

The Benioff Homelessness & Housing Initiative

Encampment Resolution Guide

Benioff Homelessness and Housing Initiative



University of California
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Encampment Resolution Guide

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Introduction

Encampment resolution is a coordinated, multi-system strategy to address the impacts of unsheltered homelessness and connect encampment residents to housing. This approach differs from displacement strategies that force encampment residents to move *without* connecting them to housing and support (commonly referred to as ‘sweeps’) in several ways. To make lasting connections to housing for encampment residents and seek to avoid re-encampment at the site, encampment resolution employs evidence-based practices and involves a range of stakeholders. The encampment residents' needs and what is achievable and available in the community drive the process. Finally, encampment resolution avoids unnecessary experiences of trauma and displacement that occur when people experiencing unsheltered homelessness are subject to rigid and punitive responses.

In California and across the country, communities are struggling 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 the health and safety issues that encampments can represent. Using an encampment resolution approach that prioritizes housing and shelter placements over displacement actions, in connection with broader system reforms, is how communities can chart a path forward while addressing the complexity of these interrelated concerns.

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 increasing 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 four sections. The first provides an overview of the encampment resolution protocol; the second outlines the makeup of the team typically involved in a successful resolution; the third is a model operational protocol that jurisdictions can use to execute resolutions; and the final section is a glossary of the technical terms that appear throughout this document.

In recognition of the urgent health and social needs of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, we encourage policymakers and practitioners to adopt and incorporate these practices.

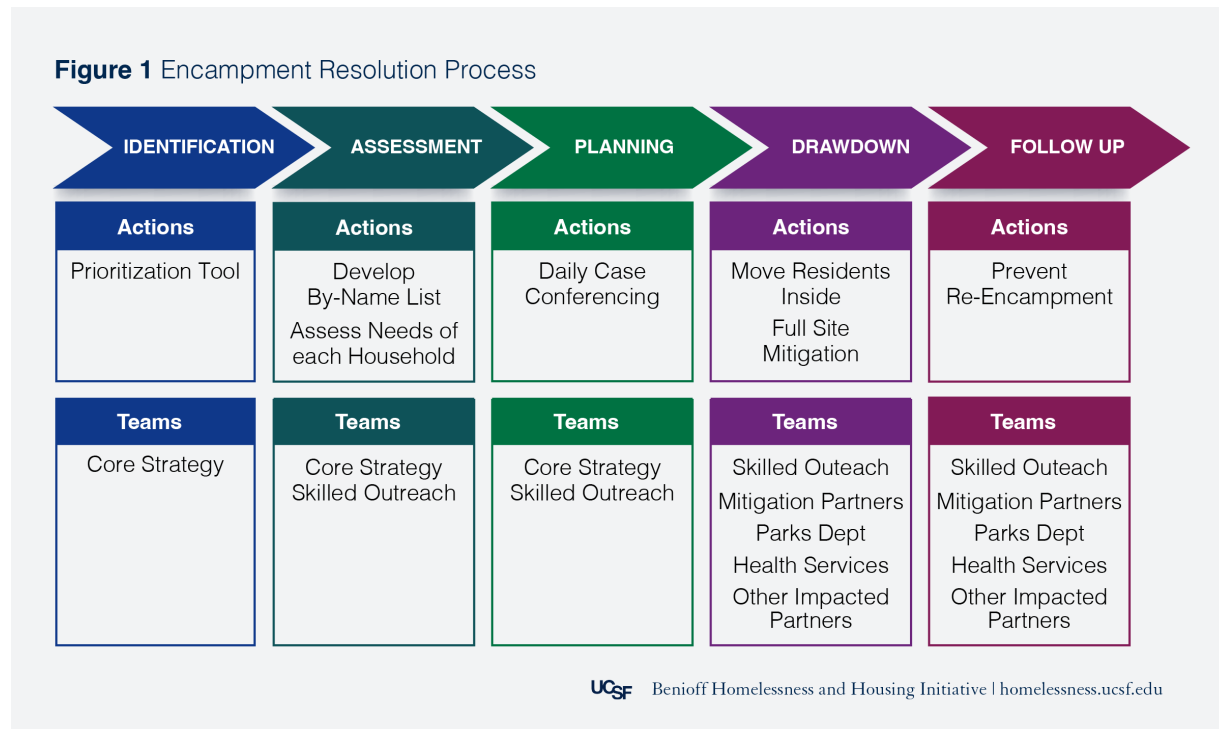
Encampment Resolution: A Detailed Overview

Encampment Resolution: What It Is and Isn't

To address unsheltered homelessness in communities, encampment resolution aims to use a whole system response by prioritizing encampments and deploying the system's **complete** resources to address them. This model focuses on housing people first, using shelter only when a housing placement is not possible.

Resolution is **not** the same as offering people shelter placements that are inadequate or declined and then displacing (also called 'sweeping') the encampment. By helping people to move inside rather than forcing them to move around, resolution **can** meaningfully reduce the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in a jurisdiction.

As depicted in the figure below, encampment resolution has a four-phase process of identification, assessment, planning, and drawdown, with a fifth ongoing follow-up phase continuing in perpetuity or until the jurisdiction or property owner repurposes the site otherwise. A multi-agency Core Strategy Team and a skilled outreach team primarily drive this process.



Identification

Encampment **identification** is the process by which a community becomes aware of and maintains an active list of the encampments in the jurisdiction. This process can leverage multiple inputs, including community reports, outreach staff reports, and reports from law enforcement officers (LEOs) or other government agency staff.

Importantly, in an encampment resolution model, identification is coupled with an assessment of the encampment to understand what priority level it should be assigned. This allows communities to stage their resolution operations and have interagency clarity on what activities are needed at which sites. To this end, we have provided a model prioritization tool in a separate document. While using the prioritization tool, we urge communities to understand that the goal is always to support people moving inside and into permanent housing. **Prioritization is a tool made necessary by resource constraints and not a policy goal in and of itself. No community should overly invest in *how* to prioritize in lieu of doing the actual work of addressing the underlying resource constraints that drive the need to prioritize.**

The [model encampment prioritization tool](#) evaluates five domains (population needs, disorder, public health, location, and geographic targeting). The five domains and the specific characteristics to evaluate are in the table below. To understand how to use these fully, please see the prioritization tool.

