The Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative

**Encampment Prioritization**

**September 2024**



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UCSF Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative

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This **Encampment Prioritization Tool** was developed to accompany the [Encampment Resolution Guide](https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/EncampmentResolution) and [Unsheltered Homelessness Policy Brief](http://homelessness.ucsf.edu/UnshelteredTopicBrief), published in September 2024.

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## Introduction

Communities across the country struggle with how to approach encampments in a way that balances many competing issues and priorities: urgently responding to encampments and all forms of homelessness, the shortage of housing and shelter resources, and health and safety issues that encampments can represent. In connection with broader system reforms, using an encampment resolution approach that prioritizes housing and shelter placements over displacement actions is how communities can chart a path forward while addressing the complexity of these interrelated concerns.

This document intends to create and sustain a transparent and axiomatic way of prioritizing encampments for resolution. With scarce resources, prioritization is necessary to equitably and sustainably resolve encampments and meet the needs of the various constituents, including encampment residents, surrounding neighbors, businesses, and other community members. This tool should be used in conjunction with the Encampment Resolution Guide.

**However, without the necessary investment in housing and shelter, no homelessness system will ever provide an adequate response to the needs of unsheltered people.** Although this approach can effectively resolve encampments while generating higher housing and shelter placement levels, no strategy can counteract a lack of resources. Policymakers and system administrators must commit to addressing community-level housing and shelter shortages to achieve long-term sustainable success.

This document contains the following:

**Process and Factors Considered**

An overview of all the factors considered in the model encampment resolution protocol.

#### Form #1: Encampment Prioritization

This form is a model template that allows communities to determine which encampments to prioritize for resolution.

#### Acceptable Data Sources for Form #1

This outlines the recommended data sources for the items used in Form #1.

#### Form #2: Operational Factors

This form template allows communities to determine the units and types of resources needed to resolve encampments successfully. It provides information necessary to execute site stabilization approaches (detailed in the encampment resolution guide).

**Key: Point Allocations and Tiers for Form #1**

Information that feeds into Prioritization #1 and #2 helps the user determine how to rank each domain and characteristic. This key also has information about how the points determine the pathway for each encampment.

#### Definitions

Operational definitions for each characteristic.

## Process and Factors Considered

This tool is designed to support communities in prioritizing encampments and successfully resolving them. The process (outlined in Figure 1) is designed to help communities determine which encampments to deploy resources to and in which sequence.

To prioritize and successfully resolve encampments, this tool looks at prioritization factors that drive what ‘rank’ or prioritization level an encampment receives and operational factors that help identify what some of the resources will be necessary to resolve the encampment successfully. The [Encampment Resolution Guide](https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/EncampmentResolution) describes this process in detail. Prioritization factors are broken down into five domains and 18 discrete characteristics. Operational factors are broken into four domains and 12 characteristics. The population needs domain and characteristics are used in both. All the domains and characteristics appear in the table below. Complete definitions of all the characteristics are available in the definitions section of this document.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Domain** | **Characteristic**  |
| **Prioritization Factors** |
| **Disorder**  | Sexual Violence  |
| Physical Violence  |
| Uncontrolled Fires  |
| Theft  |
| Conflict  |
| **Population Needs**  | Severe Medical Needs  |
| Severe Behavioral Health Needs  |
| Activities of Daily Living  |
| **Public Health**  | Infestation  |
| Infectious Disease  |
| **Location**  | Proximity to Sensitive Use  |
| ADA Concern  |
| Environmental Concern  |
| Challenge to Frequent Public Use  |
| Construction Zone  |
| Danger to Encampment Residents  |
| Department Access Issue  |
| **Priorities**  | Geographic Targeting  |
| **Operational Factors** |
| **Organization**  | Group Cohesion  |
| Self-Management |
| Provider Engagement  |
| **Size**  | Number of People  |
| **Equity Factors**  | Significant Percentage of Black Residents  |
| Significant Percentage of Latino/a/x Residents |
| Significant Percentage of Native/Indigenous Residents |
| Significant Percentage of LGBTQ+ Residents  |
| Significant Percentage of Female Residents  |
| **Complexity**  | Type of Structures  |
| Vehicles  |
| Density  |

