

CREATING A TIPPING POINT FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN THE UNITED STATES

IMPACT AND LEARNING REPORT: YEAR ONE OF 100&CHANGE

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**THE FUTURE
WE CAN BUILD,
TOGETHER**



Imagine the future with us.

It's 2026. Cities and counties of all kinds — big and small, urban and rural, red and blue — have made homelessness rare and brief. Homelessness is no longer seen as intractable, and ending it is no longer seen as exceptional. It's expected.

The experience of homelessness has changed. Most people receive the support they need to avoid experiencing homelessness in the first place. The few people who do lose their housing aren't lost in a convoluted system. Instead, their names and needs are immediately known by the systems responsible for helping them exit homelessness, and those needs are addressed in a timely and dignified way. The systems and services that are meant to help people into housing deliver equally excellent outcomes for everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Homelessness is no longer accepted as a heartbreaking but inevitable reality. Instead, the United States has forged a better, different reality — delivering on the promise of a healthier and more equitable society.

How did this happen?

Cities and counties work differently.

Communities define success not by how they're managing homelessness — but by whether they are driving it toward zero. And they have the structure, data, and partnerships to ensure homelessness is rare and brief. Homelessness is not the job of a single organization or sector; instead, it's the responsibility of the entire community. Like an emergency management command center, everyone who holds a key piece of the solution is at the table together to solve it. Decisions are made by and with people who have experienced homelessness themselves.

Leaders take real accountability for ending homelessness.

Instead of relying on annual street counts, local government leaders publish how many people are experiencing homelessness every single month. This enforces accountability. Community leaders and constituents understand the urgency of the goal of getting to zero homelessness, know where their efforts stand, and they mobilize to support it.

Areas that have historically slowed progress now accelerate change.

Public policies, local governance structures, funding, and technology all work in service of ending homelessness. Communities use all available tools to close housing supply gaps quickly. >>

This future is not an impossible dream.

It is exactly what the MacArthur Foundation had in mind in 2021, when it awarded Community Solutions \$100 million over five years to support Built for Zero, a movement of communities working to measurably end homelessness. The goal: accelerate an end to homelessness for at least 75 populations in 50 U.S. communities by 2026.

And in some places, you can already see this future unfolding. In 2022, several communities — including, notably, a number of large cities — drove reductions in homelessness. After having measurably ended homelessness for veterans and people experiencing chronic homelessness, communities are now working toward becoming the first cities and counties in the country to make homelessness rare and brief for everyone. Community teams are better coordinated, collaborative, and confident that they are maintaining an account of all of their unhoused neighbors. Meanwhile, other systems and sectors, like health care, are exploring and embracing the role they can play in solving homelessness.

Homelessness is solvable.

These achievements are profoundly inspiring. They are also only the beginning. Communities in Built for Zero are primed to continue proving it is possible to solve homelessness, everywhere.

How urgently we act, and how quickly we learn, will determine how far we can go. In that spirit, this annual report sets out the key insights and opportunities that have emerged in the past year of the MacArthur Foundation's five-year challenge.

The future described is not an impossible dream. It is a moral imperative, a different set of choices, and a reality within our collective reach. Thank you for helping us build it.



OUR PATH TOWARD A TIPPING POINT

Community Solutions aims to create a tipping point in the United States by July 31, 2026, in which the conditions are primed for any community to create a lasting end to homelessness.

In this future, it is the norm, not the exception, that homelessness is rare, brief, and permanently resolved whenever and wherever it is experienced. Our theory of change aims to establish the conditions and generate the learning and proof needed to make this an achievable reality in every U.S. community.

PROOF OF SOLVABILITY:

50 communities have solved homelessness across 75 populations

The myth that homelessness is intractable is pervasive, and it is a powerful, self-fulfilling prophecy. By working with a broad cross-section of communities, we aim to demonstrate that homelessness is solvable in any context.

Built for Zero, our vehicle for this effort, is a national movement of 105 cities, counties, and regions working to reach functional zero homelessness. We aim to help a critical mass — 50 of these communities — achieve functional zero, across 75 populations, by July 31, 2026. With this robust and mounting evidence, we will demonstrate that homelessness can be solved for all sub-populations across communities of varying geographies, sizes, and political leanings.

Homelessness results when people have crashed through layers upon layers of the social safety net. It is a result of systems and policies failing our communities and perpetuating the suffering and marginalization of some of our most vulnerable neighbors. We can end this cycle.

Systems are designed by people — and they can be redesigned. Through Built for Zero, we support communities in shifting their mindsets and systems from managing the crisis of homelessness to eliminating it. Through this work, we have identified several essential features of a system designed to reduce and end homelessness. >

Features of a system designed to reduce and end homelessness

- A shared aim and belief that homelessness is solvable
- A collaborative, community-wide team that is accountable for reducing and ending homelessness
- High-quality data systems that support a culture of continuous improvement
- An aligned and effective coordinated system whereby all providers 1) allocate housing and services through a single process and according to shared protocol (also known as a coordinated entry system) and 2) participate in recurring, problem-solving efforts to collectively remove barriers to housing (also known as case conferencing)
- Establishment of a racially equitable homeless response system
- Policy mechanisms to clear structural and administrative barriers to ending homelessness
- Strategic, data-driven investments to reduce homelessness long-term and flexible financial resources to clear immediate barriers to housing

Communities in Built for Zero apply these principles toward building new systems designed to accelerate exits from homelessness (outflow) and prevent people from experiencing homelessness in the first place (inflow). A successful system is measured by its ability to achieve and sustain functional zero, a measurable state in which instances of homelessness are rare, brief, and non-recurring, and outcomes are equitable.

Built for Zero communities focus on achieving functional zero for target populations — like veterans or people experiencing chronic homelessness — as steps on the way to achieving functional zero for all. A [study by the Urban Institute](#) found that reaching functional zero for an initial group establishes the system and behaviors needed for communities to make progress for the subsequent populations.

Sustaining and scaling a reality where homelessness is rare and brief takes more than a single dedicated sector or organization. Community Solutions acts as an intermediary that supports communities and the broader conditions needed to help propel a field up and over a tipping point, a role that has been defined as a “field catalyst.” This includes bringing together partners to drive changes at the local, regional, state, and federal levels and partnering across sectors and countries to support the broader movement to end homelessness.

