

BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION PT.2

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8/20/24

What We Do

Policy and Programs

- Carries out the vital work of educating policymakers and the field about key strategies and policies for ending and preventing homelessness.
- Keeps federal policymakers and legislators informed of the needs of people experiencing homelessness and the programs serving them.
- Leads advocacy efforts on a grassroots level.

Capacity Building

- Supports efforts to end homelessness by offering training and technical assistance tailored to communities' unique needs.
- Helps design and implement crisis systems, improve systems' performance, and utilize data to end homelessness, particularly with an equity lens.
- Provides online courses, trainings, and webinars to inform the field of best practices to end homelessness.

Homelessness Research Institute

- Analyzes data to identify homelessness trends on national, local, and Continuum of Care levels.
- Publishes research that ensures policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the public have the best information about trends and emerging solutions to the problem.
- Uses an equity lens to identify disparities in homelessness data.

Lived Experience Innovation + Strategic Communications

National Alliance to End Homelessness Statements for Participation

The Alliance works to ensure that diverse voices are included as facilitators, attendees, and guests in our training forums. All voices are welcome.

The organization has a zero-tolerance policy for any form of discrimination or abusive behavior. The Alliance is committed to ensuring that all its events are safe and respectful for all participants.

Participants acknowledge that any form of discrimination, violence, or abusive behavior may result in removal from an office hour or forum depending on the situation.

If any discrimination is witnessed or experienced during the training, or if you feel unsafe, please notify any member of the Alliance staff.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness strives to create a diverse, inclusive, accepting, and safe space for everyone.

Housekeeping



BEST PRACTICES IN HOUSING PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION: Objectives

Gain	Gain an understanding of the important role of shelter and diversion within a crisis response system
Gain	Gain an understanding of the key fundamentals of effective homelessness diversion
Identify	Identify steps to get started
Clarify	Clarify important measures of successful diversion



"Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Until your good is better and your better is best." —Tim Duncan

In Breakout

- Your name, organization, roles, and identities
- What's your favorite beverage?
- What is one thing we talked about last week that resonated with you?



PART 1. REVIEW



Effective, Efficient, and Equitable Homeless Response Homeless Response System: Goal

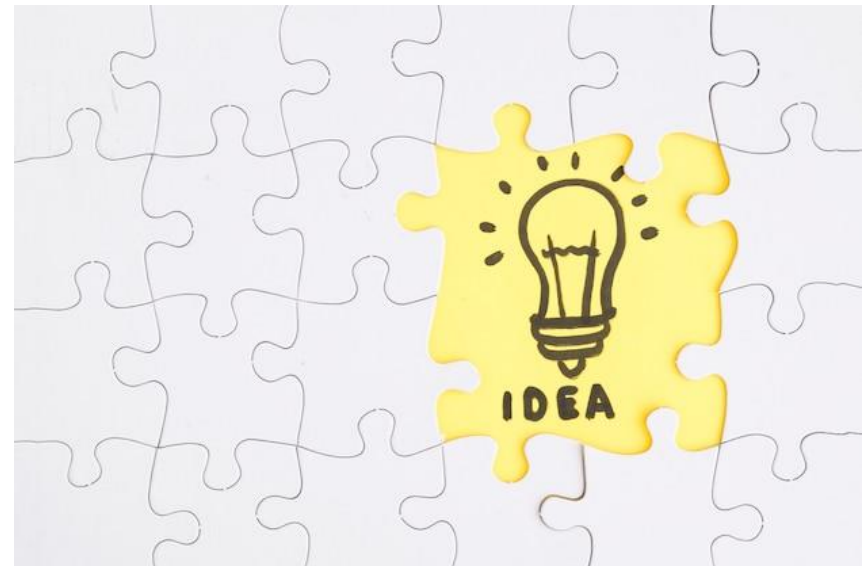
House people as quickly as possible
and

divert people from imminent
homelessness whenever possible



Housing Problem-Solving

A strength-based, person-centered, flexible intervention focused on identifying solutions in conversation with people to support them in resolving their own housing crisis as quickly as possible by any means available to them.



How Does Diversion Work?



Diversion is an intensive service intervention. Through an interactive problem-solving conversation with the person or household, staff seek to:

- understand what caused a person's housing crisis;
- explore what immediate solutions to the crisis may be possible; and
- help them pursue a solution(s).

The Reality

Diversion Is/Isn't

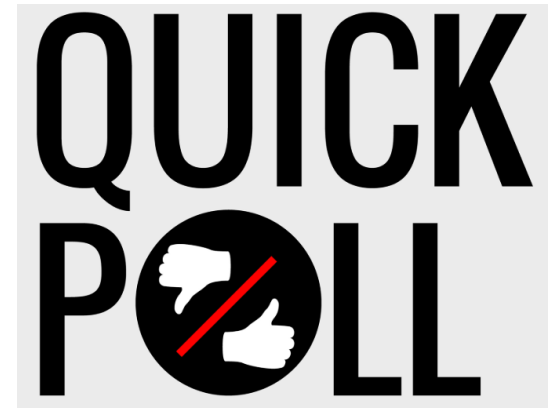
- Diversion is **NOT** a separate “program” but rather part of the entire system
- Diversion is **problem solving and solution focused**
- Diversion should always be **safe and appropriate** for the client

Diversion Requires

- Coordinated entry process and shelter front door
- **Resourceful staff trained** in:
 - Mediation, conflict resolution
 - Strength based assessment
 - Problem solving
 - Respect for client choice and
 - Recognition of safety
- **Linkages** to mainstream services and natural supports
- **Flexible** funds

Poll

Are you currently practicing diversion/housing problem solving?



Pt.1 Questions



Problem Solving Across Interventions

Consumer's Housing Situation	Intervention Used	Services Provided in All Interventions
At Risk of Losing Housing (precariously housed)	HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION	<p>Services (Strengths-Based Case Management)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative Problem-Solving Conversation • Conflict Resolution • Housing Search/Placement • Landlord/Tenant Mediation • Connection to Mainstream Resources • Tenant Legal Services • Credit Repair <p>Financial Assistance*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rental Application Fee • Rental Subsidy/Arrears • Security/Utility Deposits • Utility Arrears • Moving Costs • Transportation Costs • Other Financial Assistance
Seeking Shelter (at "front door" of system and seeking place to stay)	DIVERSION	
Literally Homeless (in emergency shelter or on the street/place not meant for human habitation/ shelter)	HOUSING FOCUSED, RAPID EXIT SERVICES	

Diversion, Homelessness Prevention, and Eviction Prevention

IMPACT ON HOMELESSNESS SYSTEM

HIGH

Diversion

TARGETED TO:

People who have lost housing and are about to enter shelter or sleep outside

FUNDED BY:

- Homelessness system funds

MEDIUM

Homelessness Prevention

TARGETED TO:

Extremely vulnerable people who are about to lose their housing

FUNDED BY:

- Mainstream "feeder system" funds
- Homelessness systems that have served their entire homeless population

LOW

Eviction Prevention

TARGETED TO:

Low income people who have received an eviction notice

FUNDED BY:

- Federal, state, and local housing funds
- Legal assistance funds

Target resources strategically!