####

## Form #1: Encampment Prioritization

#### Directions

1. First, fill out Domain: Population Needs. You will insert the Tier number in each category (Age, Medical Needs, Severe Behavioral Health Needs, and Activities of Daily Living) based on the "Tiering Chart: Population Needs” chart in the key provided later in this document. If the encampment does not meet the criteria for **any** of the three tiers, put 0 in the corresponding row.

2. Next, fill out the "Overall Prioritization Chart." Please refer to this document’s key and definitions sections to make determinations.

3. Next, sum the total points and determine the relevant pathway.

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| **Form 1 Domain: Population Needs**  |
| **Age** |
| Tier  |  |
| Points |  |
| **Severe Medical Needs** |
| Tier  |  |
| Points |  |
| **Severe Behavioral Health Needs** |
| Tier  |  |
| Points |  |
| **Activities of Daily Living** |
| Tier  |  |
| Points |  |
| Total Points (Insert into row titled "Population Points- From "Ranking Chart: Population Needs"" below |  |

| **Overall Prioritization Chart** |
| --- |
| **Domain** | **Characteristic** | **Ranking** |
| Disorder | Sexual Violence |  |
| Physical Violence |  |
| Uncontrolled Fires |  |
| Theft  |  |
| Conflict  |  |
| Count of Yes's  |  |
| Disorder Tier Determination |  |
| Points |  |
| Public Health | Infestation (public health protocol activation) |  |
| Infectious disease (public health protocol activation) |  |
| Driving public health concern |  |
| Public Health Protocol Activation |  |
| Location | Proximity to Sensitive Use |  |
| ADA |  |
| Environmental Risk |  |
| Challenge to Frequent Public Use  |  |
| Critical Infrastructure |  |
| Danger to Encampment Residents (hazard protocol activation) |  |
| Department Access Issue |  |
| Hazard Protocol Activation |  |
| Count of Yes's  |  |
| Location Tier Determination |  |
| Points |  |
| Geographic Targeting  |  |
| Points |  |
| Population Points- From "Ranking Chart: Population Needs" |  |
| Total Points (sum of points from all domains) |       |
|  |
| Pathway |  |  |
|  |

## Acceptable Data Sources for Form #1

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Domain** | **Characteristic** | **Measurement**  | **Prioritizes Encampment for Resolution** | **Data Needed and Acceptable Sources** |
| **Disorder** | Sexual Violence | Binary | Yes | Incidence and types of sexual violence on site as reported by either encampment residents, outreach workers, or law enforcement.  |
| Physical Violence | Binary | Yes | Incidence and types of physical violence on site as reported by either encampment residents, outreach workers, or law enforcement.  |
| Uncontrolled Fires | Binary | Yes | Incidence of uncontrolled fires on-site as reported by either encampment residents, outreach workers, law enforcement, fire department, or other first responders.  |
| Theft  | Binary | Yes | Incidence of theft verified by encampment residents or outreach workers.  |
| Conflict  | Binary | Yes | Incidence of interpersonal conflict verified by encampment residents or outreach workers. |
| **Public Health** | Infestation | Binary  | No | Type(s) of infestation observed by encampment residents or outreach workers and verified by public health or another appropriate agency.  |
| Infectious Disease | Binary  | No | Type(s) of disease and rate(s) of infection (if available) observed by encampment residents or outreach workers and verified by public health or the health services resolution partner.  |
| **Location** | Proximity to Sensitive Use | Binary | Yes | Distance to use and information about the type of sensitive use the encampment is near as verified by outreach staff.  |
| ADA | Binary | Yes | Type and location of access, egress, passage, or transit that is obstructed with detailed ADA implication provided via interdepartmental memo from the relevant agency.  |
| Environmental Risk | Binary | Yes | Location and type of environmental risk verified by appropriate government department and provided via interdepartmental memo.  |
| Challenge to Frequent Public Use  | Binary | Yes | Distance to use and information about the type of challenge the encampment presents to the use provided via interdepartmental memo from the property managing agency. |
| Construction zone | Binary | Yes | Distance to the construction site and date(s) construction is slated to begin provided by the property owner or developer and verified by the relevant permitting agency.  |
| Danger to Encampment Residents | Binary | Yes | Location and nature of risk to residents verified by outreach workers.  |
| Department Access Issue | Binary | Yes | Interdepartmental memo detailing the nature of access needed (routine, sporadic, emergency, etc.), how the encampment obstructs that access, and whether the encampment residents are at any risk when access is needed.  |

