



RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

Supporting People Experiencing
Homelessness In The City Of Cincinnati

MAY 2019

HOW MIGHT WE
**SUPPORT PEOPLE
EXPERIENCING
HOMELESSNESS
WHO ARE
UNWILLING OR
UNABLE TO GO
TO SHELTERS?**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



In July 2018, the city of Cincinnati was embroiled in controversy surrounding dozens of people living beneath the I-75 overpass and along Third Street in downtown Cincinnati without housing. The public response clearly communicated to the city that they needed to **build trust with the homeless community and increase support to reduce homelessness.**

Between December 2018 and May 2019, the City of Cincinnati hired a local nonprofit firm, Design Impact (DI), to identify recommendations and ideas for the city to **better support people experiencing homelessness who are unwilling or unable to go to shelters.**

PROCESS

The project was led by a working group made up of diverse stakeholders, including people with lived experience around homelessness. To ensure the recommendations were relevant, realistic, and sustainable, DI invited people experiencing homelessness, service providers, and decision-makers to be part of the working group. In addition, DI conducted phone interviews and a focus group with people

experiencing homelessness, service providers, and frontline workers from social service agencies to learn about the context, barriers, and opportunities related to homelessness in Cincinnati.

The interview and focus group data was reviewed and organized into major themes. The themes were presented to the working group as potential areas for new policies, procedures, and recommendations, which were then verified and prioritized by the working group.

Afterward, the working group invited other stakeholders to generate ideas on the prioritized themes as an opportunity for people who typically lack decision-making power to sit at the same table and share ideas with people who hold traditional authority.

DI shared the top ideas with 20 people experiencing homelessness. The group's feedback and new ideas shaped the final recommendations. In total, 15 service providers and 38 people who had or currently experience homelessness were engaged throughout this process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The working group developed a number of recommendations for the City of Cincinnati to support people who are unwilling or unable to go to shelters. These recommendations were divided into two categories: **1) program and service; and 2) policy and procedure.**

PROGRAM AND SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Create affordable efficiency units.
2. Conduct a comprehensive needs study for people experiencing homelessness.
3. Reopen and refresh Findlay Park.
4. Create flexible shelter policies with low barriers to entry.
5. Offer flexible, unrestricted funds to address unmet needs.
6. Hire people who experienced homelessness as outreach workers.
7. Create a resource guide and directory of service providers.
8. Develop a universal database for service providers.
9. Provide shuttle service to administrative offices.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish an ongoing funding stream to support permanent supportive housing.
2. Establish empathic policing practices and develop accountability measures related to homelessness.
3. Update existing quantitative evaluation metrics that inform funding to include measurements around the quality of life at shelters.
4. Develop and implement regulations and practices that protect people experiencing homelessness.
5. Create a "Reverse Lobby Day" to bring policy makers directly to the voice of people experiencing homelessness.
6. Conduct a study to analyze the effectiveness of the CAP (Central Access Point) line.
7. Establish an ongoing homeless working group.

INTRODUCTION

PROJECT BACKGROUND

During the summer of 2018, people experiencing homelessness established large encampments in downtown Cincinnati. The “homeless camps,” located along Third Street and under the I-75 overpass, attracted significant media attention and spurred a large community response. While homelessness has always existed in Cincinnati, the encampment brought the issue to the forefront and divided city leaders, residents, business owners, and camp inhabitants. The City of Cincinnati dissolved the encampments. However, the resulting tension emphasized the City’s need to build trust with the homeless community and increase efforts to better support people who are unwilling or unable to go to homeless shelters.

In July 2018, council members Tamaya Dennard and Greg Landsman put forth a motion to establish a “**homeless working group**” that could identify short-term and long-term recommendations for the city. Through a Request for Proposal process, the City hired Design Impact as an outside consultant in December to facilitate and convene this working group. Over the course of five months (January-May 2019) multiple conversations and interactive meetings took place to lift up the voices and experiences of people experiencing homelessness who cannot or will not go to shelters. These conversations informed the creation of this report.

PROJECT ROLES

Design Impact

Design Impact is a nonprofit social innovation firm with deep experience facilitating social change processes. They collaborate with community members, organizations, and local leaders to apply creative and inclusive approaches to design new ways forward on complex challenges. Their approach combines best practices in social change, human-centered design, and leadership development to address system-wide inequity. To date, they have partnered with community leaders on over 400 social design projects nationwide that span multiple sectors including community health, early education, community development, and food access. In 2017 their work engaged nearly 2,000 local leaders and community members.