Partners in the movement to end homelessness

INTERNATIONAL

- Backbone organizations for national movements to end homelessness

NATIONAL

- Core and strategic partners
- Health system and public health partners
- Field catalysts
- Federal partners (Executive and Legislative branches)
- Housing and homelessness organizations
- National coalitions
- Philanthropic foundations
- Data and technology companies

REGIONAL / STATE

- State housing agencies
- Health care systems
- State and regional Human Service and Public Health agencies
- Entities coordinating regional homelessness response
- State legislatures
- Governor's offices
- State-level coalitions

LOCAL

- Continuums of Care
- City/county agencies
- VA Medical Centers
- Nonprofit service providers
- Housing providers
- Faith-based organizations
- Housing authorities
- Health systems
- Municipal governments/leaders

ENABLING CONDITIONS:**Priming conditions for any community to be able to solve homelessness**

Homelessness has become widespread, recurring, and difficult for individuals to exit because of the ways systems, incentives, and policies are designed. In that context, much of the progress that communities are achieving is often in spite of the conditions upholding the status quo.

Our aim is for any community committed to achieving functional zero to be bolstered by — rather than set back by — these conditions. As we learn alongside communities, we have focused our attention on eliminating key barriers that stand in the way of solving homelessness. With that knowledge, Community Solutions is harnessing learning and evaluation, policy advocacy, and communications to transform conditions surrounding data, governance, and accountability.

We are pursuing systems-level change on the federal, state, and municipal levels to create the conditions for any community in the United States to create a lasting end to homelessness. Community Solutions is working to align funding, the way progress is measured, and operational structures so communities are set up to solve homelessness. We are also working with select cities, regions, and states to formalize their role in the homeless service system and explicitly orient their work around reduction goals. Our plan is to generate and amplify a broader set of knowledge, guidance, and strategies that can help the federal government, states, and localities end homelessness.



Achieving and sustaining a reality where homelessness is rare and brief requires a clear understanding of the solutions as well as accountability for implementing them.

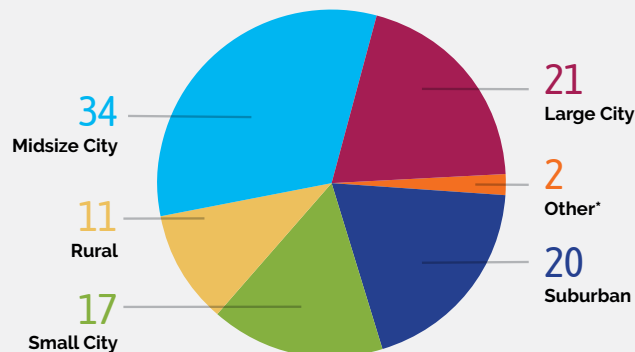
The myth that homelessness is an intractable problem has prolonged human suffering and perpetuated the status quo for far too long. We need a new story that raises our collective expectations of what can and must be done. The reality is that homelessness is a solvable, systems problem, and communities are proving it. That truth must give rise to a new set of expectations and behaviors that produces solutions, everywhere. Community Solutions is driving campaigns to establish a new level of public and media accountability for a measurable and equitable end to homelessness. We measure success by tracking the national discourse around homelessness and how we are supporting shifts in the conversation and behavior. As part of that work, we are changing local and national discourse to center proof of what is possible, and the role we must all play.

1 | HELPING COMMUNITIES END HOMELESSNESS

The journey to 75 proof points

In the United States, Built for Zero is now a movement of 105 communities committed to measurably and equitably ending homelessness. More than 70 million people—about a fifth of the U.S. population—live in these communities. Together, their leaders are building a new reality where homelessness is rare and brief, if it ever occurs.

What kind of communities are in Built for Zero?



**The two communities in this category are West Virginia Balance of State and Downtown Cincinnati*



OUR AIM

Our goal is to marshal enough proof to create a tipping point across the country. By 2026, at least 50 U.S. communities will have reached functional zero homelessness for 75 populations, including veterans, youth, families, single adults, and people experiencing chronic — or long-lasting or recurring — homelessness. Five of these communities will have proven it is possible to make homelessness rare and brief for everyone.

Our Approach

We recognize that the myth that homelessness is intractable is a powerful self-fulfilling prophecy. In partnership with a movement of communities, we are proving that homelessness is solvable.

Ensuring homelessness is rare and brief requires systems that can help people exit homelessness quickly and positively (outflow) and prevent people from becoming unhoused in the first place (inflow). As part of this work, we help communities implement the essential features of a resilient, effective, and equitable homeless response system that can dynamically respond to homelessness.

We have found that there are seven features of local housing/homelessness response systems that can effectively reduce and end homelessness: »

1. A shared aim and belief that homelessness is solvable
2. A collaborative, community-wide team that is accountable for reducing and ending homelessness
3. High-quality data that support a culture of continuous improvement
4. An aligned system wherein all providers:
 - Allocate housing and services through a single process and according to shared protocols (also known as a coordinated entry system) and
 - Participate in recurring, collective problem-solving efforts to remove barriers to housing (also known as case conferencing)
5. Establishment of a framework to achieve a racially equitable homeless response system
6. Policy mechanisms to clear structural and administrative barriers to ending homelessness
7. Strategic, data-driven investments to reduce homelessness long-term and flexible financial resources to clear immediate barriers to housing

Communities in Built for Zero focus on reaching functional zero for target populations as steps on the way to achieving functional zero for all populations. A [study by the Urban Institute](#) found that reaching functional zero for one population sets up the community to make progress for subsequent populations.

Landscape

In 2022, organizations and agencies working to reduce and end homelessness struggled to absorb an influx of federal resources as a confluence of factors impacted their overall operations and capacity. In every city and county across the country, the workforce for health and social services has been depleted, with attrition outpacing hiring. Based on a national survey conducted by the National Council of Nonprofits in 2021, 26% of nonprofits reported vacancy rates between 20-29%, with human-service jobs constituting most openings. This trend continued throughout 2022 and had a tremendous impact on homeless services. Senior leaders in Built for Zero communities expressed that insufficient staffing capacity was among their most pressing and ongoing challenges.

As these organizations struggled with diminished capacity, communities continued to absorb a significantly increased influx of Covid-related federal funding. Despite the opportunity presented by the resources, many communities were not set up with the staffing, support, and processes to effectively allocate and expend the resources to drive lasting and measurable change. This phenomenon highlighted the critical importance of not only having sufficient resources to end homelessness, but having the organized, coordinated, and sufficiently supported systems to deploy them to achieve measurable and equitable reductions in homelessness.

In 2022, Community Solutions made investments in Built for Zero communities to support new system-level positions and broadened its strategy for improving communities' ability to attract, hire, and retain staff dedicated to improving systems. More on those efforts is detailed in Solving Key Data and Collaboration Challenges.

In the 2022 Annual Homeless Report, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated that throughout this period, rates of homelessness — specifically unsheltered homelessness — continued to rise, particularly in large cities on the West Coast. »

These circumstances could easily paint a picture that feels overwhelming and dire. But despite the challenges that local leaders face, a sample survey of Built for Zero communities found that 90% were “hopeful” to achieve functional zero. In findings from our evaluation partners — ORS and Equal Measure — and our own analysis, we see not only reason for hope; we see clear progress toward ending homelessness.

