

# Built for Zero

Media Kit

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The purpose of this media kit is to equip journalists with background information and shareable resources to incorporate into their reporting around Built for Zero.

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# About Built for Zero

## What is Built for Zero?

**Built for Zero** is a movement led by the nonprofit [Community Solutions](#) of more than 100 communities in the United States committed to measurably ending homelessness — and proving that it is possible. Built for Zero communities work to render homelessness rare and brief for populations, by reaching functional zero, a dynamic end state when they can sustain “net zero” homelessness, where fewer people are experiencing homelessness than can routinely exit homelessness in a month.

## What communities are participating in Built for Zero?

Currently, 142 communities are in Built for Zero. The full list can be found [here](#).

## What does it mean for a community to be a part of Built for Zero?

Joining Built for Zero means that the community has committed to measurable and equitable solving homelessness. By joining the movement, they are committed to implementing the Built for Zero methodology and redesigning their systems to reach functional zero.

## What is the Built for Zero methodology?

While there is no single magic bullet for driving homelessness to zero across a city or county — but that does not mean it is not possible. Making homelessness rare and brief takes more than a single intervention or sector — it takes the full force of a community-wide system designed to solve the problem. The Built for Zero methodology has four main components:

### 1. COMMUNITIES CREATE SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY



**FROM**  
**No single actor is fully accountable for ending homelessness in a community.**  
Each local agency or program holds its own small piece of the solution, but no one has their eye on how the pieces fit together.



**TO**  
**Command center that shares accountability.**  
Key agencies, like the Continuum of Care, the housing authority, local government, and the VA, work together every week toward a shared definition of zero.

### 2. COMMUNITIES SET A SHARED AIM

|                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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| <p><b>FROM</b></p>  | <p><b>A definition of success limited to program outcomes.</b></p> <p>Success is widely measured by the success of housing programs, not on whether a community reduces the number of people experiencing homelessness..</p> | <p><b>TO</b></p>  | <p><b>A commitment to functional zero.</b></p> <p>The command center operates under a unified aim of reducing the number of individuals experiencing homelessness as the key measure of their results — all the way down to zero.</p> |
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### 3. COMMUNITIES ESTABLISH AND USE QUALITY, REAL-TIME DATA

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| <p><b>FROM</b></p>  | <p><b>A once-a-year count of a problem that changes nightly.</b></p> <p>You can't solve a problem you can't see. Homelessness is constantly changing, but communities working on solving it rely on annual, anonymized street counts.</p> | <p><b>TO</b></p>  | <p><b>Comprehensive, real-time, by-name data.</b></p> <p>Built for Zero communities know everyone experiencing homelessness by name, in real time. The result is more tailored solutions for individuals and a clearer picture of the system as a whole.</p> |
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### 4. CENTERING RACIAL EQUITY



**Racism and homelessness are inextricably linked.** Research shows that Black and Native Americans experience homelessness at disproportionately high rates, even when we control for disparities in poverty level.

This means that, like so many other systems of care in America impacted by racism, the homeless response system produces racial disparities. The system can maintain or exacerbate these disparities — or work to dismantle them. Communities are using data to understand and improve the racial equity of a community's homeless response system.

### 5. COMMUNITIES MAKE TARGETED INVESTMENTS FOR REDUCTIONS IN HOMELESSNESS

|                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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| <p><b>FROM</b></p>  | <p><b>Housing supply paralysis.</b></p> <p>Expanded housing resources are crucial, but many cities have dramatically expanded housing supply without making a dent in homelessness.</p> | <p><b>TO</b></p>  | <p><b>Strategic, data-driven housing investments.</b> Built for Zero communities use real-time data to secure the housing resources they need and target them for the greatest possible reductions in homelessness</p> |
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## Resources to learn more about Built for Zero

- Website: [Built for Zero](https://www.builtforzero.org/)

- Website: [Built for Zero Methodology](#)
- Video: [Homelessness as a Systems Problem](#)
- Blog: [Why is homelessness a systems problem?](#)

