standing at the top
OF THE WATER SLIDE,
OVERTHINKING IT.
You have to go
down the chute.



In-reach



Engaging unsheltered individuals at community organizations that provide homeless services but do not enter data into our homeless management system



Another method of meeting the clients where they are and collecting data we may otherwise miss



Why In-Reach?

Establishes positive relationships with organizations and service providers that do not utilize our homeless management system and perhaps leads them to utilizing our system

Creates a relaxed atmosphere for crucial and confidential conversations with individuals.

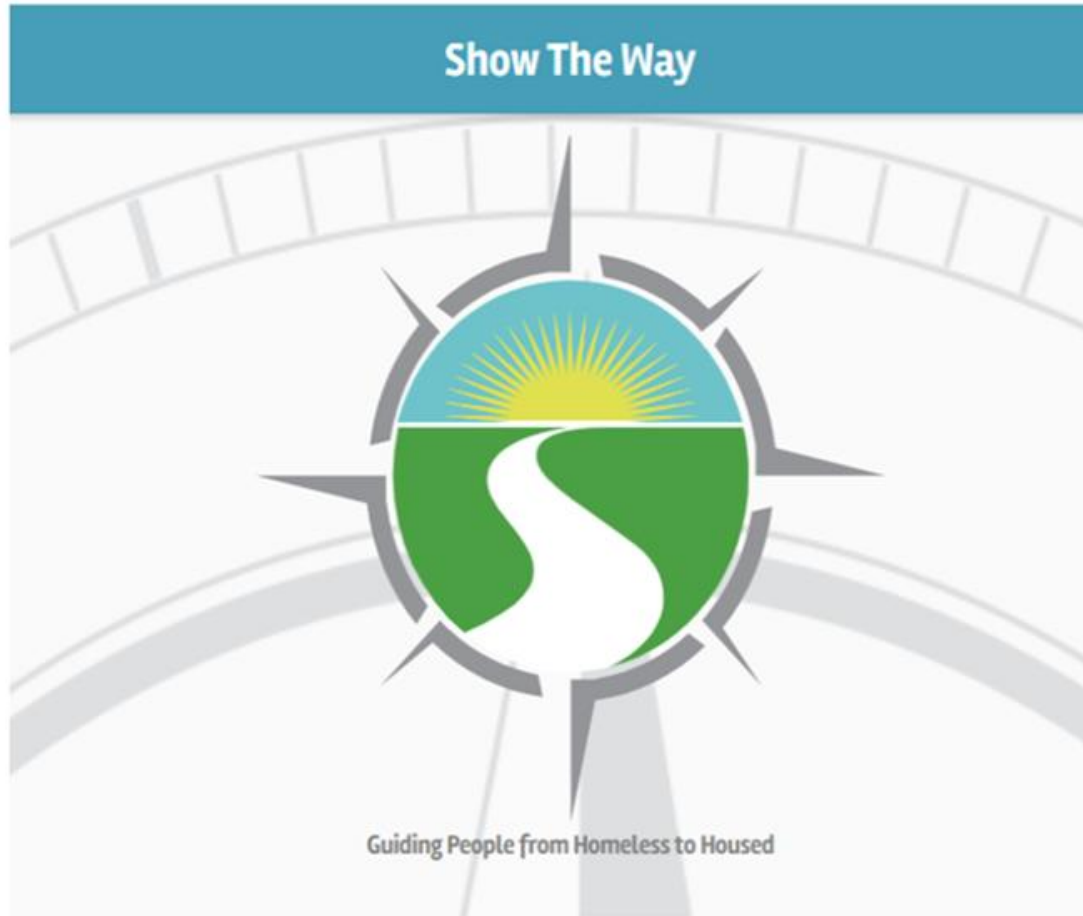
Maintains consistent ongoing communication with clients

Maximizes resources and time for staff to locate clients, collect pre-navigation documents, and enhances communication with clients and partners.

Assist outreach teams in locating and accurately verifying persons are experiencing street homelessness.



Embrace Technology



- Show the Way is an online/mobile platform designed to enhance communication and collaboration amongst our homeless response system.
- Focused on better servicing our unsheltered population in accessing housing and other pertinent resources throughout our targeted region.