Milestones

- **Communities that have reached functional zero:** 14
- **Number of proof points, and population breakdown:** 17
 - 12 for veteran homelessness
 - 5 for chronic homelessness
- **Communities that have achieved quality data:** 64
- **State partners:** 2 (Colorado, Maine)
- **Number of people housed by communities:**
 - 13,917 housed in 2022
 - 155,997 people total housed since 2015

Progress

Since 2015, 14 communities in Built for Zero have achieved functional zero for one or more populations, and numerous communities are on the path to achieving functional zero in the next year.

As of 2022, Community Solutions is a little more than one-quarter of the way (28%) toward its aim of helping at least 50 communities that have achieved functional zero or at least one population. With some communities achieving functional zero for multiple populations, this group has achieved functional zero for 17 populations.

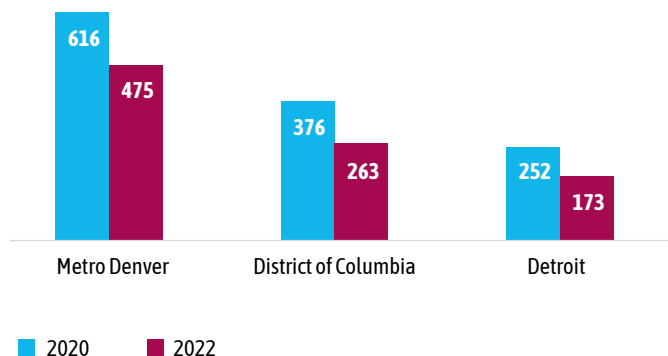
In 2022, 20 communities achieved a downward **shift**, which means that a community has made a measurable, meaningful reduction in homelessness and a major improvement in their system. A shift occurs when six data points in a row fall above or below the median — in this case, the number of people experiencing homelessness over the course of six months. This downward shift would with statistical confidence indicate that the baseline state of the system (or the definition of normal) has changed.

Currently, there are 13 Built for Zero communities in the **last mile** of functional zero, indicating that they are on the path to achieving functional zero within the next 12 months. Communities in the last mile have consistently reduced homelessness and have a community-wide commitment and strategy to reach functional zero.

To date, small-to mid sized cities and rural and suburban communities have made the most progress in achieving functional zero. The 14 communities that have reached functional zero for at least one subpopulation are rural communities, small, and mid-sized cities, or suburban communities. >>

Three large cities made significant reductions in their veteran homeless populations (-27% on average from 2020-2022) and have substantially strengthened their homeless response systems to improve coordination and care across multiple programs and systems. These reductions are significantly higher than the national reduction in veteran homelessness over the same timespan (11%). Community Solution is working with 21 large cities, which include 21 of the 50 largest cities in the United States.

of Homeless Veterans, 2020 - 2022



Source: Community Solutions 2020 and 2022 data

No community — in Built for Zero or in the country — has yet solved homelessness for all populations, but a select group of communities are making progress toward this goal.

As communities in Built for Zero worked toward functional zero for veteran and chronic homelessness, they raised the fact that there was no definition for solving homelessness for all populations — within Built for Zero or outside of it. >>

Functional Zero for All Populations

Rare

The community has ensured that homelessness among youth, families, single adults, veterans, and people experiencing chronic homelessness are all sustained below their functional zero threshold, which means that the number of people actively experiencing homelessness is fewer than the six-month average of positive exits from homelessness.

Brief

The average length of time from the identification of someone experiencing homelessness to moving them into housing is 45 days or less.

Non-recurring

Of all exits to permanent housing, no more than 5% of positive exits result in a return to the homeless system within two years of exit from the homeless system.

Equitable

The community is making measurable progress on closing all racial and ethnic disproportionality in housing placements, returns to homelessness, and the average length of time experiencing homelessness, from identification to housing placement. As part of this work, they are also ensuring 1) people of color at all levels of the homeless response system have decision-making power to influence the design of the system and 2) that Black, Indigenous, and other people of color receiving services from the homeless response system have experiences that preserve their dignity and have their needs met in a timely manner.

This definition reflects thinking informed by partners, community leaders, and people with lived expertise, and will continue to evolve as we learn together.

"We were getting a little frustrated as we worked toward zero for all," said Jennifer Jaeger, Community Services Director at the City of Rockford, the first community in the country to achieve functional zero for both veteran and chronic populations. "There was no way to measure our progress. We were finding our way in the dark."

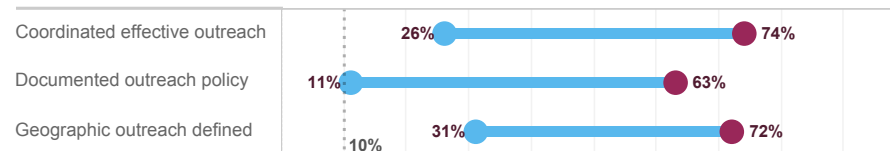
In December 2020, Community Solutions began working with 14 Built for Zero communities and a group of individuals with lived experience of homelessness to understand what it would take to prove that homelessness had been solved for all populations. In October 2021, Community Solutions presented a definition that captured our thinking to date with the communities in Built for Zero as part of our Learning Session.

Community Solutions is tracking the progress of the cohort of communities that are farthest along in their journey to functional zero for all populations. It is probable that the nation will see the first community reach functional zero for all populations in the next year. >>

"You start digging in and most of what you find is problems," said John Meier, a leader in Abilene, Texas, a community that has reached functional zero for both veteran and chronic populations. "You get disappointed and wonder, 'How have we been operating like this?' But without the challenge of ending homelessness for all populations, a lot of these problems would stay in place. It's an opportunity to dig in and make sure we're doing continuous improvement on the overall system."

Communities are creating systems of stronger coordination and collaboration. Our external evaluator assessed data from 65 Built for Zero communities and found expanded ownership and collaboration across these communities, enabling them to better understand and effectively address homelessness. One example is the significant progress throughout the Built for Zero network in improving outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a manner that helps to ensure that all unhoused people across a geography are known by the system responsible for connecting them to housing.

Outreach



Communities in Built for Zero complete a scorecard assessment to assess progress toward achieving or maintaining quality by-name data. Outreach is one of four key components of quality data that the scorecard assesses. The point on the left refers to the percentage of communities reporting that they had met the criteria at initial submission, and the point on the right refers to the percentage of communities reporting they had met the criteria as of fall 2022. For any community to answer "yes" to a scorecard item, Community Solutions will have conducted a review of the evidence that indicates that the behavior, policy, or process has changed.