Homeless Working Group

Historically, city leaders have addressed issues related to homelessness by establishing responses, policies, and procedures that prioritized the concerns and needs of business owners and homeowners.

The homeless task force was intentionally established to bring a diverse group of stakeholders together with different perspectives and experiences. City leaders worked directly with people experiencing homelessness to elevate the voices of the community most affected by future recommendations. This community-centered approach helps ensure ideas are not only more equitable, but also rooted in authentic community voice.



DEFINING THE TARGET POPULATION

The City of Cincinnati and DI limited the focus of this project to the needs and experiences of people experiencing homelessness who are **unwilling or unable to go to shelters**. We considered the following factors in defining this target population based on interviews from service providers and people experiencing homelessness.

- **Substance and/or alcohol addiction**
- **Mental illness**
- **Shelter restrictions against sex offenders**
- **Bans from shelters for past behavior**
- **Restraints and/or limited space for couples**
- **Families that don't want to be split up**
- **Restrictive rules at shelters**
- **Unwelcoming environment and/or staff at shelters**
- **Anxiety**
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**
- **The need (or desire) to be alone**
- **Pet ownership**
- **Safety concerns**

PROJECT PROCESS



CONTEXT AND DISCOVERY

Throughout January and February 2019, DI conducted nine phone interviews with service providers and frontline workers from social service agencies and facilitated a focus group with eight people experiencing homelessness to learn about the context, barriers, and opportunities related to those unwilling or unable to go to shelters in Cincinnati.

These initial calls and focus group provided foundational information and insight into the realities and struggles people experiencing homelessness face on a daily basis. In March, this data was reviewed and organized into ten major themes. *See appendix on page 25 to review the themes.*



HOMELESS WORKING GROUP DATA REVIEW

On April 4, 2019, DI presented these emerging themes to the homeless working group as potential areas for new policies, procedures, and recommendations. The working group verified and prioritized the themes.

The session was divided into two 90-minute meetings, first with people currently or previously experiencing homelessness; second with service providers and other stakeholders. *Note: Creating a comfortable and safe space where people could openly share their experiences without any fear of losing services meant keeping the groups separate. This meeting structure allowed important conversation and dialogue to unfold.*

In total, 17 people participated: six people experiencing homelessness and 11 service providers/stakeholders.

After reviewing all ten themes, both groups aligned on three to prioritize:

- **Broken collaboration**
- **Limited funding**
- **Need to support mental illness and addiction**

See appendix on page 25 for the complete list of themes and supporting data points.

The groups created an additional theme: **affordable housing**, emphasizing that without access to affordable housing, other ideas and solutions would be ineffective. In addition, people experiencing homelessness made it clear that the ideas must treat people as humans, with dignity and respect.



HOMELESS WORKING GROUP IDEA GENERATION

On April 17, 2019 the working group met with service providers, stakeholders, and people experiencing homelessness to generate new ideas and strategies. The ideas would be used by the city to support people experiencing homelessness who are unwilling or unable to go to shelters.

DI created a space where people who normally wouldn't be at the same table generating ideas could sit side-by-side for honest, open, and authentic interactions. Together, the group came up with both short-term and long-term solutions (*see page 10*).

In total, 24 people participated: 12 service providers and stakeholders and 12 people experiencing homelessness.



IDEA FEEDBACK

Following the session, DI shared the top ideas with a focus group of approximately 20 people experiencing homelessness at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church's Bridge Ministry Bible study and lunch program.

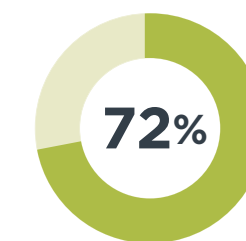
The focus group provided valuable input, feedback, and new ideas to help shape the final recommendations.



RECOMMENDATION DEVELOPMENT

DI took all of the ideas that emerged throughout the process and (with some refinement and editing) captured them into this final report.

All of the ideas are grouped into two categories: program and service recommendations and policy and procedure recommendations. The program and service recommendations were developed directly from the working group. These ideas rely on partnership with existing organizations and agencies in the community. The policy and procedure recommendations emerged organically throughout the process and highlight ideas the city can directly (and immediately) influence.



Nearly three-quarters of people engaged on this project were people with lived experience around homelessness. A total of **15 service providers** and **38 people who had or currently experienced homelessness** participated during this process.

PROGRAM AND SERVICE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were developed for programs and social services based on ideas and feedback from the working group. These recommendations highlight a high-level estimate for the **time** required to implement. The suggested timeline needs to be confirmed by the stakeholders responsible for activating the recommendations.