Prioritization Domains and Characteristics		
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, unmanaged seizures, unmanaged diabetes, unmanaged kidney disease or kidney failure, and unmanaged 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

Prioritization Domains and Characteristics		
		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 with any of these activities, they are considered unable to perform 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. An encampment that has had reported or observed instances of sexual violence is considered to be an encampment that contains sexual violence.
	Physical Violence	Physical violence is an act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain and/or physical injury. An encampment that has had reported or observed instances of physical violence is considered to be an encampment that contains physical violence.
	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

Prioritization Domains and Characteristics		
		the answer to this is YES , then a public health protocol activates (see below for detail).
	Infectious Disease (public health protocol)	Infectious disease, in this case, refers to the presence of diseases that are easily transmittable and pose a significant risk to encampment residents and the surrounding neighborhood. Examples include, but are not limited to, shigella, tuberculosis, typhus, or covid-19. If the answer to this is YES , then a public health protocol activates (see below 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 Concern	If an encampment is impairing ADA-required access, it is blocking ramps, sidewalks, or ADA specific transit infrastructure (e.g., elevators to and from train stations).
	Environmental Concern	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 directly 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	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

Prioritization Domains and Characteristics		
	(hazard designation)	are not limited to, encampments sites on freeway on- or offramps, 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 below 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.

Once encampments have been prioritized, any set for immediate resolution become subject to the protocol outlined in this document. **Encampments *not* prioritized for resolution should still receive services and support; we discuss such strategies later in this document.**

Jurisdictions must treat which encampments are currently classed for resolution as sensitive or need-to-know information. Publicizing the information on which encampments are currently slated for resolution (or even where encampments are generally) poses significant risks. While jurisdictional leaders may be motivated by calls for transparency, making this information public can put encampment residents at risk. These risks can run the gamut from unauthorized removal, harassment, being targeted for violence, or the encampment residents becoming targets for more organized criminal activities by gangs or traffickers.

Additionally, making encampment prioritization information public could prompt people experiencing homelessness to flood prioritized areas to access scarce resources. It's natural and normal for people in need to move towards an area where they might be able to access resources. However, a rapidly growing site can exacerbate public health and safety risks and delay or prevent closure. Carefully managing access to encampment information prevents sites from growing rapidly as unsheltered people in the community hear about a resolution at a particular site.

Hazard Protocols

When an encampment is identified, it should also be assessed to determine whether the location of the encampment triggers a hazard protocol. Hazard protocols are triggered when the location of a site creates an extreme risk of death or severe harm for residents. While any form of unsheltered homelessness significantly elevates a person's vulnerability to harm, a site receives a hazard designation when the risk of death or serious harm can be considered functionally constant and cannot be mitigated through a site stabilization approach. Examples of locations that would receive a hazard designation include highway or freeway on- and offramps, in the path of wildfires or other active natural disasters, or floodplains during rainy seasons.

Hazard designations should be used sparingly and only in cases without an alternative. For example, in one jurisdiction, an encampment was resolved under a hazard protocol because it was on a narrow onramp to a major freeway with no physical separation from vehicles.¹ However, another encampment situated on a broad strip of land between a neighborhood and a highway avoided a hazard designation due to an assessment by the state transportation department that found minimal risk in relationship to the traffic pattern and existing physical barriers. However, to ensure that a hazard designation wasn't necessary, the state agency worked with outreach partners to deploy temporary concrete barriers for additional protection of the encampment residents until the encampment could be successfully resolved.

If a hazard designation is unavoidable through other approaches to resident safety, it should be applied to an encampment. If a hazard designation is deemed unavoidable at that time the site immediately becomes the jurisdiction's priority site, and any other resolution operations and resource allocations are subordinated to completing the hazard protocol resolution. Therefore, in identifying encampments and creating a working map, jurisdictions should identify all hazard-designated encampments and address them *first* to avoid potential disruption to resolution timelines for other encampments.

Public Health Protocols

When an encampment is suspected of having a significant infestation or significant infectious disease, a public health protocol is activated. In this case, infestation means the presence of an unusually large number of insects or animals, typically sufficient to cause significant property damage or increase the risk or spread of disease. Examples include, but are not limited to, body lice, rats, mice, or other rodents. Infectious disease,

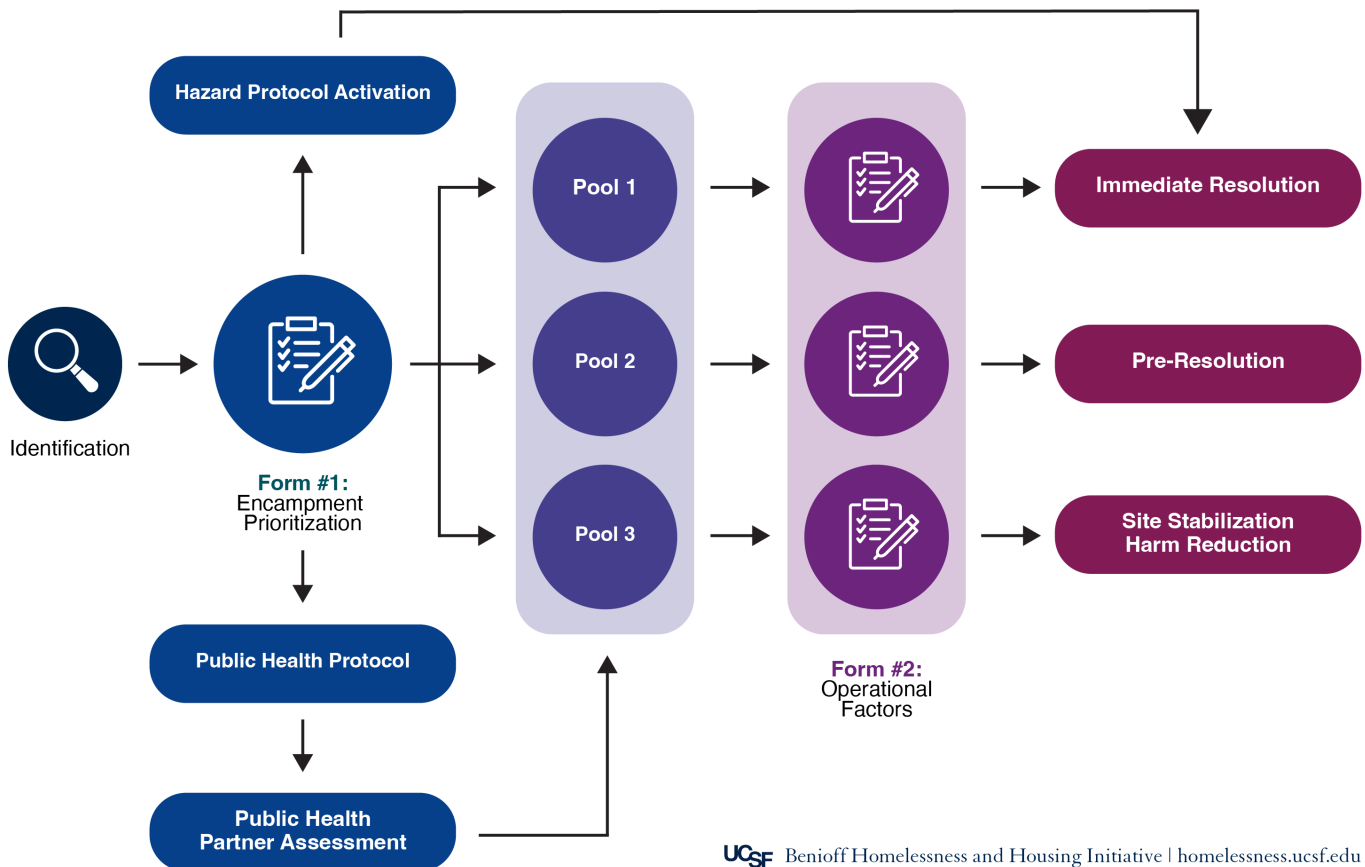
¹ This document describes real-life examples of specific actions at encampment resolutions. These examples are taken from the author's (Marc Dones) experience working to resolve encampments in their previous work.