For example, [Springfield, Eugene, and Lane County](#) encompass 4,722 square miles of urban and forest environments in Oregon, which is also a region with one of the nation's highest rates of chronic homelessness and unsheltered homelessness per capita. With such a vast catchment area, this community's homeless services had largely been concentrated around the cities of Eugene and Springfield. This meant that people experiencing homelessness outside of the urban areas were often isolated and underserved, or had to relocate to one of the cities to access help. In 2022 the community team invested in expanded outreach, which enabled them to achieve quality by-name data for veterans and people experiencing chronic homelessness. As a result, the community is able to ensure that the names and needs of people within those populations — regardless of where they are physically located — are known and connected to the support they need. >>

Communities are making progress toward functional zero through other backbone intermediary organizations supported by Community Solutions. The movement to end homelessness is greater than any single organization. Community Solutions partners with other field catalysts operating domestically and internationally to support communities beyond our immediate reach to achieve functional zero homelessness. We provide tools, design, strategy, and coaching support to these backbone organizations and regularly exchange learnings to strengthen the global movement to make homelessness rare and brief.

Internationally, Community Solutions provides design and strategy support to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, which are supporting national campaigns modeled on Built for Zero to help communities reduce and end homelessness. Two communities in Canada — London, Ontario, and Medicine Hat, Alberta — have achieved functional zero for a population, and two more are in their “final kilometer” of achieving the milestone. Community Solutions also provides similar advisory and initiative design support to early-stage efforts in the United Kingdom, France, and Denmark.

Challenges and Learnings

Establishing community-wide accountability for reducing and ending homelessness is an essential component of getting to functional zero. In every community, there is a constellation of organizations and agencies working to serve the homeless population. Regardless of the quality of their individual programs, organizations working in silos cannot see the entire picture of homelessness in their community or alone drive population-level reductions in homelessness across an entire geography. Organizations must learn to function as a coordinated system to ensure that the entire unhoused population is accounted for and that their collective efforts are equitably driving that number toward zero.

Communities reported that establishing this community-wide accountability requires overcoming structural, operational, and even interpersonal barriers. Operationally, communities noted the challenge of ensuring that changes or turnover among leaders or champions do not interrupt the work and the commitment to collective accountability for reducing and ending homelessness.

Structurally, organizations and programs are funded to provide or fulfill certain activities, such as outreach or sheltering services, rather than to drive overall reductions in homelessness. This reinforces the challenge of knitting together siloed programs into an effective, collaborative, community-wide system focused on reaching functional zero. Transforming disparate programs into a cohesive system can also require addressing partner misalignment in priorities and ideological differences.

Communities reported that the process of establishing a shared goal with shared measurable objectives has been essential to creating community-wide accountability and necessary collaboration at the program level. To reinforce the shared aim and commitment to collective accountability, some communities regularly report their population-level data and progress to the broader community.

Communities are also expanding and diversifying partnerships beyond what has historically been seen as their homeless response system. The team may now include health care providers; people with lived experience; schools and youth-serving organizations; public health agencies; landlords; departments of corrections; municipal departments such as police, fire and rescue, and code enforcement; and state-level policymakers.

“If I don’t know someone that has come to the health care clinic, someone in the fire department might know, or someone on the street might know,” said Shelton Kay, Vice President Community Services of Crusader Community Health, a local partner in Rockford, Illinois. “And we really work collaboratively and partner to make sure that somebody knows these folks.” >>

Not all communities that have reached functional zero are sustaining those gains over time. Ending homelessness is not a finish line. It is a standard that must be sustained. At Community Solutions, we celebrate the moment a community achieves functional zero — the milestone where communities have proven that they have measurably and equitably ended homelessness for a population. Getting to that moment is often the result of years of dedication from countless people. Acknowledging this momentous achievement is important for honoring that work and provides proof of what is possible. But leaders themselves will tell you that ending homelessness is not about a single moment of achievement. The work of sustaining an end to homelessness is a continuous practice.

"Sustaining functional zero is about our credibility of ending homelessness in the community and for the populations we serve," said Amanda Harris, Chief of Services to End and Prevent Homelessness for the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services in Maryland. Her community reached functional zero for veterans in 2015. "It's not enough to have achieved it on one day, to check a box, and forget about it. It's important we're able to keep our foot on the pedal."

According to their monthly data, over half of communities that have achieved functional zero are sustaining that achievement. In order to tailor our support, we conduct a regular review of community data and work with communities to understand the risks that are challenging a city's ability to ensure homelessness is rare and brief. The factors that threaten a community's ability to sustain functional zero were highly unique to each city or county. In 2022, examples of challenges included diminished workforce capacity and staff turnover, which in turn affected the community's ability to address competing demands on the system. Many communities also expressed the challenge of trying to sustain functional zero for one or more populations while simultaneously working toward that milestone for subsequent populations. To better support those communities, we are gleaning insights from communities like Rockford, Illinois, and the Gulf Coast Region of Mississippi that have sustained functional zero for multiple populations over the course of several years. We are also working with our evaluation partners to incorporate insights from a qualitative review

of communities that have achieved functional zero in order to strengthen our definition of sustaining.

Our goal is to work with communities to ensure this is a sustained reality, and that by 2026, 90% of communities that have reached functional zero are sustaining those results and have the systems in place to sustain functional zero over time.



2 | SOLVING KEY DATA AND COLLABORATION CHALLENGES



OUR AIM

By 2026, key data, governance, and accountability challenges will have been solved, creating the conditions for any community to end homelessness. Across the country, communities will have comprehensive, real-time, person-specific data that enables them to accelerate housing placements, make targeted system improvements, and drive reductions in overall homelessness.

Progress

Communities have made significant progress in developing the data infrastructure they need to reduce and end homelessness. A critical step toward reaching functional zero for any community is establishing high-quality data systems that account for everyone experiencing homelessness by name and need, in real-time. Other fields, like public health, have situated quality, real-time data at the heart of their efforts to understand and bend the curve on crises, like epidemics. Since communities cannot solve a problem they cannot fully see, they must be able to account for all unhoused individuals living within their community. Communities must also understand how many people are experiencing homelessness on at least a monthly basis and how the pattern is moving and changing over time. Seeing the dynamics of inflow and outflow enables communities to understand where to intervene to reduce and end homelessness.

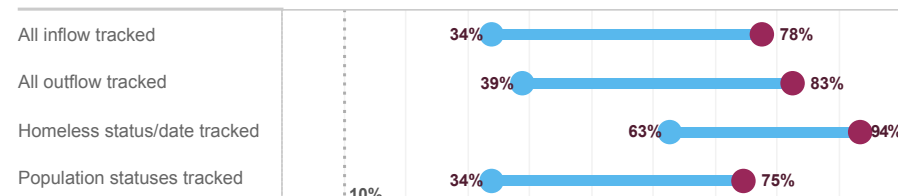
Sixty four communities have achieved the quality, by-name data milestone for one or more populations. Boulder County, Colorado, was one of the communities that achieved quality data for a population in 2022.