- IMMEDIATE: WITHIN ONE YEAR
- SHORT TERM: UP TO TWO YEARS
- LONG TERM: MORE THAN TWO YEARS

The program and service ideas fell into four main categories:



Affordable Housing

How might we increase the number of affordable housing units in Cincinnati?

Two recommendations fall under this theme:

1. Create Affordable Efficiency Units
2. Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Study for People Experiencing Homelessness



Mental Health and Addiction

How might we better support people experiencing homelessness and mental illness and/or addiction?

Two recommendations fall under this theme:

3. Reopen and Refresh Findlay Park
4. Create Flexible Shelter Policies With Low Barriers to Entry



Strategic Budgeting

How might we reimagine the way we fund organizations in a way that allows for greater flexibility to focus on their mission?

Two recommendations fall under this theme:

5. Offer Flexible, Unrestricted Funds to Address Unmet Needs
6. Hire People who Experienced Homelessness as Outreach Workers



Collaboration

How might we build better bridges among organizations with shared mission to address homelessness?

Three recommendations fall under this theme:

7. Create a Resource Guide and Directory of Service Providers
8. Develop a Universal Database for Service Providers
9. Provide Shuttle Service to Administrative Offices

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

1. Create Affordable Efficiency Units

SUMMARY:

Create affordable single-room occupancy units within buildings and shared living communities.

CHALLENGE:

Cincinnati does not have enough affordable housing units to meet the current demand. This shortage creates a backlog for people in shelters who are eligible for housing. The delay also causes overcrowding and other conditions that make shelters less accessible for people who might otherwise go to a shelter. In addition to a lack of space, some people are also not good candidates for shelters for a variety of reasons—they don't want to be separated from their family; they struggle with mental illness; they suffer from anxiety, etc.

SOLUTION:

To address this housing shortage, the city can divide large buildings and shared living communities into separate units for individuals and families. These units create a sense a community for individuals who lack support from friends and families by grouping residents together based on interest and community. Residents can also utilize **onsite support** to directly address their needs and barriers, such as transportation or childcare. Living in intentional community can help reduce isolation that often comes with living in affordable units. The City could also incentivize churches and other organizations with large buildings to convert their spaces into affordable housing units.

Some people experiencing homelessness were in favor of this idea and referenced similar housing situations where they were able to pay a flat rate and a portion of their job wages/income. Two local examples are **821 Flats**, operated by Tender Mercies where residents pay a flat rate of 30% of their income, and **Kunst Flats**, modern units with shared living spaces where tenants paid a flat rate and a portion of their job wages/income.

“We want to be responsible, if we could find a place where we could pay based on our income.”

SHORT TERM

2. Conduct a Comprehensive Needs Study for People Experiencing Homelessness



SUMMARY:
Invest in a robust study that outlines the comprehensive needs of people experiencing homelessness in Cincinnati.

CHALLENGE:
While there is much discussion about the need for affordable housing in Cincinnati, the city lacks comprehensive data to fully support the anecdotal discussions or understand the specific needs of people experiencing homelessness. People experiencing homelessness and service providers agree that a variety of housing options are needed to meet the varied needs of individuals and families, but data is necessary to highlight these varied needs and pinpoint the scope and scale.

SOLUTION:
Conduct a needs study to gather comprehensive information, focusing on qualitative data about Cincinnati’s homeless population. The study should focus on the needs, challenges, and barriers in order to inform the types of housing and support that are most needed. Concurrently, gather data around Cincinnati’s housing developers to understand their needs and limitations. This data can help decision-makers support and justify future planning and housing developments.

IMMEDIATE

3. Reopen and Remodel Findlay Park

SUMMARY:
Reopen Findlay Park as a safe, drug-free space that welcomes people experiencing homelessness and provides access to social services.

CHALLENGE:
People experiencing homelessness reported having limited places to go—especially during the day—where they felt welcome, safe and treated with respect. Historically, Findlay Park was a public space where people experiencing homelessness felt welcomed and a place where they could gather. However, the park also became a location for drug activity and crime, and the park was closed in 2019 for renovations.

SOLUTION:
Reopen Findlay Park as a community space where people can access programs and services in non-traditional settings (rather than traditional clinical or administrative environments). Partner with Cincinnati Recreation Commission to co-design with people who are experiencing homelessness to ensure the park design, layout, and amenities help foster community.