in this case, refers to the presence of easily transmittable diseases that pose a significant risk to encampment residents and the surrounding neighborhood. Examples include, but are not limited to, shigella, tuberculosis, Hepatitis A, or covid-19.

If an encampment is suspected to meet either one of these criteria, then resolution operations should be suspended. A public health team should be deployed to assess and, if needed, respond to the situation. In many instances, significant infestation necessitates that property either be left behind or that residents have access to specialized tools to ensure that the infestation does not move indoors with them. Outreach teams may need to be prepared to coach clients through these conversations about items that cannot be saved.

Similarly, infectious diseases may necessitate field treatment or brief hospitalization to ensure that any threat of outbreak is contained *before* residents are transitioned to indoor locations. This protocol ensures that mass outbreaks do not unintendedly occur when residents from an encampment with a highly infectious disease are moved to multiple sites across a community.

Only public health staff with the appropriate clinical expertise should make the assessments, diagnoses, and subsequent decisions on what strategies are needed. Resolution operations can resume once the relevant public health or health services agency provides written notice that identified issues have been addressed. The identification and various pathways that it could launch are depicted in the Figure below.



Assessment

Resolution-classed encampments are then moved into an in-depth **assessment** phase conducted by skilled outreach teams in coordination with the Core Strategy Team. This stage involves developing a by-name list of every *person* who is living in the encampment and understanding the collective needs of each *household*. Where possible, “household” definitions should be expanded to refer to any group committed to moving into housing or shelter together. Legal relationship status is less important than understanding the nature of what social connections people have and are committed to maintaining as they transition inside. Sometimes, accepting shelter or housing placements may be contingent on maintaining these connections.

At the conclusion of the assessment phase, the outreach team must communicate to encampment residents that the by-name list is closed and new individuals and households can no longer be added. Encampment residents should be encouraged to share this information widely to prevent the site from growing after list closure and avoid the risks outlined above.

Operational Domains and Characteristics

During the assessment phase, outreach staff should also gather information on key operational characteristics of the encampment that will help determine what supports might best stabilize the encampment during resolution and what support residents might need to transition inside successfully. The operational domains evaluated are organization, size, population need, equity factors, and complexity. The five domains and the specific characteristics evaluated are in the table below. To understand how to use these fully, please see the prioritization tool.

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 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 the residents of an encampment are routinely engaged by outreach or supportive service providers. Low engagement would be receiving outreach support once per month or less. High engagement would be

		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 spread out or concentrated. This can be assessed by looking at whether residents are tightly organized in a small space or more diffuse across the site (whether large or small).

Equity Factors and Protocols

People from historically marginalized communities will often form encampments where they are the majority of the residents. This can also happen along gender lines with encampments that are mostly or entirely female-identified. When outreach workers

observe this phenomenon during the assessment phase, they should document it using Form #2 in the encampment prioritization tool. This activates an equity protocol where the Core Strategy Team should assess the staffing makeup of the outreach team in relation to the makeup of the encampment.

Changing which outreach staff are deployed to a site may be necessary in these situations. For example, encampments comprised primarily of women may have had negative experiences with men or male-presenting people and may develop more trusting relationships with women or female-presenting staff. This dynamic holds when encampments have a significant racial or ethnic makeup. The Core Strategy Team should be sensitive to encampments' equity concerns and cultural needs. Failure to do so can cause substantial delays in executing a successful resolution.

Planning

The next phase is **planning**. During this phase, two key activities take place: (1) the outreach team should develop service and housing plans for each household, and (2) the date for the encampment closure should be decided (based on available data) and communicated to encampment residents. Importantly, outreach teams should communicate this verbally and provide each resident with a detailed explanation of what support they will receive to transition inside successfully. Publicly posting the closure date should be driven by legal or community concerns and done in close coordination with the property owner. Posting should only occur once outreach staff confirms they have discussed in detail what closure means with encampment residents and what supports are available.

All household and individual plans should focus on surfacing residents' barriers to successful transitions inside. Example barriers include behavioral health support needs, substance use or recovery support needs, open warrants or other legal complications, or needs that restrict potential housing locations (such as transit to work). These barriers should then be brought into daily case conferencing meetings with the Core Strategy Team, who are responsible for identifying resources necessary to solve any obstacles to successfully transitioning to an indoor location for *every* household.

The Core Strategy Team must understand that their role is to resource solutions and eliminate barriers. Core Strategy Team members should adopt a cadence of identifying solutions to problems within 48 hours of being made aware. This allows outreach staff to quickly communicate these solutions to the individuals and households they work with. This is key to maintaining trust with encampment residents and ensuring the encampment can be closed by the established operational deadline.