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF DIVERSION



Poll

Check all that apply!



Guiding Principles of Problem Solving



Crisis
Resolution



Client
Choice



Progressive
Engagement



Maximizing
Resources



Guiding Principle #1: Crisis Resolution

Homelessness is a crisis.



Responses must include:

- Triage
- Focus on personal safety as the first priority
- De-escalation of emotions
- Clear, achievable, action steps
- Returning control to the person for their own problem-solving

Guiding Principle #2: Client Empowerment

Choice. Respect.
Empowerment.



Responses must include:

- Help person regain a sense of control
- Focus on person's goals, choices, preferences
- Unwavering respect for **client's strengths, and reinforcement of progress** = essential for empowerment

Guiding Principle #3: Progressive Engagement

Provide the minimum assistance necessary for the shortest time possible.



Responses must include:

- Recognition that we don't have deep resources to assist everyone
- A response that's geared to individual's current situation, not a future prediction of need
- **A belief in a person's ingenuity, resourcefulness, and resiliency**
- A basis of how crises resolve, and people live

Guiding Principle #4: Maximizing Resources

Targeting and maximizing a community's resources



Responses must include:

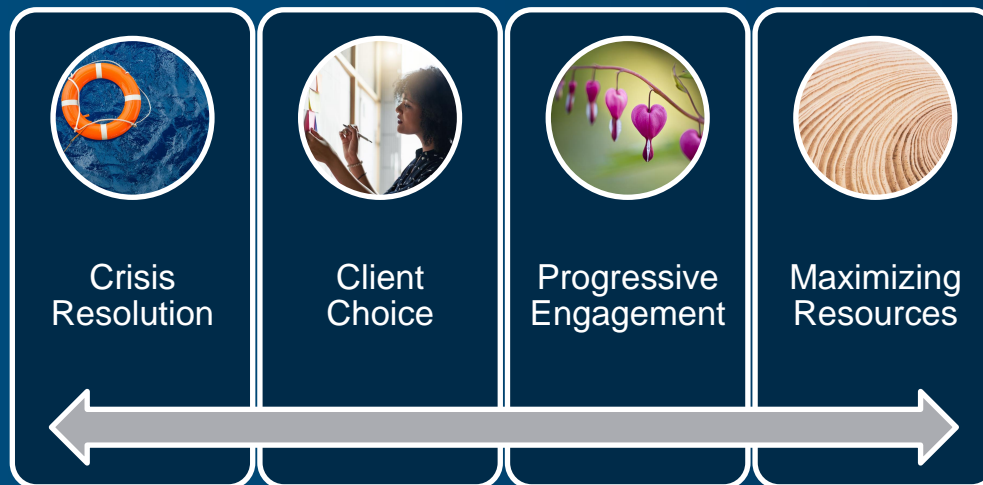
- Lightest touch
- Reserving limited shelter beds and permanent housing resources for those who need it most
- Connecting people to supports, resources, services to stabilize
- Leveraging non-traditional partners
- Expanding network of services and supports to increase ability to serve diverse populations
- Recognizing that **the homeless system cannot do it all**

Five Minute Stretch Break!



Breakout Questions: Guiding Principles of Problem Solving/Diversion

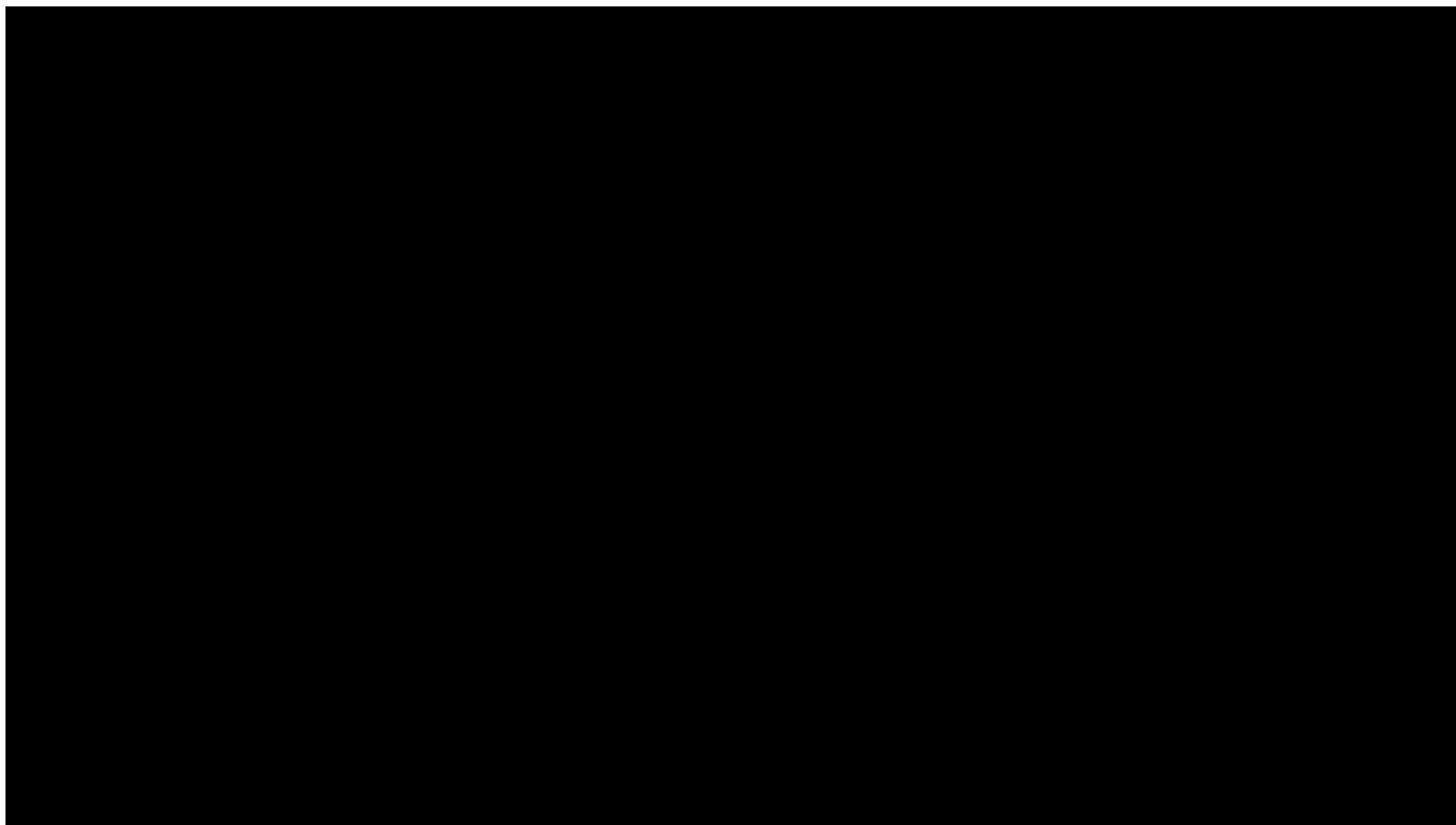
- Which guiding principle do you or the system currently do the best?
- Which principle(s) do you need to improve on individually or systemically?
- What is something needed to help you as a system improve?