ADVANTAGES OF SHOW THE WAY



Improve
Communication



Enhance
Coordination



Locate
Encampments
& Clients



Track Trends



Disaster Relief
Efforts



Minimize
Redundant
Data Entry



Streamline
Housing Efforts



Address
Response
Requests



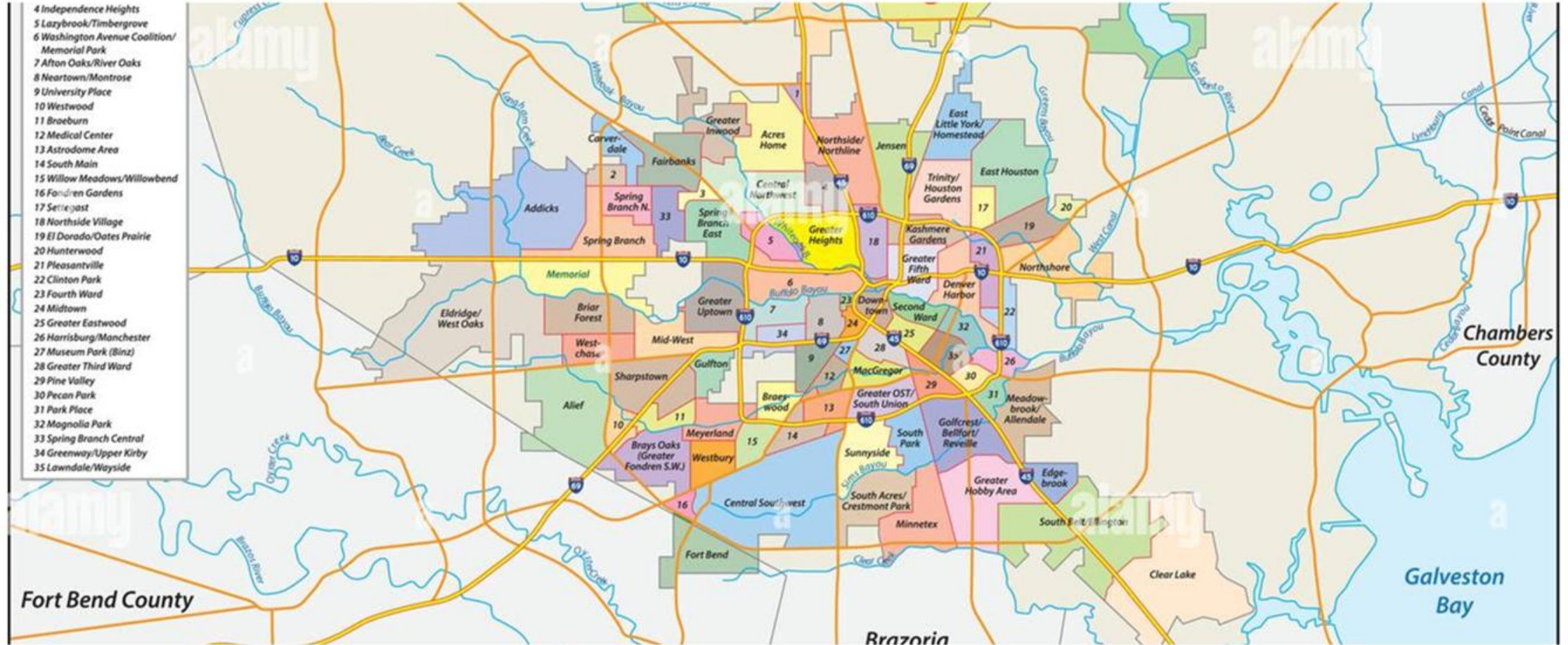
Data, Data, Data

To collect more specific data on specific populations and regions in 2024 we completed “mini” PIT counts.

- Youth PIT- was conducted to specifically target those living unsheltered or precariously housed between the ages of 18-24
 - Worked with youth providers and our Youth Advisory Board to identify and target geographical areas in our CoC where youth is more densely populated
- Downtown Survey- was conducted within Houston’s downtown and midtown regions
 - Questions were tailored to find out why these locations were more densely populated with individuals experiencing homelessness and what resources they accessed or averted.
 - Conducted at different times of the day to compare results



Super Neighborhoods



Neighborhood/District Analyses



Outreach conducted on different days and times



Taking note of other factors in the area for people to be out on the street- i.e., drugs, transportation hub, pan-handling, etc



Noting resources available in the area



Came together in a report provided to the governing board of the neighborhood/district to help them identify what interventions may work best in their specific area



Key Take Aways

The only way to improve is to try new things

- Different Methods Yield Different Results

“Mini PITs”/Neighborhood Analyses

- Homeless vs. other factors- Are those we see on the streets truly experiencing homelessness or are there other factors at play
- Different populations were seen at different times- Why?
- A housing intervention may not be the solution

Embrace Technology

- Captures and Provides data from different sources
- Reduces duplication of services/efforts
- Assist in the coordination of services



Q&A



Key Takeaways

- **Accurate data drives effective solutions.** Improving data quality enhances outreach, housing interventions, and policy decisions.
- **Collaboration strengthens data collection.** Partnering with outreach teams, service providers, and those with lived experience improves accuracy and coverage.
- **Use data to drive action.** Leverage findings to inform system improvements, secure funding, and implement targeted strategies.
- **Continuous improvement is key.** Establish feedback loops, refine data practices, and adapt based on trends and outcomes.

 *Join the conversation!* Stay engaged with national and local partners to advance data-driven solutions. **Use the Whova App to make connections HERE at NAEH!**

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Now What?: Actionable Steps for Better Data



Enhance Data Collection

- *Provide Outreach workers with the training and resource to improve data collection*
- *Expand year-round data collection through HMIS*
- *Capture the full spectrum of the unsheltered experience*

Leverage Data to Design Housing Interventions

- *Implement evidence-based models that reduce unsheltered homelessness*
- *Engage people with lived experience in the design and testing of interventions*

Don't Go It Alone

- *Make Regional and National connections with partners to design interventions and data strategies*
- *Seek funding, input, and resources from non-HUD partners such as researchers, academics, and foundations*

Strengthen Collaboration

- *Trust but verify; use data from multiple sources*
- *Partner with outreach workers, service providers, and people with lived experience to gather comprehensive data that reflects on-the-ground realities.*

Commit to Equity

- *Ensure data collection methods are inclusive, respectful, and trauma-informed to capture the experiences of marginalized groups accurately.*



References

1. [State of Homelessness](#)
2. [HUD Exchange: Unsheltered Homelessness](#)
3. [HUD Exchange: Housing Interventions](#)
4. [AHAR 2023 Reports](#)
5. [HUD Exchange: Homelessness and Health Data Sharing Toolkit](#)
6. [19 Strategies for Communities to Address Encampments Humanely and Effectively](#) (USICH)

Please give us feedback in Whova!

- **Poll:** “How else do you use data on unsheltered homelessness beyond what was discussed in this session?”
- **Feedback survey**

Thank You!



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