## Previous coverage

- Forbes: [How 100 Communities Are Solving Homelessness—And What We Can Learn From Their Success](#)
- Governing: [Building a lasting solution to the nation's homelessness crisis](#)
- National League of Cities: [How Communities are Building Systems to Reduce and End Homelessness](#)
- How to Citizen: [Homelessness Is Solvable](#)
- Oregonian: [A shared aim, shared accountability in driving to 'functional zero' on homelessness](#)

## Questions to explore to understand the homeless response system:

- Who are the actors (agencies, non profits, grassroots) working on ending homelessness?
  - Are they working together? If not, why not? If yes, how are they working together?
  - Are they all committed to the same goal?
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# About Functional Zero

## What is functional zero?

Functional zero is a dynamic milestone that indicates a community is continuously rendering homelessness rare overall and brief when it occurs, for a population.

Functional zero does not mean nobody is experiencing homelessness, or that no one will experience homelessness. It does mean that a community has driven that number down toward zero, and is keeping it below the community's capacity to ensure positive exits from homelessness.

Imagine if the homeless system operated like a well-functioning hospital. That hospital will not necessarily prevent people from ever becoming sick. But it will ensure people are triaged appropriately, promptly receive the services they need, and address the illness, preventing further harm.

## How is Functional Zero calculated for specific populations?

**Functional zero for veteran homelessness:** A community has ended veteran homelessness when the number of veterans experiencing homelessness is less than the number of veterans a community has proven it can house in a month, with a minimum threshold of 3.

**Functional zero for chronic homelessness:** A community has ended chronic homelessness when the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is zero, or if not zero, than either 3 or .1% of the total number of individuals reported in the most recent point-in-time count, whichever is greater.

**Functional zero for all populations** ([More details on the definition are here](#)). **A community has ended homelessness for all populations when:**

- **Rare.** The number of people experiencing homelessness across all populations must consistently remain below a level, known as their functional zero threshold.
- **Brief.** When homelessness does occur, it must be an experience that quickly passes. Communities at functional zero ensure that the average length of time from identification to move-in is 45 days or less.
- **Nonrecurring.** Homelessness should be resolved, for good. No more than 5% of exits should result in a return to homelessness within two years of the system's service or support.
- **Equitable.** Communities must close racial and ethnic disproportionality in housing placements, return to homelessness, and the average length of time from identification to housing.

## How is functional zero different from the USICH benchmarks and criteria?

The Federal Criteria and Benchmarks and functional zero represent different approaches to measurement, but they are not exclusive. Achieving the Federal Criteria and Benchmarks for ending veteran homelessness is an important milestone on the path to reaching functional zero, and a major accomplishment for a community.

To achieve functional zero, a community must have fewer veterans experiencing homelessness than it can routinely house in permanent housing in a single month. Our ultimate objective is to help communities build systems that can achieve and sustain functional zero, even if new veterans experience housing crises over time.

## What communities have achieved functional zero?

14 communities have achieved functional zero for at least one population.

**12 communities have ended veteran homelessness:**

- Gulf Coast region, MS
- Arlington County, VA
- Montgomery County, MD
- Rockford, Winnebago & Boone Counties, IL
- Bergen County, NJ
- Abilene, TX
- Lake County, IL
- Norman, Cleveland County, OK
- Chattanooga, TN
- Lynchburg Region, VA
- Crater Region, VA
- Fremont County, CO

**5 communities have ended chronic homelessness:**

- Rockford, Winnebago & Boone Counties, IL
- Lancaster City & County, PA
- Bergen County, NJ
- Abilene, TX
- Bakersfield, Kern County, CA

**3 communities have ended both:**

- Rockford, Winnebago & Boone Counties, IL
- Bergen County, NJ
- Abilene, TX

## Resources to learn more about functional zero

- Website: [Functional Zero](#)
- Video: [What is Functional Zero?](#)

## Previous coverage

- Fast Company: [3 cities in the U.S. have ended chronic homelessness: Here's how they did it](#)
- Next City: [These Cities Have Ended Chronic Homelessness](#)

## Questions to explore to determine if a community has a goal for ending homelessness:

- Have key actors in the community committed to ending homelessness?
- If so, how are they defining it? Is it a measurable goal based on reductions or programmatic outcomes?