"To achieve quality data for veterans means that we know who's in our community," said Heidi Grove, who is the Homeless Solutions for Boulder County Systems Manager. "We identify our veterans person-by-person and strategize the most appropriate exit and resources for them to end homelessness."

Communities in Built for Zero must take a scorecard assessment to understand whether they have achieved quality data. Together the four aspects assessed by the scorecard — outreach, provider participation, policies/procedures, and data infrastructure — indicate the degree to which a community is collecting high-quality data and following practices that ensure efforts to reduce homelessness are coordinated, effective, and sustainable. External evaluators recently conducted an analysis of the progress of 65 Built for Zero communities over time using the scorecard data. In 2022, 62% of communities updated their scores, with 37% improving all four dimensions of quality data. Community Solutions also conducted a review of the evidence that indicates that the behavior, policy, or process has changed.

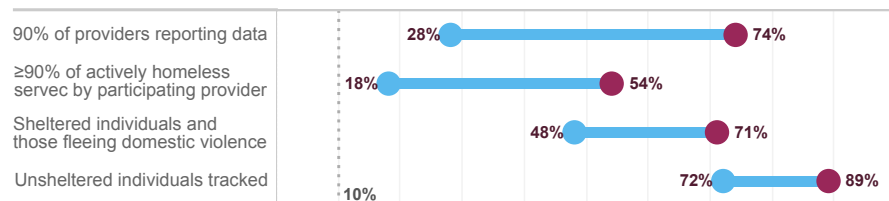
A high-quality data infrastructure allows communities to track the status and needs of individuals as well as population-level inflow and outflow dynamics from homelessness to track progress toward functional zero on at least a monthly basis. >>

Data Infrastructure



Communities are forging the partnerships needed to ensure their data reflects all those currently experiencing homelessness in the community, including those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Participation among all community providers is critical to ensuring a community's data provides a full accounting of individuals currently experiencing homelessness. As of 2022, 48 out of 65 Built for Zero communities (74%) included in a recent analysis have at least 90% of local providers contributing to the community's by-name data. This represents a 53 percentage point increase from when communities took their initial scorecard assessments, signaling that significantly more providers across communities are participating in a collective homelessness response system accountable for quality data collection, reporting, and results.

Provider Participation



Communities in Built for Zero complete a scorecard assessment to assess progress toward achieving or maintaining quality by-name data. Provider participation is one of four key components of quality data that the scorecard assesses. The point on the left refers to the percentage of communities reporting that they had met the criteria at initial submission, and the point on the right refers to the percentage of communities reporting they had met the criteria as of fall 2022. For any community to answer "yes" to a scorecard item, Community Solutions will have conducted a review of the evidence that indicates that the behavior, policy, or process has changed.

Communities are using their data to connect people with housing and needed support and accelerating their efforts to achieve functional zero. Several communities reported they also use by-name data to prioritize and customize services for individuals. They shared that they use the population-level data to identify system gaps and opportunities, measure progress, and hold partnerships accountable to their shared aim of reducing homelessness toward functional zero. Communities are also using aggregated data to advocate for solutions with policymakers, funders, and the general public.

Challenges and Learning

Organizations working to end homelessness overwhelmingly depend on technology systems that do not provide the functionality or the comprehensive data they need.

Communities rely on a tool called a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which is mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The tool effectively measures programmatic compliance for federally funded programs, but fails to provide the comprehensive, updated, person-level data needed to connect individuals with housing and equitably reduce homelessness. As a result, communities must engage in elaborate workarounds in order to understand how many people are experiencing homelessness on a monthly basis and the inflow-outflow dynamics, whether the number of people experiencing homelessness is increasing or decreasing month over month and what interventions and policies are leading to reductions in overall homelessness.

Furthermore, Continuums of Care and actors in adjacent sectors like health care have raised the challenges of facilitating collaboration, shared accountability, and supporting collective problem-solving to drive reductions in homelessness when systems do not enable data interoperability, or the ability to share appropriately protected data. »



In response, Community Solutions has brought together national and local partners and federal government staff to:

- Work with Continuums of Care and Homeless Management Information System software vendors to better align system architecture to enable communities to have comprehensive, person-centric data
- Ensure Homeless Management Information System software systems provide Continuums of Care with the ability to generate the reports needed to support day-to-day system operations without incurring additional fees
- Request additional investments to:
 - Support Continuums of Care in obtaining sufficient software licenses to allow for wider access to and use by local leaders
 - Increase human and technical capacity for collecting and using comprehensive, person-centric data
 - Create dynamic reports necessary for understanding who is experiencing homelessness, why these individuals are unhoused, and what supports are needed for them to move into stable housing

Communities need dedicated staffing capacity and expertise to collect and use comprehensive, person-centric data. In addition to the improvements needed in the data systems themselves, communities need the staff capacity and data and technology infrastructure required to support a system designed to reduce, prevent, and end homelessness. Community Solutions is scaling its staff capacity investments with the aim of delivering grants to all communities by the end of 2023.

Beyond direct investments in staff capacity, Community Solutions is also developing workforce support for communities to help local teams attract and retain key staff. Staff burnout and turnover is at crisis levels across health and social services. Learning from promising efforts in other sectors, Community Solutions will provide tools and support to communities in recruiting, training, and retaining staff. For example, research has shown that peer connection and a sense of career identity outside of an individual organization improves retention. Community Solutions will test ways to incorporate these experiences in a cohort of new hires at community teams, including by convening regular peer discussions of work challenges and mapping professional development pathways in system leadership.

Strategic, flexible investments can help communities bridge gaps and strengthen systems. In 2022, Community Solutions made investments in 23 Built for Zero communities. The investments supported 12 new system-level positions, provided flexible funding to 14 communities to address barriers to housing for groups of individuals, and initiated tests of new solutions to system-level challenges in 13 communities.

Early data from these investments show that flexible resources have allowed communities to accelerate positive exits to permanent housing and reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in the community.

3 | SUPPORTING RACIALLY EQUITABLE HOMELESS RESPONSE SYSTEMS



OUR AIM

By 2026, communities across the country have proven it is possible to make progress on and achieve key indicators of a racially equitable homeless response system.

The systems responding to homelessness have not historically been designed to identify or address racial disparities. Unsurprisingly, people of color — particularly Black and Native Americans — experience disproportionately higher rates of homelessness.

This also means that people of color are at risk of experiencing worse outcomes throughout the housing process. Any system that is not set up to identify and respond to inequity is likely to reproduce — or even deepen — the problem. But it does not have to be that way.

Working with racial equity leaders, homeless services staff, and people with lived experience of homelessness, we created a framework for measuring and improving key indicators of a racially equitable homeless response system. In partnership with communities, we are developing interventions for tackling each indicator.