## Form #2: Operational Factors

#### Directions

1. Refer to the "Definitions" page for more details on the domains and characteristics.

2. Refer to the "Data Form" column below to learn how to fill out the Data Entry Column. The information in the column "Data Form" will specify how the data should be presented in the column labeled "Data Entry."

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| **Form #2: Operational Factors**  |
| **Characteristic** | **Sub-characteristic** | **Data Form** | **Data Entry** | **Additional Detail** |
| **Organization** | Group Cohesion | Scale (1- 5)\* |   |        |
| Self-Management | Scale (1- 5)\* |   |        |
| Provider Engagement | Scale (1- 5)\* |   |        |
| **Size**  | Number of People | Number |        |        |
| **Population** | Needs | Description of Needs | # of People in need of Medical Respite:  |        |        |
| # of People in need of SUD Services:  |        |        |
| # of People with severe behavioral or mental health needs  |        |        |
| # of People over the age of 50 |        |        |
| # of People under the age of 21 |        |        |
| # of People with ADL needs |        |        |
| Pets  | Number  |        |        |
| **Equity Factors** | Significant percentage of Black residents | Rough percentage |       |        |
| Significant percentage of Latino/a/x residents | Rough percentage |       |        |
| Significant percentage of Native/Indigenous residents | Rough percentage |       |        |
| Significant percentage of LGBTQ residents | Rough percentage |       |        |
| Significant percentage of female residents | Rough percentage |       |        |
| **Complexity** | Large Structures | Number  |        |        |
| RVs  | Number  |        |        |
| Cars | Number  |        |        |
| Density | Description  |        |        |

## Key: Point Allocations and Tiers for Form #1

#### Points needed to qualify an encampment for each pathway.

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| **Ranking Pathway Key** |
| **Immediate Resolution** | 10 or more points |
| **Pre-Resolution** | 6-9 points |
| **Harm Reduction** | 0-5 points |

#### Qualifying criteria for each tier for population vulnerability characteristics.

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| **Tiering Chart - Population Needs** |
| **Characteristic** | **Tier 1 (3 points)** | **Tier 2 (2 points)** | **Tier 3 (1 point)** |
| **Age** | 75% of residents are 50 and above, or 75% are 21 and below | 50% of residents are 50 and above, or 50% are 21 and below | 25% of residents are 50 and above, or 25% are 21 and below |
| **Severe Medical Needs** | 75% of residents have medical respite needs | 50% of residents have medical respite needs | 25% of residents have medical respite needs |
| **Severe Behavioral Health Needs** | 75% of residents have severe behavioral health needs | 50% of residents have severe behavioral health needs | 25% of residents have behavioral health needs |
| **Activities of Daily Living** | 75% of residents struggle with 2 or more ADL impairments | 50% of residents struggle with 2 or more ADL impairments  | 25% of residents struggle with 2 or more ADL impairments  |