- Who is responsible for setting the goal(s) and measuring success?
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## About By-Name Data

### What is by-name data?

By-name data is a comprehensive database of every person in a community experiencing homelessness, updated in real time. Using information collected and shared with their consent, each person on the list has a file that includes their name, homeless history, health, and housing needs. This data is updated monthly, at minimum. Quality by-name data enables teams to account for every person experiencing homelessness in real time. Achieving it is a necessary and catalytic step toward solving homelessness.

### Why is by-name data critical for ending homelessness?

**By-name data helps improve outcomes for individuals.** By maintaining a by-name list, communities have current and detailed information on every unhoused person in a population. With this detailed information, they are able to better match housing solutions with the needs of the individuals. By-name lists often form the basis for case conferencing meetings, where all the providers within a community meet to coordinate and drive forward with housing solutions for people.

**By-name data enables communities to understand if they are reducing overall homelessness and target systems changes to make progress.** Communities are able to track the changing size, composition, and dynamics of their homeless population. This information enables them to prioritize resources, test changes to their system, and understand whether their efforts are helping to drive those numbers down toward zero.

**Equipped with this data, communities can understand where to direct their attention and implement strategies that are as dynamic as the problem.** By-name, real-time data is modeled off approaches to other public health challenges, like COVID-19. An annual snapshot of cases doesn't equip public health officials with the information they need to know if they are making progress on ending the pandemic. They have real-time data to know the scale and scope of the problem, if their strategies are driving numbers down, and if not, whether they need to pivot. Without this information, communities can get stuck in a cycle of solving yesterday's problem, without knowing if they are moving any closer to zero homelessness.

## How is by-name data different from the Point in Time count?

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandates an annual census of people experiencing homelessness, called the point-in-time count.

Historically, communities have relied heavily on point-in-time counts to understand whether the problem of homelessness is improving. They've used this number to develop local strategies and make budget decisions. But the count is just that — an estimate from a moment in time. There are no names behind it. No way to know what that number is today.

Using the point-in-time count is like taking a photo with an early model camera where the picture is distorted if the subject moves. Homelessness is always in flux, and the picture takes time to develop, in this case many months. The result is a hazy picture of the past. Homelessness is a problem that changes every night. To keep up with it, we need a clear video. By-name lists is person-specific data, which is updated regularly, to provide communities with more actionable information on homelessness.

## Resources to learn more about by-name data

- Website: [By-Name Data](#)
- Video: [How By-Name Data Helps Communities End Homelessness](#)
- Website: [Journalists Guidance for how to Cover the Point-in-Time Count](#)

## Previous coverage

- New York Times: [How Many Americans Are Homeless? No One Knows](#)
- Bloomberg: [Is there a Better Way to Collect Data on Homelessness?](#)
- Eugene Weekly: [A Solution to Ending Homelessness Might be in the Data](#)
- The San Diego Union-Tribune: [To end homelessness, we need a real-time database of all people experiencing homelessness](#)
- The Christian Science Monitor: [How a better headcount reduces homelessness in the US](#)

## Questions to explore to determine how a community measures progress on ending homelessness

1. How is the community measuring success toward its goal?
2. Is it making progress? How would we know?
3. Is the community relying on the PIT count?
4. Does the community know how many people are experiencing homelessness at any given time? If not, why?
5. Can it disaggregate data by race and ethnicity to track and respond to disparities?

6. How has that number changed? Is it going up or down?
7. How are they transparently sharing this progress data with the community? Example: do you have a public dashboard on their website?

## **CONTACT**

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