FUNDAMENTALS OF EFFECTIVE DIVERSION PRACTICE



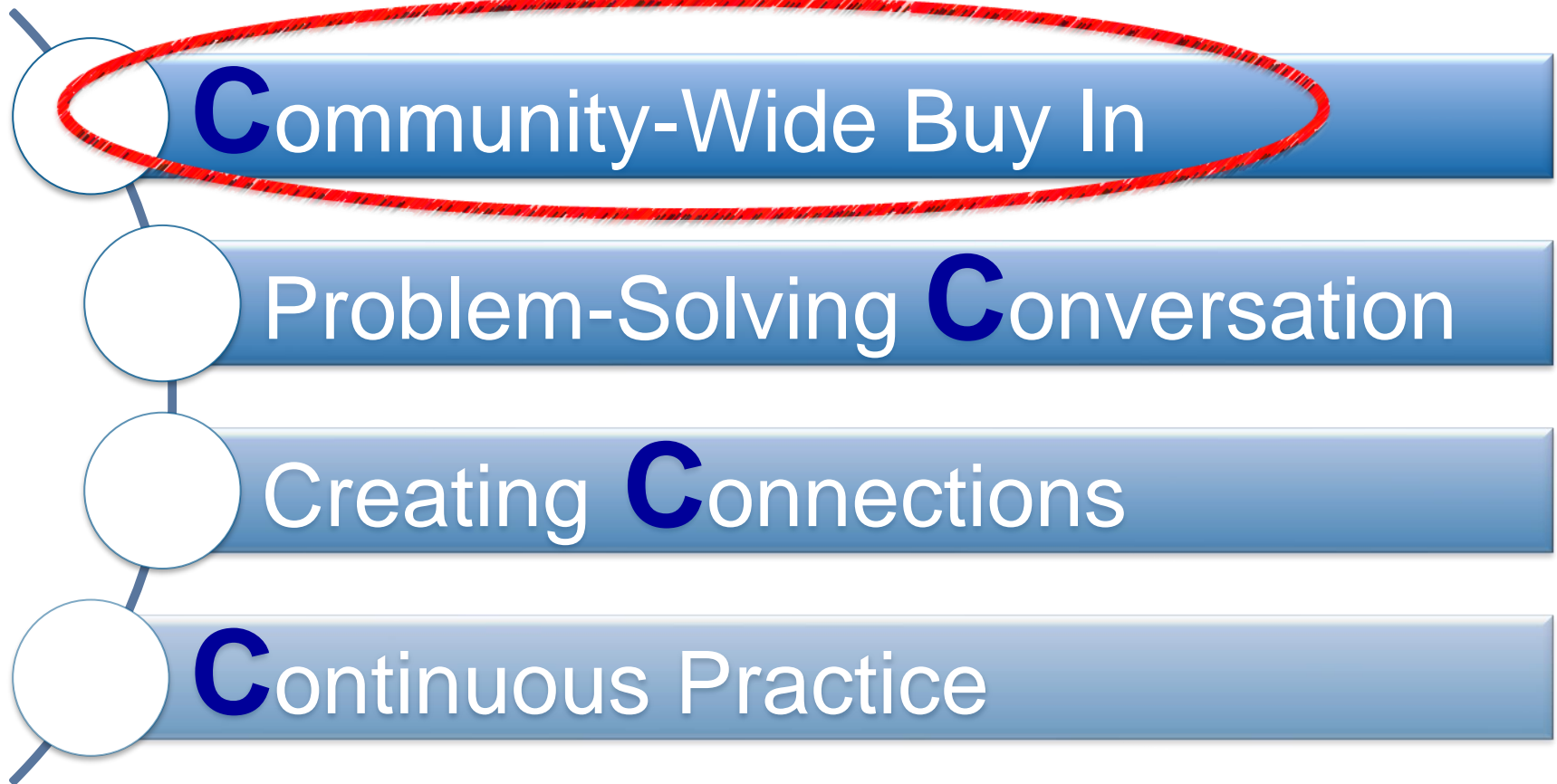
Four Fundamentals of Diversion



Effective Problem Solving Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Community-Wide Buy In

The Collective Impact Approach:

1. Common Agenda
2. Shared Measurement System
3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities
4. Continuous Communication
5. Backbone Organization



Source: Collaboration for Impact

Community-Wide Buy In

Common Agenda:

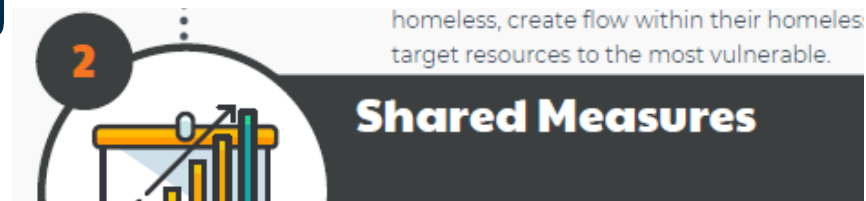
- Identify key stakeholders
- Vision/Message:
 - “Most people experiencing a housing crisis will not need or receive deep subsidized housing”
 - “Assisting people who have an immediate housing crisis and are now seeking emergency shelter or facing unsheltered homelessness and those entering shelter by helping them identify and access safe alternative housing options.”