Jurisdictions should maintain a housing-first orientation to their household planning. This means that, wherever possible, households should be moved directly into permanent housing. When this is not possible, households should be moved into temporary locations while attached to aggressive housing navigation supports that will rapidly move the household into permanent housing within a short time.

Drawdown

Once plans are in place for every household, the final phase is **drawdown**. The purpose of this phase is to move households into their housing and shelter placements. The primary focus is to transition each household into its placement location. The Core Strategy Team should collaborate with outreach staff to set daily goals, which consist of transitioning a certain number of households each day and working backward from the closure date to ensure that all encampment residents are moved out by the deadline.

During the final stage of drawdown, site mitigation begins, led by site-specific mitigation partners. Mitigation partners become fully active at the final stage of the resolution process. These partners focus on physically clearing and, if necessary, restoring the site. Mitigation activities may include trash disposal, hazardous waste disposal, landscaping, or other site security strategies. Mitigation should not begin before the drawdown phase, and full mitigation should be delayed until the drawdown ends and all residents have been relocated to their placements. Details on this timing are outlined in the operational protocol below.

Follow-up

After mitigation, the property owner (whether a government agency, business, or private citizen) must carefully consider how they will activate the site to prevent re-encampment. In an environment of limited resources and systems stretched to capacity, it is not feasible for the same sites to be continuously or repeatedly addressed through an encampment resolution approach. This tension often leads to people favoring sweeps instead of housing-oriented approaches. Moreover, when sites are repeatedly re-encamped, even if the residents are different, it damages public confidence in the government's capacity to respond meaningfully to the homelessness crisis.

Therefore, when a resolution is complete, property owners must activate the site to prevent it from being re-encamped. Because the focus of this operational protocol is not site activation, we will not detail the activation process here. However, property owners and communities should not assume that site activation only looks like fencing, boulders, or other hardscaping approaches. Numerous prosocial approaches to site activation are available, and property owners should work with landscape designers and urban planning specialists to identify pathways forward.

The timeline for an encampment resolution, not including mitigation or site activation, is typically 6-8 weeks. Larger encampments may take longer—for example, one resolution of an encampment with 90 residents using a similar protocol took approximately 10 weeks. Timelines should be adapted according to the size of an encampment and the overall complexity of needs among residents.

The Core Strategy Team and Key Partners

The Core Strategy Team serves as the ‘drivers’ of any encampment resolution. This team is responsible for evaluating information received from outreach teams and others and using this information to set prioritization, drive resource allocation, and resolve encampments. They are ultimately responsible for whether operations are successful and should be considered the accountable individuals for a jurisdiction’s effort to resolve encampments. Therefore, the Core Strategy Team should establish a clear internal governance model with a written charter. This model does not need to be complex; instead, it must focus on clarifying processes and procedures. Some important considerations are:

- What happens when members are absent or otherwise need to delegate authority? Does each member have an alternate, or is it impossible to delegate decision making?
- How are decisions made? By vote, or do members present their cases to a smaller group or singular decision maker?
- How does the group record decisions that set policy versus purely operational decisions? Do additional decision-makers need to be engaged in policy decisions?

As outlined above, this team should think of themselves primarily as problem solvers who resource solutions to problems surfaced by other teams, particularly the outreach team. Because of this responsibility, it should be a team of decision-makers, and delegation should be limited to ensure that daily meetings can effectively solve problems without requiring additional administrative work to connect with leadership and obtain approvals.

The majority of team members will participate in every encampment resolution. However, a subset will change depending on the characteristics of the encampment: the location, who owns the property or is responsible for maintaining it, and the characteristics of encampment residents (e.g., if the population has specific needs revealed through assessment).

Core Strategy Team Members

Continuum of Care (CoC) Leadership Representative

This representative should have the authority to approve using systemwide resources, such as prioritized Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) beds or temporary resources (including congregate, non-congregate, or interim housing placements). This member should be empowered to set a Coordinated Entry policy for encampments in collaboration with the CoC board or committee that maintains executive control.

Housing-Focused Service Providers

A small number of experienced housing providers should be part of the team. These providers should be able to support the placement and retention of key populations,

including people experiencing chronic homelessness, people with significant behavioral health needs, and/or people with criminal-legal system involvement.

Outreach Lead Agency

This agency will lead outreach activities and provide clear guidance and updates to the rest of the Core Strategy Team on the status of encampment residents. This agency is ultimately responsible for coordinating all on-the-ground activities, including assessment, development of the By-Name list, service plan development, and drawdown activities. Multiple outreach agencies may participate in these activities, particularly if the encampment residents have specific service needs. However, only one agency should function as the lead, acting as the coordinator of site activities and holding accountability for ensuring that they are completed.

Property Owner(s)

The owner(s) of the property where the encampment is situated should be available to attend the Core Strategy Team meetings at any given point for the duration of the resolution. While these individuals may not need to participate in every meeting, they must be available to discuss any relevant interim activities that might need to happen to the property to increase the safety and stability of encampment residents and the surrounding community during the planning phase. These could include installing temporary lighting, fencing, portable toilets, or other temporary hygiene support. Additionally, engaging property owners will be necessary for any mitigation activities and to drive post-resolution site activation.

Law Enforcement Representative

Law enforcement plays a critical role in the Core Strategy Team as an **information partner rather than an enforcement partner**. In many instances, people experiencing homelessness have been engaged by the criminal-legal system in ways that prevent them from accessing housing resources. These criminal-legal system barriers can be as simple as unpaid fines or as complicated as open cases with bench warrants. In many instances, people may not be fully aware of all the legal barriers they face or have access to up-to-date information on the status of their cases. A trusted law enforcement partner can assist in helping outreach teams gather information and coordinate with the Core Strategy Team on how to address these so they do not prevent people from moving indoors by the time the encampment is scheduled for closure. Additional information on the suggested structure of this relationship is detailed in the following section on working with law enforcement.

Mitigation Partners

Depending on the profile and physical attributes of the site, mitigation partners will vary. The property owner should select these partners, and while they can attend meetings for the duration of the operation, they are only needed once the drawdown phase has begun. During drawdown, mitigation partners should be present and engaged in planning for full site mitigation once the residents have moved out.

Parks Department Representative (if needed)

Parks departments should be included if the land involved is otherwise operated as a park of the jurisdiction.