#### Qualifying criteria for the three primary risk factors: crime, public health, and location.

| **Tiering Chart - Risk Factors** |
| --- |
| **Characteristic**  | **High Risk** | **Medium Risk** | **Low Risk** |
| **Disorder** | Tier 1 (3 points)- All 5 sub-characteristics  | Tier 2 (2 points)- 3 to 4 sub-characteristics  | Tier 3 (1 point)- 1 to 2 sub-characteristics  |
| **Location** | Tier 1 (3 points)- All 7 sub-characteristics | Tier 2 (2 points)- 4 to 6 sub-characteristics | Tier 3 (1 point)- 1 to 3 sub-characteristics |

## Definitions

| **Encampment Prioritization Factors**  |
| --- |
| **Domain**  | **Characteristic** | **Definition** |
| **Population Needs** | Age | The self-reported age of a client. |
| Severe Medical Needs | Severe medical needs are those that would likely trigger a hospitalization or medical respite stay **before** the client could move into housing. These may include, but are not limited to, end state liver disease, unmanaged diabetes, unmanaged kidney disease or kidney failure requiring dialysis, severe COPD, decompensated DHF, and cancer. If an outreach worker identifies a severe medical need, it will need to be clinically confirmed by the selected health services partner. |
| Severe Behavioral Health Needs | Severe mental illness is often defined by its duration and the disability (functional impairment) it produces. As with severe medical needs, these issues would likely trigger a hospitalization or medical response stay **before** the client could move into housing. These could include disorders that produce psychotic symptoms, such as schizophrenia and schizoaffective disorder, and severe forms of other disorders, such as major depression and bipolar disorder. Behavioral health needs may also encompass substance use disorders or substance use coupled with chaotic behaviors. As with mental illness, the level of functional impairment is a critical part of any evaluation. If a severe behavioral health need is suspected or identified by an outreach worker, it will need to be clinically confirmed by the selected health services provider.  |
| Activities of Daily Living | The five standard ADLs are bathing, dressing, toileting, transferring (moving to and from a bed or a chair), and eating. If a client needs support on any of these activities, they are considered to have a limitation in Activities of Daily Living (ADL). |
| **Disorder** | Sexual Violence | Sexual violence means that someone forces or manipulates someone else into unwanted sexual activity without their consent. We define encampments in which residents have reported or observed sexual violence to meet these criteria.  |
| Physical Violence | Physical violence is an act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain and/or physical injury. We define encampments in which residents have reported or observed physical violence to meet these criteria.  |
| Uncontrolled Fires | While cooking and heating fires are common in encampments, an encampment that has had reported or observed instances of **uncontrolled** fire is considered to pose a threat to fire safety for both the residents and the surrounding neighborhood if applicable. |
| Conflict  | This characteristic is used to describe to what degree encampment residents experience interpersonal conflict with each other. This may include verbal assault that results in psychological stress, rather than a physical injury.  |
| **Public Health** | Infestation (public health protocol) | Infestation, in this case, means the presence of an unusually large number of insects or animals, typically sufficient to cause property damage or increase the risk or spread of disease. Examples include, but are not limited to, body lice, rats, mice, or other rodents. If the answer to this is **YES** then a public health protocol activates (see resolution guide for detail). |
| Infectious Disease (public health protocol) | Infectious disease refers to the presence of diseases that are easily transmittable and pose a significant risk to the encampment residents and the surrounding neighborhood. Examples include, but are not limited to, shigella, tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, or COVID-19. If the answer to this is **YES** then a public health protocol activates (see resolution guide for detail). |
| **Location** | Proximity to Sensitive Use | An encampment is near a location of sensitive use if it is situated at the **main** entrance of private property **OR** within 0.2 miles of schools, daycares, nursing homes, playgrounds, ballfields, public gardens, tourist attractions, or hospitals. |
| ADA | If an encampment is impairing ADA access it is blocking ramps, sidewalks, or ADA specific transit infrastructure (e.g. elevators to and from train stations). |
| Environmental  | An encampment poses environmental issues if it threatens water purity because of waste runoff or other related issues. This may include proximity to pumphouses and protected waterways. |
| Challenge to Frequent Public Use  | A challenge to frequent public use is an encampment situated in a location that often needs to be used by the public. Examples include, but are not limited to, a location within a park frequently booked for performances or gatherings, a tourist attraction that draws significant daily foot traffic, or a highly used walking or hiking path.  |
| Construction zone | An encampment is in a construction zone if it within 0.1 miles of a property slated for use, by a public or private party, for development of buildings, roadways, utilities, roadway, or other infrastructure. A construction zone designation can also be triggered by proximity to staging areas for the primary construction site where heavy machinery or building materials need to be stored. |
| Danger to Encampment Residents (hazard designation) | An encampment is a danger to the residents when the encampment site is a location where the risk of serious injury or mortality is extremely high and cannot be mitigated in any way. Examples include, but are not limited to, encampments sites on freeway on- or off-ramps, floodplains (particularly during rainy seasons), or in the path of wildfires or other natural disasters. If the answer to this question is **YES** then a hazard designation protocol activates (see resolution guide for detail) |
| Department Access Issue | An encampment is inhibiting Departmental Access if it is in the way of an entry or access point for public departments. This may include utility, property, or other access points.  |
| **Priorities** | Geographic Targeting  | Jurisdictions may choose to prioritize certain locations in the community for encampment resolution (e.g. downtown, near schools, or near critical infrastructure). If this protocol is active, then the Core Strategy Team should choose a transparent point value to assign to encampments that fall within prioritized areas.  |
| **Other Relevant Definitions** | Medical Respite | The medical respite program provides short-term room and board in a post-acute care recuperative setting with access to comprehensive medical, social, and behavioral health services.  |