Community-Wide Buy In

Shared Measures:

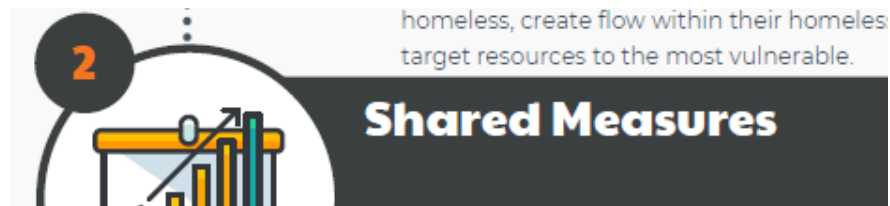
- Agreement on a common agenda must include agreement on ways success is measured and reported
- Common set of measures to:
 - Monitor performance
 - Track progress towards outcomes
 - Learn what is/isn't working



Community-Wide Buy In

Shared Measures:

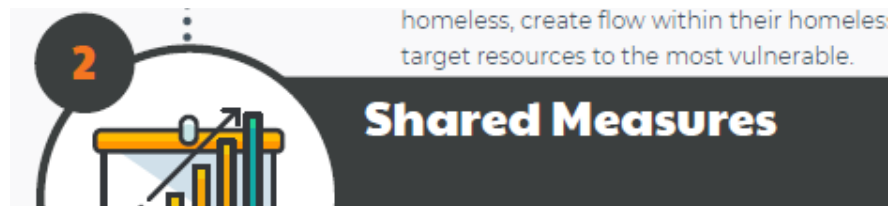
- Agree on small number of SMART goals (5-7)
- Understand problem solving strategy practices to make change
- Understand Success Factors
 - Effective relationships with funders
 - Broad community engagement
 - Ongoing training, facilitation, review of data accuracy



Community-Wide Buy In

Shared Measures:

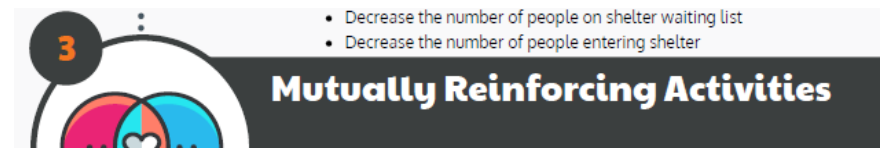
- Decrease number of first time homeless
- Decrease number of people on shelter waiting lists
- Decrease the number of people entering shelter/homelessness
- Increase the number of people exiting shelter
- Decrease the LOS in shelter to PH



Community-Wide Buy In

Mutually Reinforcing Activities:

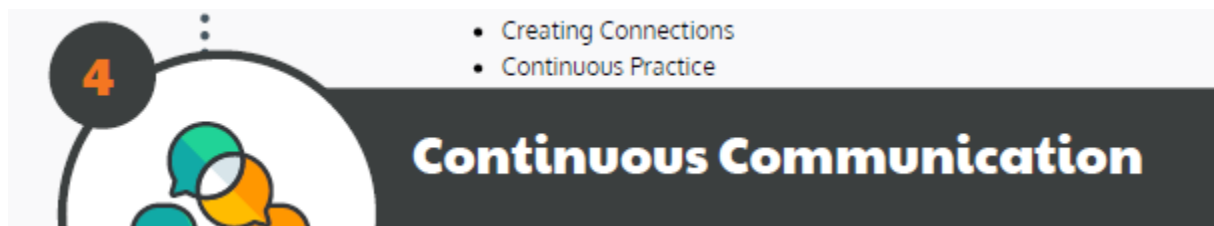
- Promote and support “front door” diversion strategies (i.e. coordinated entry and/or shelter)
- Alignment and adoption of shared measures by system/funders
- Problem-Solving Conversation
- Creating Connections
- Continuous practice
- Ongoing data analysis, evaluation and modification



Community-Wide Buy In

Continuous Communication:

- Coordinated Intake and Governance meetings
- Meetings/opportunities with funders
- State-wide and/or CoC conferences and training opportunities
- Others?



Community-Wide Buy In: Creating a Message

Messaging in Action:

- **The Need**

- Homeless population continues to grow, despite resources being poured into shelter

- **The Audience**

- Elected officials, homeless providers, local media, community residents

- **Headline**

- “Community flexes political will to redirect spending and capacity to strategies that will divert households from the trauma of homelessness”

- **Fact**

- In one West Coast city, as part of a diversion strategies pilot, 229 of 371 families were diverted from a homeless shelter.

- **Anecdote**

- “Jane and her family woke up, safe, in her sister’s home not worrying where they would sleep the next day. The kids could eat breakfast at home before going to school.”

Five Minute Stretch Break!