Other Impacted Partners (if needed)

Other partner agencies from the jurisdiction may include transit agencies, businesses, or private property owners. These partners should be included only if they have a legal connection to the property where the encampment is sited or if they will support the resolution through resource allocation. If they will be responsible only for site mitigation or activation after the resolution concludes, they do not need to participate in daily Core Strategy Team meetings.

Health Services Representative (if needed)

Health services agencies that can support street medicine, respite care, and connection to acute or urgent primary care are often helpful when encampments have a high number of medically vulnerable individuals. Information gathered on residents' needs during the assessment phase should determine whether a health services partner is necessary to execute the resolution successfully.

Working with Law Enforcement

The role of law enforcement in any homeless services endeavor should be approached with care and sensitivity. Among unsheltered people experiencing homelessness, negative interactions with law enforcement are common, and these can involve threats of arrest, seizure of belongings, or even violence. In the California Statewide Study of People Experiencing Homelessness, UCSF researchers found that approximately half (45%) of unsheltered people living outdoors had experienced a sweep in the last six months, and over half (52%) had experienced being roughed up by police during their current episode of homelessness. Because many jurisdictions enforce bans on public camping through involuntary displacements or sweeps, encampment residents may be skeptical or fearful of the presence of law enforcement in an encampment resolution.

Creating clear agreements and working with a law enforcement partner to provide trauma-informed, housing-focused services can lead to strong collaboration and resource sharing. The Core Strategy Team should be clear about the roles and responsibilities of a law enforcement partner. This role should generally focus on helping the Core Strategy Team get the information and resources needed to house people, not deploying law enforcement directly to the encampment.

This relationship requires building trust with law enforcement agencies and having clear protocols about how information is shared and what will be done with that information. **A clear policy must outline how law enforcement participation in the Core Strategy Team is entirely contingent on the willingness of these agencies to abide by the non-enforcement nature of the partnership.**

As noted in the encampment resolution overview, a law enforcement partner can be especially helpful during a resolution's assessment and planning phases. During the assessment phase, they can assist with voluntary background checks to identify housing barriers that may impede efforts to help a household enter permanent or interim housing. Identifying that a household has an open warrant or a serious criminal conviction history, such as an arson conviction or sex offender status, is crucial given the likelihood that many housing providers deny applicants based on this information alone, often as a matter of statutory or regulatory compliance. During the planning phase, law enforcement partners often have the resources (large vans, etc.) to provide transportation assistance, helping outreach workers take multiple residents to view housing sites or visit government offices (i.e., DMV, Social Security) to obtain documentation. Additionally, these agencies often have access to (or contracted support from agencies with access to) tow trucks or flatbed trucks that can transport vehicles and RVs to storage areas on behalf of encampment residents.

Whenever an individual or household has criminal-legal system involvement that will serve as a significant barrier (e.g., bench warrants), or if an encampment resident displays behavior that raises serious safety concerns, the Core Strategy Team must be notified immediately of the issue to be solved.

Through the collaborative work of encampment resolution, a law enforcement partner may become aware of a resident's open warrant. Although they may be equipped with the resident's location and able to give the order for that person's arrest, doing so would seriously undermine the goals of the overall resolution process and violate the working agreement between law enforcement and the Core Strategy Team. This action would significantly damage encampment residents' trust in outreach workers to effectively transition inside. Through the vehicle of the Core Strategy Team, outreach teams and law enforcement must be able to work together to assist people involved with the criminal-legal system in addressing any issues proactively. Wherever possible, this proactive orientation should be enacted with supportive services rather than punishment.

In rare instances, law enforcement officers are needed to protect encampment residents from outside threats. When law enforcement partners provide safety and protection for encampment residents, just as they would for housed residents, the results can impact the community and build trust. For example, during one encampment resolution, a law enforcement partner provided overnight security for an encampment when a resident received threats from someone with a weapon who did not live in the encampment. Responsive actions like these can help facilitate safe transitions into housing and build community trust.

Deploying Skilled Outreach Teams

Skilled outreach is the engine on which encampment resolutions run. This section outlines some ways outreach teams must engage to successfully resolve encampments.

Site Stabilization During Resolution

During the first two weeks of an encampment resolution, the primary goal should be to 'lower the temperature' or diffuse tensions and relational stress.

Skilled outreach team members are a vital part of this process, establishing rapport with encampment residents and gaining a sense of what is happening in the physical and social environment. In any given encampment, people may be in acute crisis, struggling to address behavioral health conditions, medical problems, safety concerns, or other needs that have grown unmanageable without skilled help. The job of any outreach team member in this first period is to strategically assess and reduce these problems, freeing up residents' cognitive and emotional capacity to think about and imagine possibilities for moving inside.

Once the team has some insight into the encampment dynamics, they should begin identifying and addressing any immediate, significant concerns at both the individual and encampment-wide levels. If the outreach team does not have the information or resources necessary to respond to the need, these issues should be raised to the Core Strategy Team for resourcing.

For example, in one encampment resolution, a resident had a severe skin abscess related to an untreated medical condition. The pain and stress of this worsening problem made it difficult for them to focus on anything else or even hold a conversation about moving out of the encampment. Outreach team members connected this person with medical support, and even while still in the early stages of treatment, they were open to discussing and working on a plan for housing because of effective pain management and significantly increased trust.

In another resolution, residents complained to Outreach Team members of feeling unsafe due to nearby gang activity and frequent gun violence. They also raised concerns about having access to hygiene supports, including toilets. In response to these concerns, the Core Strategy Team worked with the property owner (in this case, another government agency) to install temporary lighting and fencing. Portable restrooms were deployed at one end of the encampment, along with a temporary dumpster for trash disposal. These simple interventions assisted encampment residents in feeling safe, helped lower stress among the group, and allowed people to focus on their upcoming transitions inside.

Working in coordination to temporarily address significant individual or group stressors can help encampment residents become emotionally and cognitively prepared to make

meaningful choices about where they will live and how they will get their needs met as they move indoors.

Maintain Consistency of Outreach Teams

Having a consistent group of outreach team members working at the encampment site throughout the resolution process is critical. Consistency is necessary to build relationships and rapport with encampment residents, and swapping out teams can be detrimental to the resolution process. Building a foundation of trust and communication with residents can allow team members to de-escalate conflict, provide reassurance to overwhelmed residents, and ensure a smoother process, especially over the final days of the drawdown period.

Outreach team members and other key staff should expect to visit the site on a consistent schedule over the course of the resolution process.