In the remodeled park, service providers are invited to “meet people where they are” by providing “pop-up” services and programs. Shelter spaces can offer shaded, comfortable places to sit. The park can also be utilized for programming, entertainment, health screenings, church services, bands, and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcohol Anonymous (AA) meetings during the day. To address safety concerns and reduce high-violence crimes, the city can install security cameras and increase police presence.

While the park would offer programs and services for people experiencing homelessness, the park is not meant to be a substitute for shelters or service providers or a segregated public space only for people experiencing homelessness. Procedures and training can help ensure that Findlay Park becomes an open space for all rather than an exclusive space for people experiencing homelessness.

There is a need to create inclusive spaces and a sense of belonging outside of downtown and Over-the-Rhine, therefore, the community-engaged design of this park would become a model for how parks and public spaces across the city are designed to meet the needs of a diverse community.

SHORT TERM

4. Create Flexible Shelter Policies With Low Barriers to Entry

SUMMARY:

Create shelter policies that welcome people who use drugs or alcohol and help provide the treatment they need on their own time table.

CHALLENGE:

Crisis cannot be scheduled, and recovery very seldom follows a typical 9-5 timeline. There is a need to provide safe spaces for people to go while they are still struggling with an addiction. Few places exist where immediate help and treatment are available.

While many shelters exist for people without addiction problems, few options exist for people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction. Because treatment is not always immediately accessible, people with addiction problems are often forced to live on the street.

SOLUTION:

Shelter policies with low barriers to entry can immediately serve people with drug addictions and help them get the treatment they need. With 24/7 care, safe placement, and staff who can offer counseling and non-judgmental support, people with addiction have a safe place to go where they feel equipped to make better choices for themselves. Treatment options could range from Narcan to full treatment and detox. Shelters that emphasize recovery, such as the Center for Addiction Treatment House, also offer peer-to-peer support and most importantly, space for people to get treatment in their own time without the fear of getting kicked out due to relapse.

“ I was an addict for 15 years. I didn’t get clean overnight. If I didn’t have people around me who knew what it was like to go through this, I would have never gotten clean.”

SHORT TERM

5. Offer Flexible, Unrestricted Funds to Address Unmet Needs



SUMMARY:

Offer unrestricted funds that can meet pressing needs not currently being addressed by restricted money.

CHALLENGE:

Agencies rely on federal, state, and local funding to do their work and support their programs, but often these dollars come with restrictions, making it difficult to have the freedom and flexibility to address pressing, immediate concerns, or to take advantage of emerging opportunities to maximize impact.

SOLUTION:

Set aside local money to develop small scale tests, respond to pressing needs, or fill gaps left by restricted funding. This money should also prioritize quality of care, and should have no penalty for failure, and no automatic reward for numeric success. Learning should be the primary objective of this money, with support to gather the learnings to inspire improved service delivery and collaboration.

Potential funding strategies could include private funding from the business community, restructuring the city’s human services funding to be less restrictive and/or include people who are unhoused, and partnering with initiatives such as All-In Cincinnati to pool contributions from foundations and other nonprofit organizations.

SHORT TERM

“ At some point we got tied to funding streams and more removed from people.”

6. Hire People who Experienced Homelessness as Outreach Workers

SUMMARY:

Hire and train people with lived experience around homelessness to become street outreach workers that can connect people living on the streets with needed services.

CHALLENGE:

Outreach strategies require an understanding of the circumstances and needs of each individual, as well as an understanding of cultural barriers that may prevent people from accessing either mainstream services or those that target people who experience homelessness. In other words, a personalized assessment of risk behaviors and circumstances is needed to truly address the needs of each individual. Currently, outreach workers are limited by the specific demographic information and number of people experiencing homelessness that they can connect to housing programs or other services. Limits on who street outreach can take as clients set up barriers that can make it more complicated for people to access the help they need. These limitations create a number of people getting insufficient (or no) help.

SOLUTION:

Hire and train people who have experienced homelessness to become mobile case workers who can assess people's needs and share all of the resources available. People who have experienced homelessness understand first-hand what services are available and they are able to connect people with these resources and provide insight around navigating the complex system. Redesign the existing street outreach programs in order to create a holistic approach that connects the dots for people experiencing homelessness to all of the resources they might benefit from and allows outreach workers to access the resources or team needed to take on more clients, without restrictions.

“ I was homeless for five years before I found out that the city had resources for homeless people. I never ran into an outreach worker; I was only spending time with other homeless people.”

IMMEDIATE

7. Create a Resource Guide and Directory of Service Providers

SUMMARY:

Provide an up-to-date resource guide with a complete directory of all of the agencies that support people experiencing homelessness and pertinent details about each organization.