Activity: Creating a Message Breakout Rooms

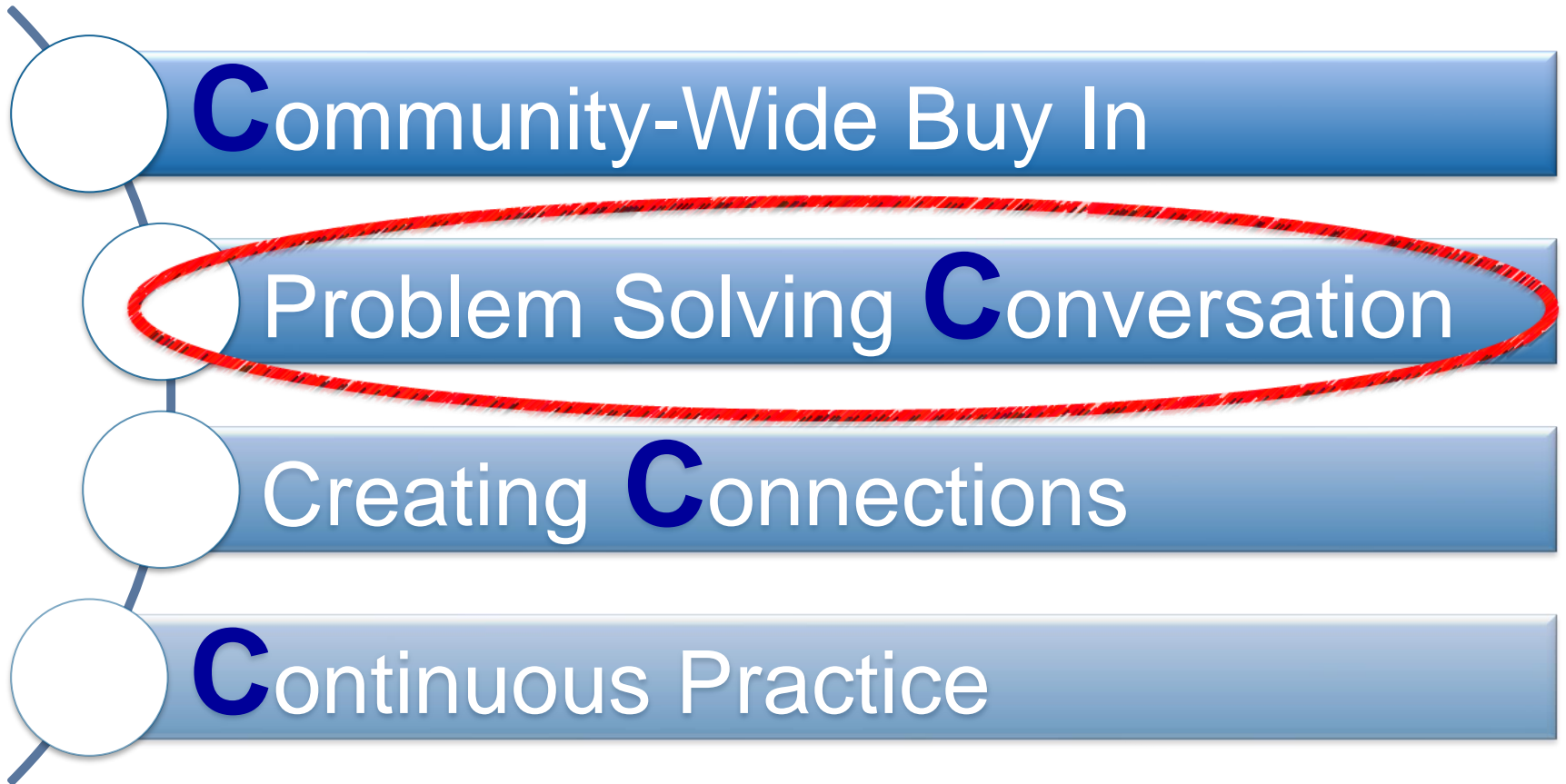
Discuss these questions

1. Why implement a system-wide problem-solving strategy
2. What goals are you trying to achieve?
3. How will you measure success?
4. As you work towards this vision, how will you frame the messaging ?
 - Who are you trying to reach? **DO NOT CHOOSE CONSUMERS**
 - What are the key stats and narratives that would build your case?
 - What communications tools do you think you could use to convey those messages?
5. **Turn your message into an elevator pitch**

Activity: Creating a Message

Large Group Report Out

Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Large Group Discussion

- Who do you trust?
- Why do you trust them?
- What causes a loss of trust?
- What does it take/mean to build trust with people you are serving?



Problem Solving Conversation

- Problem solving is a strength-based conversation, not a pre-application for eligibility or a needs assessment tool with a list of questions
- Conversations:
 - Are realistic discussions on household's housing, employment, and financial needs and opportunities
 - Help households to think of creative solutions and explore every option
 - Are related to employment, transportation, food security, other supports used previously (people and organizations)
 - Are about allowing staff time to be creative and less about quickly offering rental assistance
 - About discovering what other options that may be available; **help households identify their current supports**

Problem-Solving Conversation

6 Steps for Conducting an Effective Problem-Solving Conversation

1. Introduce Yourself & Purpose of the Meeting
2. Active Listening
3. Strengths & Supports Exploration
4. Moving Forward
5. Creating Connections
6. Summarize & Follow-Up

The infographic features a large orange number '6' followed by the text 'STEPS for conducting an effective PROBLEM SOLVING CONVERSATION'. Below this, a light blue box contains the definition: 'Diversion is a problem solving, strength based conversation. It is grounded in a conflict resolution approach, is empowering, and client centered.' A large orange number '1' is positioned above a dotted line that separates the title from the first step. The first step is titled 'INTRODUCE YOURSELF & PURPOSE OF MEETING' and includes a sample script: 'Hi, my name is Jane and I work for the HRS. I want to speak with you today about how...

Problem Solving Conversation

- **Key Principles:**

- Every person is unique and has the potential for change
- People's expertise in their own life and their own autonomy should be recognized and encouraged
- Collaboration between the person, their support network and diversion staff creates opportunities for success

3

STRENGTHS & SUPPORTS EXPLORATION

During the conversation, consider the persons current and past housing and income history, and whether every option is safe and appropriate.

-  What have you done to be able to avoid shelter these past six months?
-  What were things like for you when things were going better?
-  Identify when you have been a support to others.
-  Who are your friends, allies, and family members?

Problem Solving Conversation

- **Key Principles:**

- Staff's role is to develop the person's resources, empower them, and build their capacity to maximize their potential
- When provided with the relevant information and support, people can make meaningful choices about their lives.
- People are resourceful and resilient.

3

STRENGTHS & SUPPORTS EXPLORATION

During the conversation, consider the persons current and past housing and income history, and whether every option is safe and appropriate.

What have you done to be able to avoid shelter these past six months?

What were things like for you when things were going better?

Who are your friends, allies, and family members?

Identify when you have been a support to others.