Lead With Transparency and Trust

Being transparent with residents about what is happening is one way to strengthen relationships and build trust. **Throughout an encampment resolution, team members should be ready to share a clear message about the intentions for this process: to close the encampment, move people inside, and clear the site.** The message shared with residents should remain consistent, direct, and straightforward.

Connecting encampment residents with tangible resources from the beginning of a resolution process is essential. Team members should arrive at the site with basic outreach items: snacks, water, basic hygiene supplies, and information. These standard outreach tools prompt engagement and can help convey a clear message of service and support. For some residents, experiencing a simple act of assistance (for example, receiving a new pair of socks and a hygiene kit) can make the team's message of support more credible.

Outreach staff should also have the core competencies of trauma-informed care, motivational interviewing, and harm reduction.

Remain Focused on Housing as the Goal

While some community outreach teams focus on street-based harm reduction, the skilled outreach team in an encampment resolution must remain focused on housing residents. All outreach workers' activity must feed into a broader housing plan for each household. This requires that outreach members possess solid relational skills and the ability to triage and navigate obstacles (or escalate them to the Core Strategy Team), always engaging residents in a focused effort to move towards shelter or permanent housing.

Working with Encampments that are Not Prioritized: Other Ways to Use Site Stabilization Strategies

In any resource-constrained system, some actions will need to be prioritized, and, as a result, some actions will be delayed. This is the fundamental nature of administrative decision making and it can be particularly complicated when scarcity prolongs a person’s experience of unsheltered homelessness. However, communities must figure out how to navigate this scarcity in the interim while developing the capacity necessary to avoid making scarcity-driven decisions.

To accomplish that, communities should develop clear response strategies for encampments that are not actively prioritized for resolution. These response strategies should **not** involve involuntary displacement responses or ‘sweeps.’ Still, they should rely on skilled housing-focused outreach services that can assist people in resolving their episodes of homelessness even if the encampment they live in is not currently receiving the systemwide resource dedication that a resolution brings.

Additionally, jurisdictions can ‘stabilize’ encampments to reduce the harms of unsheltered homelessness and friction with the surrounding neighborhood. Site stabilization involves skilled outreach workers identifying needs at encampments and working to get temporary support to alleviate these needs. Ideally, site stabilization approaches the needs of the encampment residents and the neighborhood holistically. For example, if trash pickup happens at the encampment on the same day it happens for the rest of the neighborhood, then *everyone* benefits from less garbage and a lower risk of infestation and disease. The table below outlines common encampment issues and corresponding stabilizing techniques.

Issue	Stabilizing Strategy
Trash	Provide refuse bins or a dumpster for residents to use and connect it to the route that serves the (nearest) neighborhood so that trash is collected at least once per week.
Biological Waste / Hygiene	Provide portable restrooms and/or portable hygiene stations.
Substance Use Paraphernalia	Provide sharps disposal containers and equip outreach staff with harm reduction training and supplies.
Uncontrolled fires	Work with encampment residents to identify opportunities to improve fire safety. These could include moving sleeping spaces away from cooking fires or working with outreach workers to dispose of propane tanks.
Safety	Where possible install temporary lighting or temporary fencing. The goal of safety measures should always be to increase the

	sense of safety that everyone in the community feels (both encampment residents and the surrounding neighborhood).
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These responses should be provided in addition to the usual support that a skilled outreach team would provide, including food, potable water, and limited medical service.

The focus of site stabilization is to reduce harm and ease the friction that unsheltered homelessness can create in our communities while other encampments are resolved. It should not be understood to be the same as creating sanctioned encampments or as a replacement strategy for resourcing the community so that it has the necessary housing and shelter.

Model Encampment Resolution: Operational Protocol

This section can be used to structure encampment resolutions. Refer to the sections above for additional information on each section or to understand the key dimensions of certain partnerships. Use **this** section to plan and execute resolutions.

I. Identification

Action: Prioritization Tool

When: Before beginning an Encampment Resolution Process

Who: Core Strategy Team and Outreach Team

Description: Members of the Core Strategy Team should utilize the [Prioritization Tool](#) to determine the prioritization level of the encampment.

II. Assessment

Action 1: Develop By-Name List

When: Weeks 1 and 2

Who: Core Strategy Team and Outreach Team

Description: The by-name list is a comprehensive list of each household residing in the encampment. The list should include name(s), age(s), gender, race or ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status if available, history of homelessness, known disabilities or health concerns, and any other information pertinent to their successful transition to interim or permanent housing. It uses information collected with the consent of encampment residents and should be updated regularly. The by-name list should include *anyone* living in the encampment.

To develop this list, the outreach team must establish working relationships with encampment residents. Team members should pay careful attention to the current and emerging needs of encampment residents, noting any challenges or obstacles that could prevent residents from successfully moving inside within the desired timeframe and prioritizing these for follow-up during the Planning phase. The by-name list should include *anyone* living in the encampment.

Action 2: Assess the Housing-Related Needs of Each Household

When: Weeks 1 and 2

Who: Outreach Team

Description: Outreach team members conduct interviews with each household on the by-name list to gather information about their needs. The focus of these interviews should be to understand clearly what each household needs to transition to interim or permanent housing. This information should create the foundation for an individualized plan to address these needs strategically and within the desired timeframe, and thus should be almost entirely housing focused. For example, it is helpful to know if they have a pet or intend to get a pet in the near term; however, it is not relevant to an individual's housing journey to

understand that they love Pokémon (although it may help build rapport). Outreach teams should orient interviews towards understanding people's needs and desires as they pertain to housing and *staying* housed.

Action 3: Closure of the By-Name List

When: End of Week 2

Who: Outreach Team and Core Strategy Team

Description: Once the outreach team is confident that it has performed a thorough census of all encampment residents the by-name List is closed, and no one is added to it without an explicit approval of the Core Strategy Team. Anyone who takes up residence in the encampment **after** the list is closed will not be guaranteed a housing or shelter placement. The date of list closure and what it means should be discussed with encampment residents.

Additionally, once the list closes, that information should be communicated to outreach teams that support people experiencing homelessness in the jurisdiction. This clear and transparent communication reduces any sudden inflow into the site. Once the list is closed, any new residents should be offered outreach support and housing-focused case management but should **not** be guaranteed a placement.

Despite these practices, a small number of people may seek resources at the encampment. The Core Strategy Team should maintain a small 'overflow' placement availability list for every site.