CHALLENGE:

Social service agencies, service providers, and individuals lack a single “go-to” resource to find relevant, up-to-date information on programs and services for homelessness. Google is limiting because you can only search what you already know about. In addition, current resource guides do not receive the constant maintenance and updates required because of high staff turnover, organizational changes, and limited funding.

SOLUTION:

Create a public directory of local organizations that provide services for people experiencing homelessness. Relevant information would include:

- Brief description of programs and services and how they differentiate from one another
- Open hours
- Direct contact information

While this guide could be maintained by a single organization such as the Human Relations Commission, the guide could be written in part by people experiencing homelessness to develop relevant content based on first-hand experience. This co-writing effort can also help debunk common misconceptions. Partners such as the Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition's *Street Vibes* program could help provide writers to write, produce, and update the annual resource guide.

IMMEDIATE

8. Develop a Universal Database for Service Providers



SUMMARY:

Create a universal database that all service providers can access to holistically get to know a person, confirm the other resources they are utilizing, and learn how to best serve their needs.

CHALLENGE:

Service providers are always asking for information and documentation from people experiencing homelessness, which can be hard to keep. As digital technology is increasing, the benefits of shared information systems working together is becoming increasingly evident. While there are some shared databases in place, the information is often incomplete or purely administrative rather than relational, missing the ability to connect with someone more personally.

SOLUTION:

Similar to the healthcare system, this universal database for service providers keeps a record of clients' important information, such as their history, preferences, background, and/or past treatments. This database can reduce redundancies, improve customer service, and alleviate staff resources for agencies by allowing organizations to share notes. People experiencing homelessness would also not be required to provide documents and forms at every social service agency, thereby making the intake process more efficient.

LONG TERM

9. Provide Shuttle Service to Administrative Offices

SUMMARY:

Provide a free shuttle service that offers transportation from the streets and shelters to important office buildings to obtain necessary documents like photo IDs, birth certificates, and Social Security cards.

CHALLENGE:

People experiencing homelessness often do not have the necessary documentation that is required for everything from receiving benefits to securing a job (or even temporary work). Because each service or product requires different documents, navigating the various offices is extremely difficult and time consuming. For example, a person securing a photo ID requires documentation of legal name, date of birth, legal presence, Social Security Number, and street address. Proof for these requirements include a birth certificate, Social Security card, and proof of residency. These different documents are not housed in the same building, making it challenging to get a photo ID.

SOLUTION:

An "ID shuttle" helps a person experiencing homelessness navigate and physically get where they need to go to obtain needed legal documents. An ID is the first step to getting many other services. This shuttle service is especially helpful for people experiencing homelessness who have mental health challenges where complicated systems like obtaining IDs and documentation become impossible barriers to overcome and navigate.

The shuttle could function as a van that travels around the city to provide people on the streets with IDs in real-time. Another solution is offering free Cincinnati Streetcar fare to people experiencing homelessness so they can more easily access the different offices. Similar options have found success in other cities, such as the Access ID project in Bellingham, Washington, which uses the public library system to help individuals to gain the proper documents needed to get a state ID card. IDignity is a monthly identification clinic in Central Florida that gets clients birth certificates, state-issued IDs, Social Security cards, or verification information.

IMMEDIATE

shuttle service model: getting people to services

LONG TERM

mobile service model: bringing services directly to people

POLICY AND PROCEDURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The following seven recommendations reflect policy and procedures that city leaders can directly and immediately implement. These ideas surfaced organically throughout the project. While they did not come directly from the working group brainstorm session, they do reflect the voices of people experiencing homelessness and other key stakeholders that contributed to a number of conversations and interactions throughout the project.



1. ESTABLISH AN ONGOING FUNDING STREAM TO SUPPORT PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING.

Supportive housing is an intervention that combines affordable housing assistance with support services like community-based health care, treatment, and employment services. Consider allocating funds generated by the sale of homes in Cincinnati to help establish and expand these efforts.

2. ESTABLISH EMPATHIC POLICING PRACTICES AND DEVELOP ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES RELATED TO HOMELESSNESS.

People experiencing homelessness named police harassment as a daily issue. Police training could include empathy building and non-threatening de-escalation strategies to improve encounters between police officers and people experiencing homelessness.

Train existing and new outreach workers on how to take a police conduct complaint for the Citizens Complaint Authority (CCA). Make CCA forms available at shelters and service providers. Review the complaints and the actions taken by CCA annually at the City Council level.