That framework covers four key areas:

1. **Equitable system decision-making power:** People of color at all levels of the homeless response system have decision-making power to influence the design of the system.
2. **Lived experience:** Black, Indigenous, and other people of color receiving services from the homeless response system have experiences that preserve their dignity and have their needs met in a timely manner.
3. **Quality data:** All people experiencing homelessness have access to assistance and are known by name in real-time. Communities accurately collect data around race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic conditions.
4. **System outcomes:** Communities close all racial and ethnic disproportionality in housing placements, returns to homelessness, and the average length of time experiencing homelessness, from identification to housing placement.

We have integrated the indicators of achieving equitable systems outcomes into the functional zero definition for populations. Solving homelessness cannot be separated from addressing the racial inequities within the homeless response system. In order for communities to be validated for functional zero for all populations, single adults, youth, or family homelessness, communities must close all racial and ethnic disproportionality in housing placements, returns to homelessness, and the average length of time experiencing homelessness, from identification to housing placement. These populations encompass all other subpopulations, including those experiencing veteran or chronic homelessness. »

Progress

Communities in Built for Zero are at various stages of creating racially equitable homeless response systems. Over half of communities interviewed by Community Solutions' evaluation partners, ORS and Equal Measure, described early or beginning efforts to operationalize racial equity in their work, such as hiring consultants, exploring how to diversify leadership positions or governing bodies, and developing or amending data systems to more effectively collect data related to race, ethnicity, and disproportionality.

Some communities identified racial equity as an explicit focus in their work, as evidenced by steps to adopt a racial equity framework or to amend charters or strategic plans to name specific racial equity aims and targets. For example, at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless in New York reoriented their homeless response system to address the immediate needs of their community. As they did, leaders also began to ground their work in race equity and take note of the racial disparities produced by their system.

As Mike Giuffrida, Associate Director for the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, explained, "I saw these conversations really start to change in tone around this time, where there was more deliberateness and intentionality about race equity, sparked by the health disparities we were seeing."

Communities reported some successes in helping community partners adopt practices and shift mindsets to advance racial equity. Several communities used disaggregated data to identify racial disproportionalities in the populations they serve and to think about how to provide services more equitably.

In Minneapolis/Hennepin County in Minnesota, the team working on chronic homelessness measures their progress by ensuring they are achieving equitable housing outcomes.



In addition to gathering quantitative data, the team uses client satisfaction surveys to collect qualitative information from their case management program. The surveys evaluate whether each client is assigned a case manager within the same time frame and if they receive the same level of customer service.

"The surveys are sent to any person who participated in the program, and the feedback is reviewed quarterly and acted on as part of continuous improvement," explained Danielle Werder, Area Manager of Hennepin County's Office to End Homelessness.

Communities successfully bolstered their capacity for racial equity work by investing in training, dedicated diversity, equity, and inclusion staff, and support from consultants. Some communities were successful in diversifying leadership positions, committees, and other governing bodies, especially to include individuals with lived experience of homelessness on planning or governance committees.

The Hennepin County team includes people with lived experience of homelessness in funding, hiring, and policy decisions to improve the equity of their system from within.

"The impact has been obvious and great," Werder said. "We can always do better and work to elevate and empower people to not just participate once, but to feel a true sense of belonging so we can work on system improvement in partnership." »

Community Solutions continues to identify levers to pull to support communities and facilitate and disseminate learning. In 2021, Community Solutions rolled out a racial equity framework with system-level indicators that communities should track over time. In 2022, the organization expanded the group of external diversity, equity, and inclusion partners and consultants in order to support communities in operationalizing the framework and embedding it in their work. This work was further bolstered by the organization's Director of Inclusion, Equity, Diversity, and Access.

An important part of this work has included supporting communities with strategies to actively engage people with lived experience of homelessness in system decision-making and programmatic design.

"It has changed the outcomes and the way we work. We're prioritizing the people who matter the most by listening to the people who have actually navigated our system," said Tanesha Travis, the Lived Experience Coordinator at Sacramento Steps Forward in California.

Challenges and Learnings

In conversations with Community Solutions' evaluation partner, communities identified wide-ranging challenges experienced in embedding equity across their work. The framework recognizes that practitioners understand that decision-making power — which could influence key elements like governance, policies, and procedures — is essential to sustaining improvements in equitable outcomes and lived experience. This includes, but is not limited to, ensuring people with lived experience of homelessness and communities of color have power in planning, program design, and implementation.

Some communities shared that they struggle to secure the necessary commitment and action across key agencies to pursue racial equity or that leadership can struggle to shift power to marginalized groups or prioritize racial equity as a core mandate. Some of the challenges with securing or realizing those commitments are exacerbated by a sense of insufficient time and resources.



4 | CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ENDING HOMELESSNESS



OUR AIM

By 2026, targeted states and cities will have a formal role as active participants in ending and preventing homelessness, and federal grants and contracts will define success as reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness.

Importantly, others will hold political leaders accountable for reducing and ending homelessness, too. The media and public narrative will reinforce the idea that homelessness is a solvable, systems issue. Proof that homelessness is solvable will be widely documented, seeding a new understanding of what is possible, everywhere. As a result, the public will expect reductions and hold leaders accountable for ending homelessness.

Our Approach

We are pursuing systems-level change at the federal, state, regional, and municipal level to create the conditions for any community in the United States to create a lasting end to homelessness. At the federal level, Community Solutions is working to align homelessness funding toward requiring population-level reduction goals, collective accountability for results, quality data, and shared progress measures and definitions. We are also working with targeted cities and states to formalize their role in the homeless response system, and to establish clear, shared homelessness reduction goals. In doing so, we are creating and proving out templates for how federal, state, and municipal government can align their efforts to reduce, prevent, and end homelessness.

Achieving and sustaining a reality where homelessness is rare and brief requires broad understanding of the solutions and accountability for implementing them. The myth that homelessness is an intractable problem has prolonged human suffering and perpetuated the status quo for far too long. We need a new story — that homelessness is a solvable, systems issue — that raises our collective expectations of what can and must be done. Community Solutions is driving campaigns to establish a new level of public and media accountability for ending homelessness. We measure success by tracking the national discourse around homelessness and our effectiveness in supporting shifts in conversation and behavior among key audiences. As part of that work, we are highlighting roles that different groups can play in ending homelessness in their community. >>

Targeted Communications

As we support communities in Built for Zero, we continue to surface the roles that specific groups can play in reducing homelessness in their communities. Our communications team develops targeted messaging for these groups and assists communities in tailoring communications to their context. In 2022, we focused on:

- Business Leaders
- Data and Technology Leaders
- Faith-Based Organizations and Leaders
- Health System Leaders
- Homelessness Leaders
- Local Elected Officials and Policymakers (Mayors, County Executives)
- Journalists
- Public Health Departments and Leaders

Challenges and Learning

States and municipalities often lack a defined role within the existing homeless response system. The majority of funding that supports homeless services is granted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to local Continuums of Care. This funding goes directly from the federal government to local homeless service organizations to provide assistance to people experiencing homelessness. Due to the nature of this process, states and cities are left out of the fund allocation formula and have no direct programmatic oversight authority. Moreover, some Continuums of Care do not conform to county boundaries, making regional strategies necessary.