Adapted from: Hirst et al 2011, Chapin & Cox 2001, Rapp et al 2006

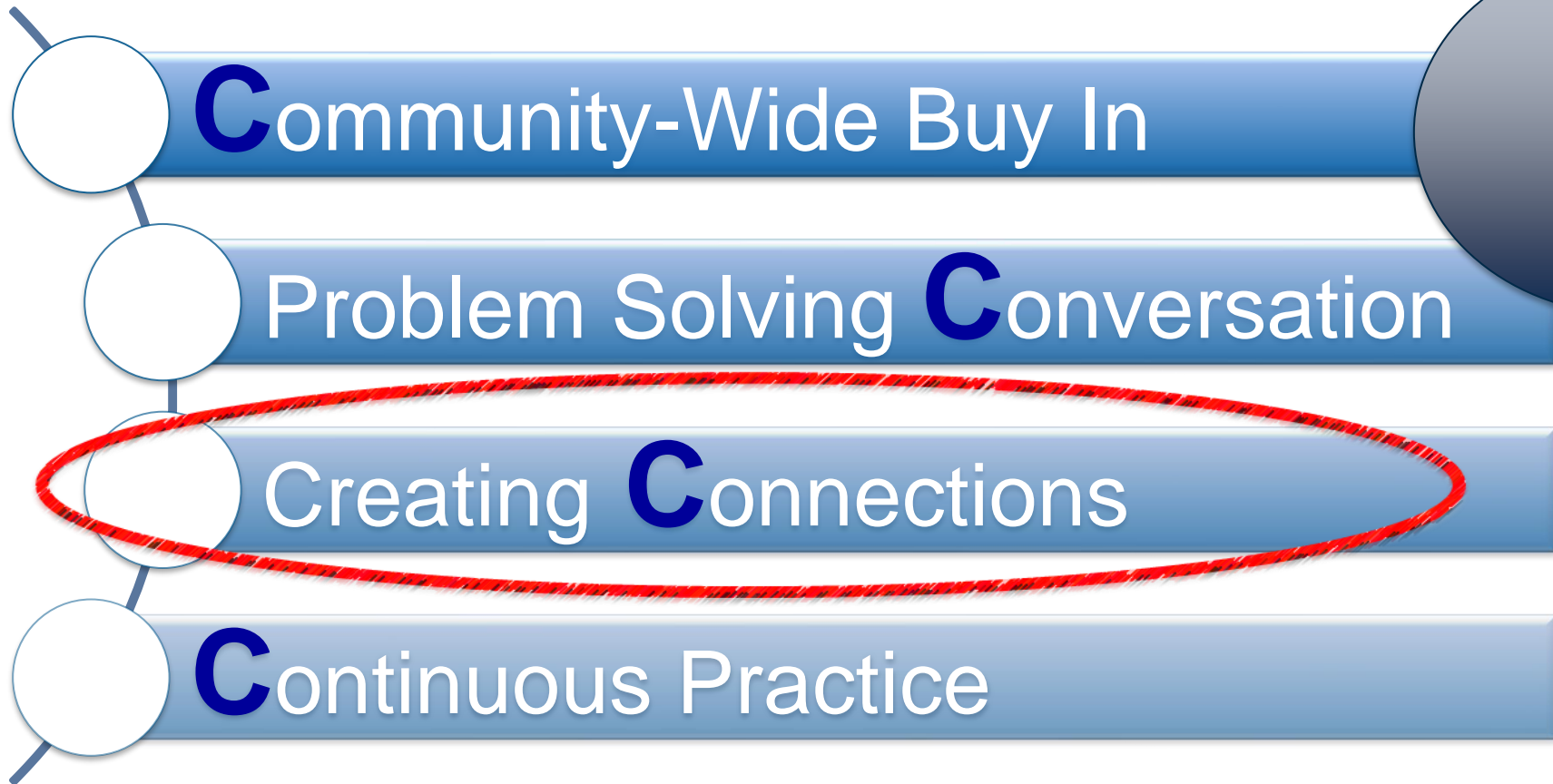
Problem Solving Conversation

- Active Listening:
 - Requires sufficient time to listen to the person share their story
 - Includes “tuning in” to a person’s nonverbal cues, like body language.
 - You’re building rapport, understanding, and trust
- Open Ended Questions:
 - Allows the person to share more information and in greater detail than if responding to questions
 - Use: How? What? Where? Who? Which?
- Be Relaxed and Open; Make Eye Contact

Anything We Missed?



Effective Diversion Practice: Four Fundamentals “Cs”



Creating **C**onnections

- Homeless response system **cannot** do it all
- Having choices/options **is empowering** to a household seeking solutions
- Family, friends, and community partners **are critical** for effective implementation of diversion strategies
- Warm Handoffs – **A MUST**

Ani_ka via iStock



Creating Connections

Breakout Rooms: Develop a list of all potential community connections: BE SPECIFIC

- Connections Critical to Housing Problem Solving Strategies
 - Friends and/or Family
 - Faith Community
 - Mainstream benefit programs
 - Employment
 - Legal Services
 - Transportation
 - Private business
 - Health and wellness
 - Food security
 - Other

Continuous Practice

Ongoing Diversion Strategies

- Problem-solving Conversation need to happen **more than** once, twice, etc. – until housing alternative is identified
- Problem Solving Conversations are **NOT** a “one time service”
- Use a **progressive engagement** approach and consider:
 - Increased engagement of problem-solving conversation and connection to supports
- Determine how to access deeper housing resources and assist with access



Continuous Practice

- Enter each problem-solving conversation as if it's the first
- Realize you are better equipped and have more context for this subsequent conversation
 - For example: “Staying with Mom these last few times doesn’t seem to be working out. Would you like to explore other options?”
- Implement the same strategies with new context
- Trust the problem-solving conversation to determine when shelter is appropriate



DIVERSION: TIPS TO TAKE AWAY



Hone The Skills, Not A Tool

Question

“We have someone who wants to fund a diversion program... He would like to find a **good diversion screening tool** and I am wondering your thoughts on this and if you have anything you could recommend?”

Answer

“I suggest that the screening tool is in fact the relaxed, client-centered, strength-based, empathetic conversation we have with the client. In other words unfortunately no short-cut screening tool.”

~ Ed Boyte (former staff
Cleveland Mediation Center)

Communication Styles



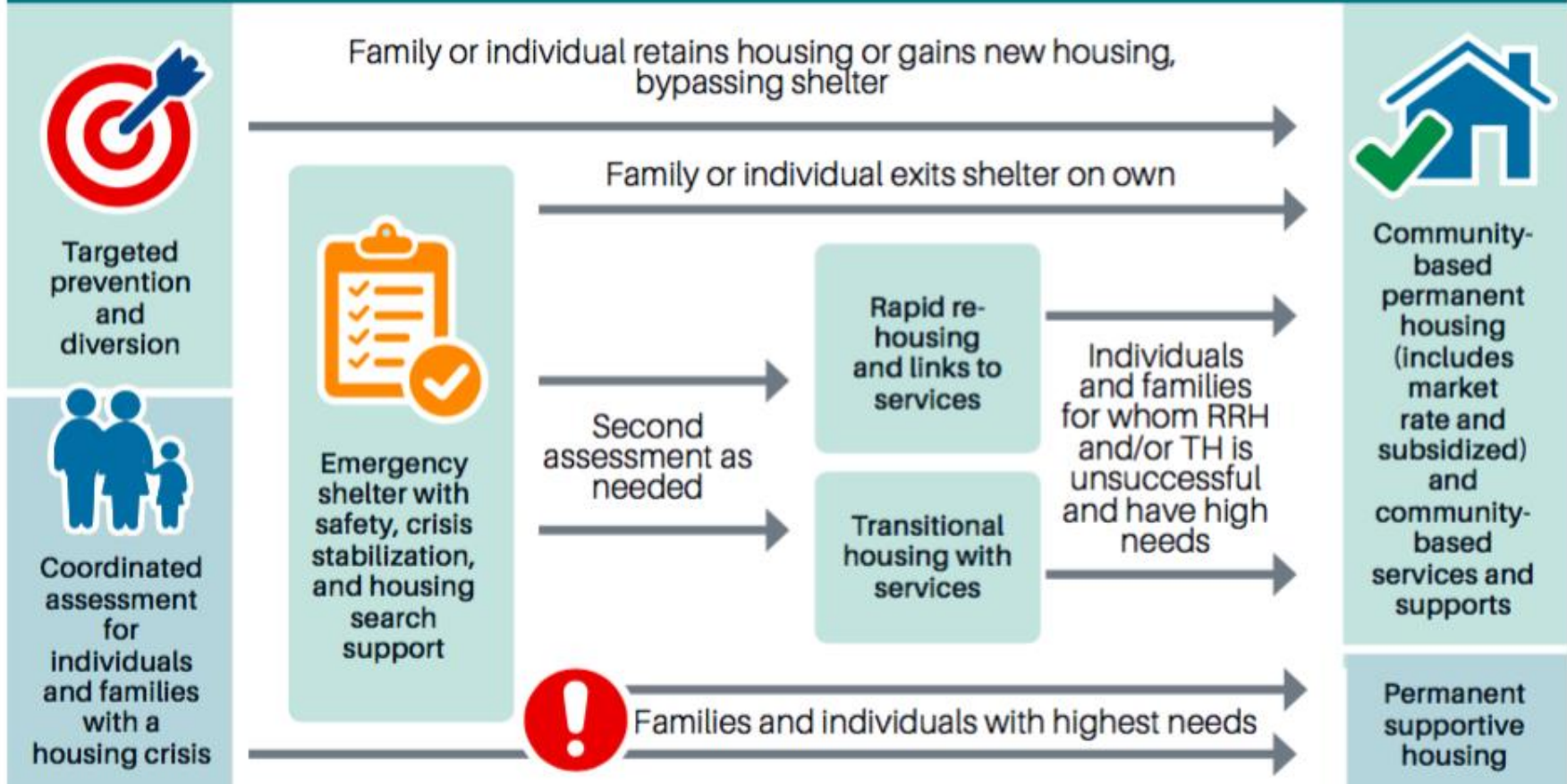
Professional Development & Ongoing Training for Staff:

- Housing First
- Harm Reduction
- Racial Equity & Homelessness
- Cultural Competencies
- Conflict Resolution
- Problem Solving
- Mediation
- Negotiation
- Communication Skills
- Military Cultural Competency
- Military Trauma Informed Care
- Safe Talk/Suicide Prevention
- Self Care

PROBLEM SOLVING/DIVERSION & COORDINATED ENTRY

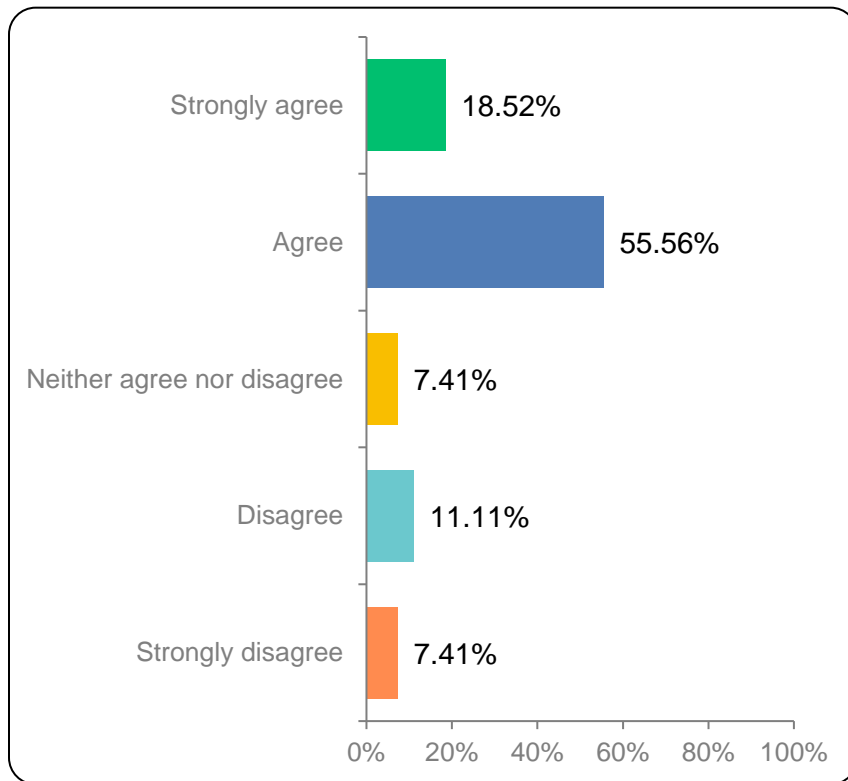


Homeless Response System

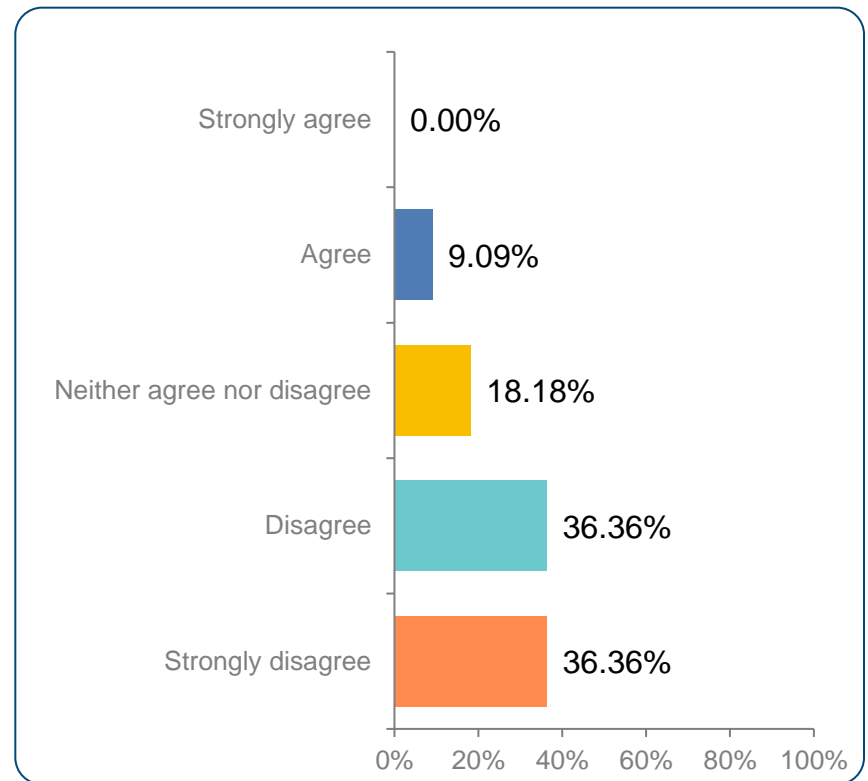


Our community uses a Coordinated Entry system as a central point of entry for anyone with a housing crisis where they can engage in a problem-solving conversation and if needed, be assessed and connected with shelter and other appropriate resources based on their strengths and needs.