"WE'RE SCARED AND ALREADY FEELING DOWN ON OURSELVES AND THEY MAKE US FEEL WORSE."

3. UPDATE EXISTING QUANTITATIVE EVALUATION METRICS THAT INFORM FUNDING TO INCLUDE MEASUREMENTS AROUND THE QUALITY OF LIFE AT SHELTERS.

Service providers and nonprofit organizations receive funding based on quantitative metrics, such as the number of beds filled. These metrics do not account for the environment, service provided, or treatment of people experiencing homelessness. Qualitative metrics that consider environment and customer service can more accurately evaluate services' overall effectiveness.

"SHELTERS IN CINCINNATI FEEL LIKE PRISON. IT SEEMS LIKE SHELTERS JUST GET PAID FOR EACH PERSON WHO GOES THERE."

4. DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT REGULATIONS AND PRACTICES THAT PROTECT PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

Many people experiencing homelessness rely on day labor or one-time job opportunities where the worker is hired and paid one day at a time. However, many people reported various forms of exploitation, from being paid less than what was promised to not being paid at all. Jobs that utilize day labor should register with the city and obtain a license. A registration system that also monitors complaints against companies would help inform decisions to renew a license or take action against the company.

“IT’S AWFUL WHEN YOU GO WORK FOR A DAY ON A PROMISE FOR A CERTAIN AMOUNT, AND THEN THEY SHORT YOU, OR DON’T PAY YOU AT ALL. I MEAN, WE ARE ALREADY DOWN, WHY DO YOU HAVE TO KICK US?”

5. CREATE A “REVERSE LOBBY DAY” TO BRING POLICY MAKERS DIRECTLY TO THE VOICE OF PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS.

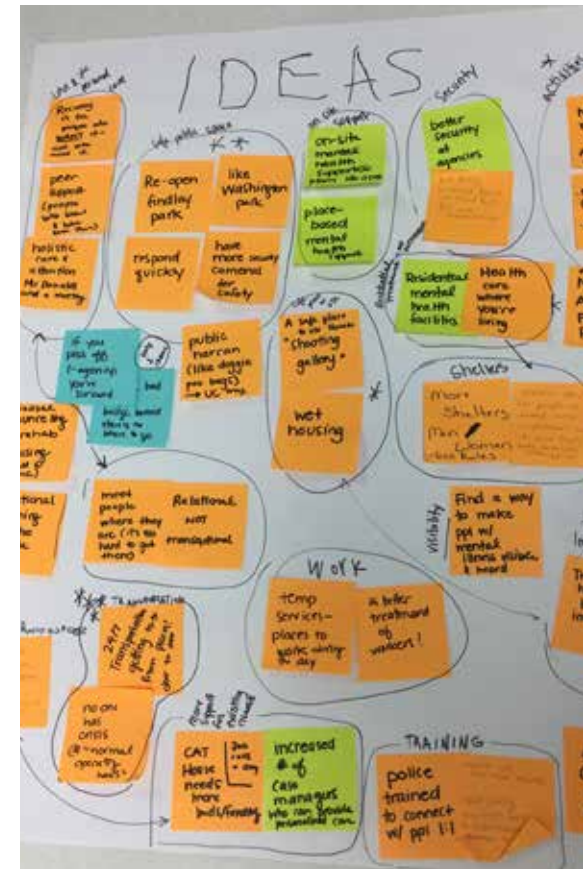
Elected officials most often rely on nonprofit leaders and social service agencies to learn about issues related to homelessness. During “Reverse Lobby Day,” major elected officials such as the mayor, city council, city manager, and police chief would spend a designated day immersed in shelters and social services with people experiencing homelessness. This time is meant for officials to experience these services first-hand and talk directly to people experiencing homelessness. Afterwards, officials could publicly reflect on what they have experienced to help inform future legislation and budgeting decisions.

6. CONDUCT A STUDY TO ANALYZE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CAP (CENTRAL ACCESS POINT) LINE

The CAP line is designed to be the central hotline for information about shelter bed availability. However, when some social service providers call the CAP line they are told that the shelters are completely full, but when they circumvent the CAP line and contact someone they know within the system, they’re able to find or create space for their client in need. Providers also indicated that when shelters are full, the call with the CAP line is ended quickly with little follow-up or help solving the problem.

Conduct an assessment of the CAP line that includes interviews with CAP line workers to verify challenges. The assessment should result in strategies that streamline and improve the effectiveness of the system.