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| **Encampment Operational Factors** |  |
| **Domain**  | **Characteristic** | **Definition** |
| **Organization** | Group Cohesion | Group cohesion refers to the degree to which the encampment operates as a group or as a collection of individuals. Encampments can either have high degrees of cohesion where the entire encampment understands itself as a group and, in some instances, will seek to remain near to each other as they transition inside, or low degrees of cohesion of individuals who live near each other but do not operate in concert.  |
| Self-Management | Encampments with high degrees of cohesion may organize a step farther into self-management or self-governance. Examples of self-management are formal or semi-formal leadership structures, adopted encampment rules or requirements, organization of encampment chores and activities, or collective negotiation with providers to get their needs met.  |
| Provider Engagement | Provider engagement refers to the degree to which outreach or supportive service providers routinely engage the residents of an encampment. Low engagement would be receiving outreach support once per month or less. High engagement would be maintaining touchpoints with service providers weekly or more.  |
| **Size**  | Number of People | The number of people who live at the site. This should **not** include those who visit frequently.  |
| **Population** | Needs (carried over from Form 1) | See Population Needs for characteristics and definitions.  |
| Number of and Type of Pets  | The number of pets at an encampment and what kind. |
| **Equity Factors** | Significant Percentage of Black Residents  | The encampment is 50% Black identifying or more. |
| Significant Percentage of Latino/a/x Residents | The encampment is 50% Latino/a/x identifying or more. |
| Significant Percentage of Native/Indigenous Residents | The encampment is 50% Native/Indigenous identifying or more. |
| Significant Percentage of LGBTQ+ Residents  | The encampment is 50% LGBTQ+ identifying or more. |
| Significant Percentage of Female Residents  | The encampment is 50% female identifying or more. |
| **Complexity** | Type of Structures | This characteristic looks at the kind of structures on the site. While encampments are predominantly composed of tents, some have higher degrees of complexity and may have significant built structures, including tent ‘hardening’ (attaching wood or other materials to tents to make them more durable or weatherproof) or de novo built structures of various sizes or uses.  |
| Vehicles | This looks at the number and type of vehicles at a site.  |
| Density | This looks at whether the encampment is tightly organized in a small space or more diffuse across the site (whether large or small).  |

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