III. Planning

Action 1: Begin Daily Case Conferencing

When: Week 3

Who: Core Strategy Team, Outreach Team Lead, and other partners as indicated, according to encampment characteristics and resident needs.

Description: During this meeting, attendees should discuss and develop individualized plans to address the unresolved needs of each household with the objective of entering interim or permanent housing, discuss the status of households on the by-name list, provide critical updates, identify barriers and their appropriate solutions, and make progress toward each household moving into housing at the end of the resolution process.

Housing resources available through Coordinated Entry, housing-focused service agencies, and the CoC system at large should be identified and presented to the group regularly to ensure that residents connect with suitable placement options.

At this point, it may be useful to work with law enforcement partners to conduct voluntary background checks for household members. These background checks

are useful to identify housing barriers that may impede efforts to help a household enter permanent or interim housing. Identifying that a household has an open warrant or a serious criminal conviction history, such as an arson conviction or sex offender status, can be crucial given the likelihood that a housing provider will deny applicants based on this information alone.

Action 2: Develop Service Plans for Each Household and Follow Up

When: Weeks 3 and 4

Who: Outreach Team

Description: In coordination with updates from daily case conferencing meetings, outreach team members should connect frequently with encampment residents to develop and act on individualized plans. This may require completing required steps for residents to connect with Coordinated Entry, including service priority evaluations or assessments.

Outreach team members may coordinate with law enforcement partners or other resourced agencies to arrange transportation to government offices to obtain identification or documentation, including from DMV or Social Security.

Action 3: Notify Residents of Encampment Closure Date

When: By end of Week 4

Who: Outreach Team

Description: The purpose of an encampment closure date is to reduce the number of new move-ins at the encampment site, thus ensuring that everyone on the by-name list is accounted for and connected with housing.

Without posting written signs, outreach team members should begin notifying residents via verbal conversations that the by-name list will be closing soon, and no others will be added to it after the closure date. Outreach teams should remind residents how much time remains before the encampment site will be fully cleared and that no new residents will be able to live there. Posting written signs should be done only if there is an operational or legal need to do so.

Action 4: Continue Daily Case Planning Meetings, Developing Service Plans, and Follow Up

When: Weeks 4 and 5

Who: Core Strategy Team, Outreach Team

Description: As the drawdown phase gets closer, the outreach team should begin discussions with residents about their belongings and what to bring to their new residences. The outreach team should have candid discussions about which items cannot be taken to their new housing (for example, used mattresses or upholstered furniture present a severe risk of bedbugs) or which items are too large and must be left behind. If necessary, the outreach team can plan for storage with the resident, but team members must be clear that this resolution process is different from an involuntary removal or sweep; non-hazardous belongings left at

the site will be considered discarded and are not required to be temporarily stored. Temporary storage may be offered as an option to residents who have a strong emotional attachment to items and discarding them would interfere with their ability to accept a housing or shelter placement. Team members should inventory the number and size of items that will need to be transported on moving day and work with the Core Strategy Team to make sure the appropriate support is in place.

During case planning meetings, attendees should continue identifying residents' needs, developing and following up on plans to connect each household with a housing option. At this point, it may be useful to work with the law enforcement partner or a similarly resourced agency to transport outreach workers and residents to view potential housing sites. The outreach team should prioritize housing tours to reduce anxiety among residents and establish a sense of where they will be moving to—even if the placement will be temporary.

Conversations between the outreach team and residents, and within daily case conferencing meetings, should focus on ensuring detailed plans for the Drawdown phase. Moves should take place over the course of several days (discussed in detail below in section IV) and outreach team members should ensure that linked households and groups are scheduled for move-out on the same day. Outreach team members should develop detailed plans for move-out dates and transportation accordingly.

A note about residential treatment and mental health hospitalization: Some residents may have contemplated entering hospitalization or residential treatment to address behavioral health concerns. Frequently, homelessness is a barrier to entering such programs because, upon exit, the individual has no place to live and safely maintain their recovery. However, the flexibility of individualized case planning during resolutions allows outreach teams to connect a resident with both residential treatment or hospitalization *and* housing. In cases like these, team members can connect the resident to a program, move their belongings to the housing site ahead of time, and arrange for the resident to go there upon completion of treatment.

IV. Drawdown

Action 1: Begin Moving Residents Inside

When: Begin by Week 5

Who: Outreach Team

Description: Moves should take place over the course of several days, with special attention to households with more complex situations that require additional time and assistance. In a given day, teams can arrange moving and transportation for a maximum of 5-6 households with minimal needs, or 1-2 households with complex needs.

As residents move out and clear space in the encampment, it may seem practical to begin light mitigation of the site to clear discarded items from the areas that are vacated, but approach this with caution. Fully clearing unused spaces may highlight the availability of space in the encampment, thus encouraging new residents to move in. (Recall that because the by-name list was closed during the planning phase, new residents will not have the same opportunity to work with the outreach team to connect with interim or permanent housing.) If necessary, only remove items that require immediate attention, create an urgent health hazard, or attract pests. Otherwise, leave things in place to be cleared after the final move and when the mitigation crews arrive.

As the final moving day approaches, remind everyone that items left behind by residents will not be stored, and other arrangements must be made to move specified items to off-site storage.

Action 2: Final Moving Day / Conduct Full Site Mitigation

When: Begin once residents have left the site; typically, by 11am on final moving day

Who: Mitigation Partners

Description: Begin planning the final moving day by setting an operational deadline for when the last residents will have departed the site for their placements. Typically, it's best to set this time for midmorning to allow mitigation and site activation crews to begin working and to ensure that the site will not be re-encamped overnight. We recommend setting a deadline of 11am for the final residents to depart the site. Ensure any residents who remain on site are aware that it will be fully closed at that time and have the last set of transportation vehicles on site by early morning (i.e. 8am if the deadline is 11am).

The outreach team should be ready to provide adequate coaching and support to residents who are moving on the last day, as the households moving on this day are likely to experience more anxiety.

On this day or in the preceding 48 hours, it should be clear what resources the team can offer to any residents who arrived *after* the by-name list closed. The outreach team should make sure these households have each been offered a resource (often, this will be a shelter or an interim placement) and notified that they will still need to leave the site by the deadline if they do not accept this offer.