Through our work, we have seen that state policymakers, legislators, and agency staffers are eager to learn what works to reduce homelessness but have little insight into ways states can leverage their resources and capacity to play a formal role in ending and preventing homelessness within their boundaries. This gap results in unrealized opportunities to influence land-use policy, health care funding (specifically Medicaid), criminal justice policy, and affordable housing finance.

Recognizing this opportunity, Community Solutions is compiling best practices and testing new models of state leadership in ending homelessness. Working with state government partners in Colorado and Maine, we are identifying high-leverage practices and governance models that can be shared with other states.

We are testing five important roles states can play:

1. Convene communities around a shared aim for measurably and equitably ending homelessness and build collective will.
2. Resource and empower communities to build local, multi-agency homelessness reduction systems, rooted in shared, real-time, population-level data.
 - Fund staff capacity at state and local levels to focus on system-level data and collaboration, continuous improvement, and performance management.
 - Incentivize local communities to prioritize quality data collection as the expected standard
 - Align state funding with population-level outcomes in reducing homelessness.
3. Work collaboratively across state agencies to clear barriers in direct response to local, data-identified needs.
4. Engage anchor institutions and partners from other sectors, particularly health care, to align behind shared aims.
5. Embed improvement methodologies into state administrative practices to support scale and long-term sustainability of quality data and functional zero outcomes. >>

Community Solutions is also engaging a cohort of states and cities to incorporate the foundational elements of effective homeless response systems into administrative regulations and operational policies.

We are increasing the representation of homelessness as a solvable, systems problem in the social and earned media discourses around solutions to homelessness. But it is being outpaced by the broader conversation around homelessness. According to the media monitoring tool Meltwater the volume of social media conversation about solving homelessness in the United States increased 420% in 2022 from the previous year, reflecting the broader attention to the issue. Conversations directly related to accountability for a measurable end state to homelessness (functional zero), homelessness as a systems problem, the role of by-name or quality data, the Built for Zero methodology, and the assertion that homelessness is solvable, increased significantly to match, in volume, about 16% of the solutions-oriented conversation.

While this demonstrates important progress, we cannot ignore that the volume of conversation focused on the crisis of homelessness continues to vastly outpace the conversation around solutions to homelessness. To create a tipping point, we must continue to increase representation of these concepts within solutions-oriented conversations around homelessness, while increasing the overall volume of these conversations about homelessness.

How are we tracking the conversation around solving homelessness?

Using Meltwater, a media monitoring tool, we are tracking the overall discourse around solving and ending homelessness.

We are also tracking the discourse that includes key components of solving homelessness, like “functional zero” and “by-name data.”



5 | CLOSING THE HOUSING SUPPLY GAP



OUR AIM

By 2026, communities can leverage powerful, dynamic ways to close housing supply gaps to accelerate progress to functional zero homelessness.

Approach

Social impact investing has opened up a critical pathway for addressing the housing gaps that stand in the way of cities working to get to functional zero, and this is particularly powerful in the largest and fastest-growing markets. Social impact financing can help deliver projects in less time at less cost while creating greater flexibility to meet the changing needs of a community over time — all while still generating a return for the investor.

Community Solutions has raised \$126 million to deliver more affordable housing to help communities end homelessness for their target population. We have acquired seven buildings across four markets within the Built for Zero network, replicating the acquisition and financing model we tested at the Abrigo Apartments (Denver, Colorado), the Santa Fe Suites (Santa Fe, New Mexico), and Centra Villa (Atlanta, Georgia),

This unique model brings housing directly to the system that serves people experiencing homelessness. As units in these already-occupied buildings become available through natural attrition, they are renovated and then leased to an individual experiencing homelessness through the local “coordinated entry system.” This means that units are linked directly to the community’s by-name dataset to ensure they are serving those assessed to have the greatest need, and that there is a clear link between increased unit availability and reductions in homelessness. This prioritization process continues until the building reaches 50% individuals who have experienced homelessness, while the other 50% of the units remain affordable workforce units. >>

Milestones

- **\$126 million** committed in social impact capital
- **500+ units of affordable housing** acquired and connected to the homeless response system
- **In May 2022, launched the Community Solutions’ Housing Systems team**

Social impact capital allows Community Solutions to purchase properties quickly and efficiently to compete with private equity buyers and minimize the traditional affordable housing transaction costs. The model guarantees long-term affordability as well. Upon the term completion of the social impact investments, buildings will be acquired by a local nonprofit partner, which will continue to meet the community's affordable housing needs in perpetuity.

We see our housing system work as a key lever for 1) creating access to housing by removing barriers to entry for people experiencing homelessness (i.e., removal of criminal background history and credit history as a basis of rental eligibility), 2) improving the process of housing placement/coordinated entry in communities, 3) supporting individuals in maintaining their housing through tenant success-focused property management, an approach we call Property Management Plus, and 4) testing ways to streamline housing eligibility review and placement steps, troubleshoot system bottlenecks, and identify larger policy barriers for attention and resolution.



Progress

A wide range of investors — including individuals, health systems, philanthropies, and banks — have committed \$126 million and helped acquire more than 500 units of affordable housing to help communities end veteran homelessness in 2022.

Their appetite and partnership have validated that the social impact investment model is a viable way to compete with private equity to preserve affordable housing and dedicate vacancies to achieve reductions in homelessness. In 2022 alone, social impact investment helped acquire more than 500 units in four large cities. Compared to housing built through the use of federal low-income housing tax credits, which can take years to complete, this model can deliver housing within months at less cost while creating greater flexibility to meet the changing needs of a community over time.

Those acquisitions include:

- **The Mayflower**, 65 units, Baltimore, Maryland
- **Caroline Village**, 93 units, Jacksonville, Florida
- **Avon North**, 63 units, Metro Denver, Colorado
- **Avon South**, 36 units, Metro Denver, Colorado
- **Park 16**, 60 units, Metro Denver, Colorado
- **French Courtyard**, 42 units, Jacksonville, Florida
- **Glastonbury Woods**, 144 units, Nashville, Tennessee

To end homelessness, it is important to connect housing directly to the people in a community experiencing homelessness. In Built for Zero communities, homeless response systems are designed to know everyone experiencing homelessness by name, in real-time. >>

In communities with newly acquired buildings (Baltimore, Jacksonville, Metro Denver, and Nashville), Community Solutions supports the local team as they align their by-name data of individuals experiencing homelessness with these newly available units. This support includes upgrading of units and coordinating the work of multiple agencies to assure a rapid move-in and successful tenancy.