“THE CAP LINE MAKES PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THEY DON’T MATTER. SOMETIMES WHEN YOU CALL YOU’RE TOLD, ‘NO.’ NOT, ‘NO, BUT CAN I HELP YOU WITH SOMETHING ELSE?’, JUST NO.”



7. ESTABLISH AN ONGOING HOMELESS WORKING GROUP.

Develop an ongoing homeless working group that meets regularly to work on the issue of homelessness. This group should include different perspectives and lived experiences. Conversations should be facilitated to discuss issues and take action. Facilitation can help distribute power and share ownership of ideas and action steps. Provide resources (time, space, funding) for the group to test their ideas in small, low fidelity ways first with an opportunity to expand and scale viable models.

“WE USED TO HAVE A HOMELESS THINK-TANK, BUT WHEN FUNDING STRUCTURES CHANGED PEOPLE STOPPED ATTENDING.”

CLOSING

Organizations have been working on the issue of homelessness for decades, and finding solutions, healing historic wounds, and building trust takes time, investment, and intentional energy. This project, which included convening and facilitating two homeless working group meetings, is only the beginning. It scratches the surface on bringing people together and solving for such a complex challenge. There is only so much understanding, alignment, and strategies that can be uncovered in the short timeline and scope of this project.

In addition, the need to act swiftly and broadly on these issues is clear beyond the project findings. Communities around the nation are facing a severe affordable housing shortage. Issues closely related to housing, such as homelessness, are exacerbated if no immediate and ongoing action is taken by local leaders. The city’s commitment to this work is crucial, and we look forward to supporting ongoing efforts in this area.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the City of Cincinnati for funding this work and valuing the voices of diverse stakeholders, including those people with experience around homelessness.

Thank you to all of the project partners who shared valuable insight into resources that exist and some of the challenges they encounter from working in this space:

Center for Addiction Treatment	Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition
City of Cincinnati Police Department	Our Daily Bread
Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services	Prince of Peace
Greater Cincinnati Homeless Coalition	Shelter House
Human Services Chamber	St. Francis Seraph Ministries
Mary Magdalene House	Strategies to End Homelessness
Maslow's Army	3CDC

Finally, thank you to all of the people experiencing homelessness who shared their time, thoughts, experiences, and skills to this project. Their honesty shaped an important narrative and reaffirmed the urgency to do more for the most marginalized in our community.

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APPENDIX

The appendix includes the initial discovery data from this project, organized into three categories: realities for agencies, realities for people with lived experience around homelessness, and other realities. The realities for agencies reflect the barriers and hurdles that organizations providing services to people experiencing homelessness encounter. The realities for people with lived experience around homelessness speak to the challenges many people experiencing homelessness who access (or avoid) social services face. Finally, the other realities capture themes that intersect these two groups.

It's important to note that all of the data in this report comes directly from interviews and focus groups and are direct quotes (or paraphrased quotes) that represent the views of the person or people that said them. They are included here because they shaped the themes that were ultimately prioritized and downselected by the homeless working group.

REALITIES FOR AGENCIES

BROKEN COLLABORATION

How might we build better bridges among organizations with shared mission to address homelessness?

- “The CAP (Central Access Point) line doesn’t work so providers call the shelters directly to find a bed for a client.”
- “The CAP line makes people feel like they don’t matter. Sometimes when you call, you’re told, ‘no.’ Not, ‘No, but can I help you with something else?’, just no.”
- “We are concerned that as a small nonprofit, if we enter into a group conversation with other organizations or governmental entities and we share what we want to do, or what we think is needed that other organizations will take our ideas and put them into their plans without supporting us in doing this work. We’ve seen it happen before and it is a very real fear. We have spent 2-3 years building this with no salary, because we believe in this work.”

QUALITY OF CARE

How might we improve the quality of care and overall experience at homeless shelters?

- “If “keeping people alive” is working, then shelters are helping, but it’s the stuff of nightmares.”
- People don’t go to shelters because they fear if they go, they will get sick.
- “Shelters are more like a warehouse with cement floors, they smell horrible, they wake you up and put you out at 6am, the coldest time of the day. There isn’t enough supervision, people get their stuff stolen, some of my people will not go there.”
- For people who struggle with anxiety, the beds in a shelter can be so tight. You can’t walk out and come back. “Once you’re out, you’re out!”

LIMITED FUNDING

How might we reimagine the way we fund organizations in a way that allows for greater flexibility to focus on their mission?