Once the last resident who has accepted a placement has departed the site, the human services portion of the operation is complete. Outreach staff should withdraw from the site and full mitigation resources may be deployed. Mitigation resources may require heavy machinery (bulldozers, etc.) and crews should be instructed that anything that remains at the site has been consciously discarded and can be considered trash. For this reason, this resolution protocol

emphasizes ensuring that households are consistently informed that items left behind on site will not automatically be stored (as is sometimes promised during involuntary displacement operations). Mitigation teams should dispose of everything that has developed at the site: debris, discarded items, waste, etc.

V. Follow Up

Action: Prevent Site Re-encampment

When: Immediately after the site is resolved; should take place at least 3x/week

Who: Outreach Team

Description: The time it takes for a site to be reactivated can vary from months to years. In part, this depends on the route a jurisdiction chooses to prevent site reactivation. While many will choose to harden the site by installing hostile architecture, including fences, boulders, or other large items or structures to prevent camping, we encourage jurisdictions to think about creative and prosocial solutions to re-encampment prevention. These solutions include facilitating creative reuse of a site: conversion to a community space, skate parks, or other similar purposes.

Preventing re-encampment is critical to building public trust in the encampment resolution process. Sites must be monitored regularly by outreach teams to prevent re-encampment, preferably around three times per week. If a fence lock is cut, it should be repaired immediately. If someone begins living at the site, the outreach team should immediately connect with them. Prioritize connecting with any individual or group that appears at the site after the encampment is closed and cleared. The outreach team should provide clear communication that this site is not a place they can stay, offer housing-focused resources, and repeat this as needed. In most cases, outreach teams can successfully redirect newcomers without any need to involve additional team members.

Glossary

Activation

Targeted strategies deployed after an encampment resolution by property owners to prevent re-encampment at a given site. These often involve hardscaping to prevent or deter encampments, including installation of boulders and/or fencing. This guide recommends property owners collaborate with community partners, including landscape design or urban planning specialists, to pursue innovative or prosocial site activation approaches.

By-Name List

Comprehensive list of each household residing in the encampment. The list should include their name/s, age/s, history of homelessness, known disabilities or health concerns, and any other information pertinent to their successful transition to interim or permanent housing. It uses information collected with the consent of encampment residents and should be updated regularly.

Closure

Designated date, during the planning phase and before the drawdown phase of an encampment resolution, after which the By-Name List is closed to new residents. The intention is to reduce the number of people who move into an encampment after the closure date so that all residents present during the drawdown phase are connected with and move into housing.

Continuum of Care

Homelessness service system and planning body, convened at the local or regional level to coordinate funding for housing and services. A Continuum of Care (CoC) develops community-based solutions to homelessness and applies collaboratively for federal funding (via the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, also known as HUD). A CoC is comprised of a range of stakeholders, including service provider agencies, affiliated community organizations, government partners, and healthcare systems.

Coordinated Entry

Centralized intake and assessment system, operated and coordinated by each Continuum of Care, designed to connect households experiencing homelessness with housing and services. A coordinated entry system relies on a comprehensive assessment and prioritization system to manage household placements into available housing resources, including Permanent Supportive Housing.

Daily Case Conferencing / Daily Case Planning

Daily meeting where all members of the Core Strategy Team discuss the status of households on the by-name list, provide critical updates, strategize, and make progress towards each household moving into housing at the end of the resolution process.

Drawdown phase

Phase during a resolution when encampment residents' moves to housing take place and the mitigation phase to clear the site can begin.

Encampment

Outside locations where a group of five or more people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have established residence, often using tents or makeshift shelters. Locations may include vacant lots, sidewalks, highway overpasses, parks, or natural areas.

Harm Reduction

Non-coercive service approach or philosophy, typically used to address substance use, which focuses on the immediate safety of people at risk of harm or injury.

Household

Individual or group of individuals (i.e., a couple or family) that plans to live together in the same housing unit.

Housing Barriers

Legal or financial barriers to obtaining housing. These include criminal-legal system involvement (e.g., recent convictions, open warrants), recent evictions, or property debt.

Mitigation

Complete clearing of the encampment after all residents have moved off site and into housing to remove and dispose of debris, waste, and other objects left at the site. This process may require heavy machinery and collaboration with local waste management.

Motivational Interviewing

Clinical approach to address behavior change, often utilized by behavioral health providers or social services providers. In essence, working with someone towards making a change by listening, being non-judgmental and non-coercive, understanding their needs and concerns, and empowering them with choices.

Permanent Supportive Housing

Evidence-based solution to homelessness consisting of a model where participants are placed in a housing unit that is permanently affordable (no time limit) through some form of ongoing rent assistance and/or public subsidy, and where voluntary support services are provided to the resident. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs may be designed to address the needs of a specific population, e.g. veterans, people with disabilities, etc. and may leverage partnerships between multiple service agencies, health systems, and government partners to deliver robust programming.

Prioritization

Process of assessing an encampment to determine its priority level within coordinated efforts to transition encampment residents into stable housing (permanent or interim). This process allows communities to stage resolution operations and facilitate interagency clarity on what activities are needed at a given site.

Re-encampment

When a site where an encampment was previously resolved becomes the site of another encampment, which can happen gradually or within a short period of time if the resolved site is left unmonitored. Various approaches exist to avoid re-encampment; this guide recommends regular monitoring and engagement by outreach teams (see Encampment Resolution Protocol).

Resolution

Collaborative, multi-agency process to address unsheltered encampments by strategically connecting all residents with housing and services before clearing the site.

Sweep/ Involuntary Displacement

Process by which encampment residents are forcibly evicted, typically led by law enforcement and mitigation crews. Residents may be given advance notice of the eviction date, and those who remain at the site may face arrest and seizure of belongings.

Shelter

Non-permanent lodging where people experiencing homelessness can meet basic needs, including sleeping quarters, hygiene facilities, and meals (or areas to prepare food). Shelter may include congregate facilities, where large numbers of participants reside in shared quarters; non-congregate shelter, where participants have private rooms (frequently in a converted motel setting) or studios; placement in a tiny home; or other short-term program. Some non-permanent programs included above may also be referred to as interim housing, serving as a step between congregate shelter and permanent housing, and these models frequently include supportive services to transition households into permanent housing.

Trauma-informed

Service approach that prioritizes understanding and responding to the impacts of trauma. When working with people experiencing homelessness, a trauma-informed approach recognizes that disruptive or uncooperative behavior may be a trauma response and takes steps to anticipate a person's needs and address them with empathy and assistance.

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