Ultimately, each building will contain a 50/50 mix of units for individuals exiting homelessness and affordable workforce units.

Glastonbury Woods apartments in Nashville, a 144-unit building purchased in August 2022, experienced a particularly seamless move-in process thanks to the exceptionally well-coordinated work of Nashville and Davidson County Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the City of Nashville's homeless response team.

Raymond is a veteran tenant at Glastonbury Woods apartment in Nashville. Photo by Roland's Photography.



In late October 2022, [Raymond](#), a veteran experiencing homelessness, moved into his own one-bedroom apartment in Glastonbury Woods. He had retired in 2016 after a career spent as an industrial maintenance worker, helping construct power plants and skyscrapers along with water and sewer lines, then fell on hard times. The apartment in Glastonbury Woods was a long hoped for return to a more stable life.

"The process of me moving home and being closer to my family is very well appreciated," he said. " ... I'm better off now than I ever was."

We continued to roll out our enhanced property management model, which aims to ensure all tenants are connected to the services and support they need to remain stably housed. We are implementing what we call Property Management Plus in all Community Solutions housing. The following features of the model are critical for tenant success and the buildings' sound operations:

1. Ensure that prospective tenants are being matched and then supported into housing by forging strong relationships with the Continuum of Care and VA
2. Create various ways for tenants to access support services within the community. This includes connecting with local advocates to provide tenants with opportunities to engage with broader community issues
3. Promote health and well-being with partnerships with health care providers, including local VA Medical Centers
4. Establish adaptable and meaningful check-ins to gauge individual tenant needs
5. Maintain the physical environment to a high standard

To ensure the effectiveness of the local property managers with whom we partner to deliver Property Management Plus, we established a centralized support team to orient, train and troubleshoot challenges with on-site staff.

The Property Management Plus model is designed to align the interests of tenants and landlords and set tenants like Raymond up for success. Raymond's low credit score was not a barrier to signing a lease, and the property management team helped Raymond secure new resources, including connecting him with a dentist and an eye doctor. Upon discovering Raymond's poor vision, they also improved the lighting throughout his apartment. >>

We continue to help Washington, D.C., and Detroit repurpose shelters and transitional housing into permanent affordable housing. As the number of homeless veterans decreases, and the community effectively prevents new veteran homelessness, properties originally built as shelters or short-term housing can be repurposed to become needed permanent affordable and supportive housing. In Detroit, we worked with the Detroit Rescue Mission to convert their 60-bed transitional housing building to 60 permanent housing units for veterans experiencing homelessness.

[Freddie Tucker](#), a new tenant in the Detroit property, recalled his despair in facing another night at a shelter.

"I wouldn't go check in until it was dark," he said. "When I would get off work, I would go to the park and park my car and just sit. But here, when I get off work, I come straight home, because I have somewhere I want to be."

Freddie Tucker is one of the new residents at 211 Glendale, a facility that converted 60 transitional units into permanent housing for veterans exiting homelessness.



Challenges and Learnings

Housing providers across the country face bureaucratic challenges in renting to people exiting homelessness. An effective housing and homeless response system must be able to account for everyone who is unhoused and rapidly coordinate and match individuals with housing that meets their needs.

As we increase the number of housing units dedicated to ending homelessness in select Built for Zero communities, we have gained important insight into the challenges that can slow down or lengthen the overall process of connecting individuals with housing.

Refining this process so it operates seamlessly and equitably for all parties is a key objective of our Housing Systems work. Streamlining the steps it takes to bring people home takes a strong system of partnerships, a real-time line of sight into the population experiencing homelessness, and a commitment to addressing immediate and chronic barriers. In communities like Jacksonville, Nashville, Denver, and Baltimore we are testing ways to strengthen connections between landlords, property managers, and key partners in the local homeless response system, like the Continuum of Care, the Housing Authority, and VA.

We are also removing the barriers that perpetuate poverty and homelessness, like criminal background checks, credit ratings, and security deposits. Our aim is to learn what it takes to operate a strong, coordinated and equitable housing system and to share those lessons more broadly across Built for Zero communities and the housing sector.

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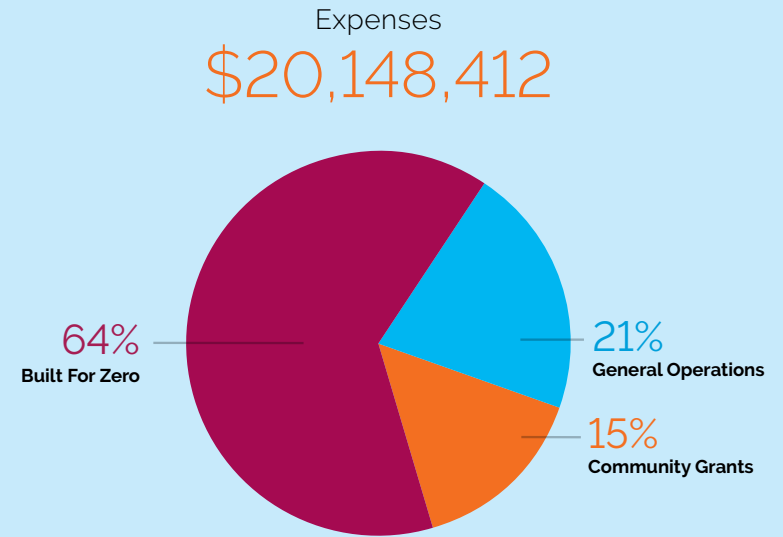
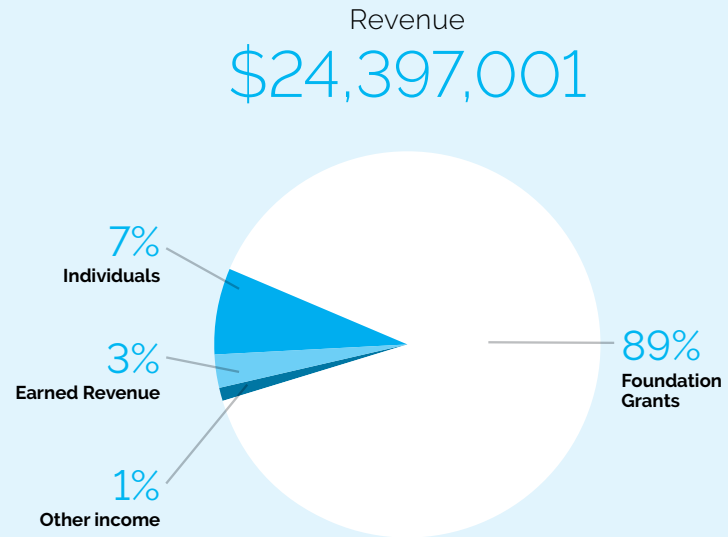
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