- “Agencies that work on homelessness used to be more innovative and connected to the voice of homeless people. About 5 years ago, there was a “Homeless Think Tank” that took input from people experiencing homelessness more seriously and developed programs based on that feedback.”
- “At some point we got tied to funding streams and more removed from people.”
- “Agencies went from asking forgiveness to asking permission. We’ve moved toward a weird survival mode.”
- There’s a lack of flexibility when it comes to funding.
- “We’ve never been tied to government funding streams. This allows us to focus on hospitality.”
- “The funders (biggest funder being HUD) have parameters attached to it. They look for the pressure points that can make the most impact. They also have identified the type of person that we can make the biggest impact with. This is the process... it’s all tied to outcomes. It takes away the expertise of the organizations and people who are offering the services. They can’t meet people as individuals; instead, they have to bucket people together (but people aren’t one size fits all).”
- “We already can’t handle the need with our limited services.”

REALITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AROUND HOMELESSNESS

MORE OPPORTUNITIES NEEDED

How might we create expanded opportunities for people experiencing homelessness to do meaningful work on regular basis?

- “One organization has a daily program where you can get paid \$45 to pick up trash for 4-5 hours. They pick up about 10 people a day in a 12 passenger van.” *Note: people were excited by this and wanted details. How to get picked up, where to get picked up, how to get “on the list”?*
- There needs to be more job opportunities for the homeless. “If I am bored, I am getting as high as a kite.”
- “Keep us busy; we have too much free time on our hands.”

LIMITED FREEDOM

How might we create spaces that protect people while honoring their humanity?

- “Who wants to be told when to sleep, when to wake up, when you can come and go, and what to eat?”
- “Do the rules that we impose upon people who are experiencing homelessness to access temporary or permanent shelter inhibit community and/or deny the humanity of the individuals to the point that sleeping outside is preferable?”
- “Shelters are very unnatural and an institutionalized place. I understand why people would want to be outside in their own communities.”

THE NEED TO BELONG

How might we reimagine care for people experiencing homelessness from meeting individual needs to meeting group/collective needs?

- There is nowhere that will treat people in groups.
- There are no shelters (or limited) that will take couples without kids.
- “A lot of people don’t want to give up being with their boyfriend or girlfriend, or even their best friend.”
- “Relationships are often tied to drug abuse (especially heroin). That feeds into the relationship; there is no way they will separate from that person (and their link to the drugs) in that moment.”

NOWHERE TO GO DURING THE DAY

How might we provide welcoming places for people experiencing homelessness to be during the day?

- “We don’t have anywhere to go after the breakfast places close.”
- “There are few places open during the day aside from a handful of churches and the library.”
- There are social services available (on-location) to people who are staying at a shelter—onsite medical help, mental health treatment, Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous

OTHER REALITIES

SUPPORTING MENTAL ILLNESS AND ADDICTION

How might we better support people experiencing homelessness and mental illness and/or addiction?

- “Services are not designed to take seriously mental illness or realities of people who live with it.”
- “People experiencing homelessness are told that they should just pull themselves up by their bootstraps; you would never tell someone with Alzheimer’s disease this. Why can’t we treat people with mental health challenges the same way we treat Alzheimer’s patients?”
- “You can’t be picked up unless you are considered a danger to yourself or others. Usually by then it’s too late. Everyone on the streets needs a psych evaluation.”
- “A lot of people assume if you are on the street you are an addict.”
- “The stigma that goes with mental health is bad enough and when you add alcoholism or drug addiction it grows.”
- “People use drugs and alcohol to self medicate: these two diseases are fighting with one another. You have to take care of both of them at the same time. The mental illness can cause the relapse. But if you only treat the alcoholism, you are missing the mental health care.”
- “There are resources available, if people hang in there long enough, but many people are too addicted or too mentally ill to access them. If on the day they are supposed to access help they are too wiped, or get angry and get into a fight... they lose the help. You can put the best program together but the people have to be able to access it.”

THE NEED FOR FAITH BASED INSTITUTIONS

How might we increase the Faith Based Institutions who prioritize working with people experiencing homelessness?

- “Faith Based Institutions operate with different rules.”
- The freedom helps them to be more flexible and therefore more inviting to some people.

DISTRUST OF THE CITY

How might we rebuild trust and foster collaboration between the city and people experiencing homelessness and/or those working to address this challenge?

- “What are the motivations for doing this work? What will the follow through be?”
- “They put down on us like we are not human. We are treated like stray animals. They might as well be SPCA and we are the stray dogs.”
- “The homeless don’t get respect: the soup kitchens, the law, if you have a backpack on—watch out!”
- “The attitudes city council has toward mental health, addiction, homelessness, etc. are wrong. They are just wrong.”



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