Provider

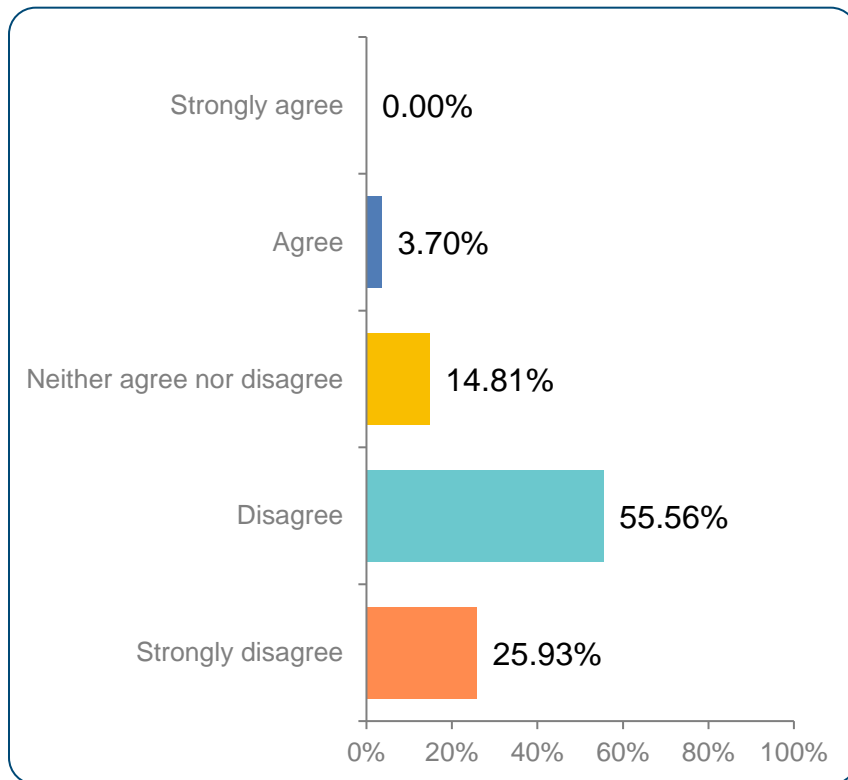


Leadership

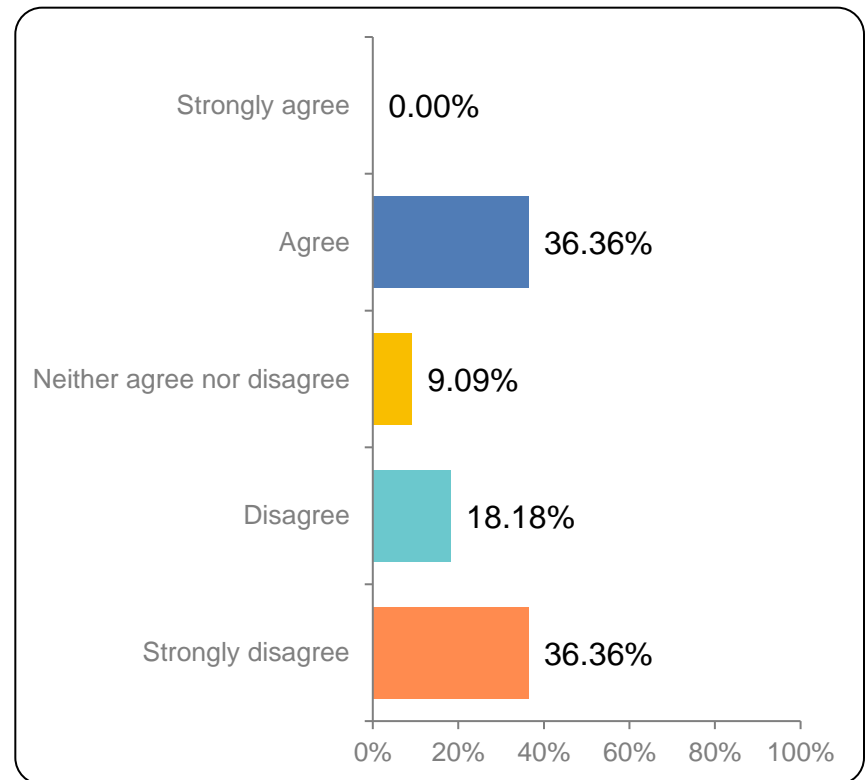


Whenever possible, our community employs strategies that prevent people from losing their housing and diverts them away from needing shelter or other housing assistance.

Provider

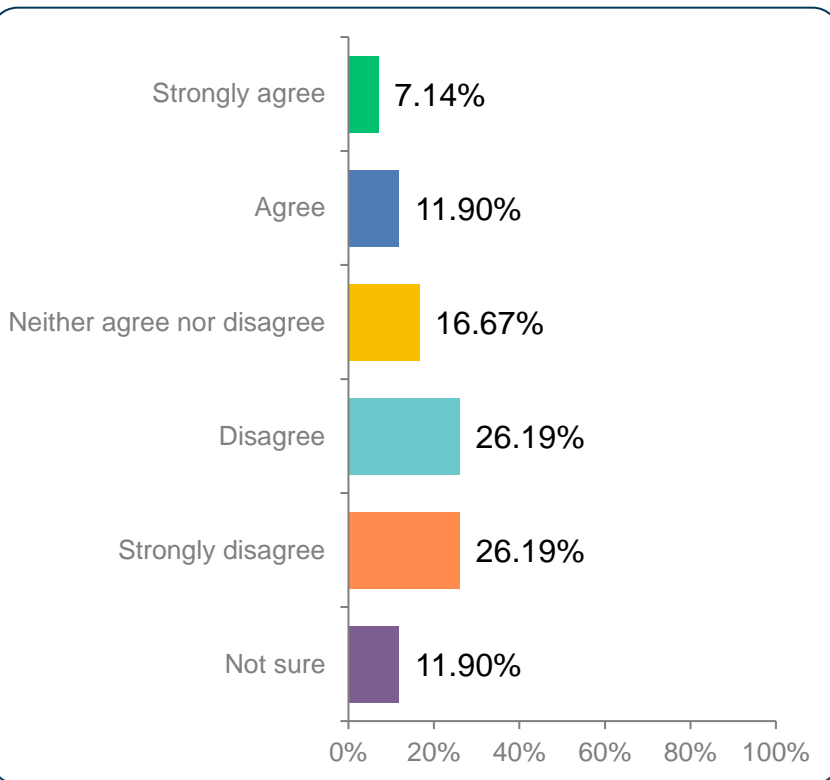


Leadership

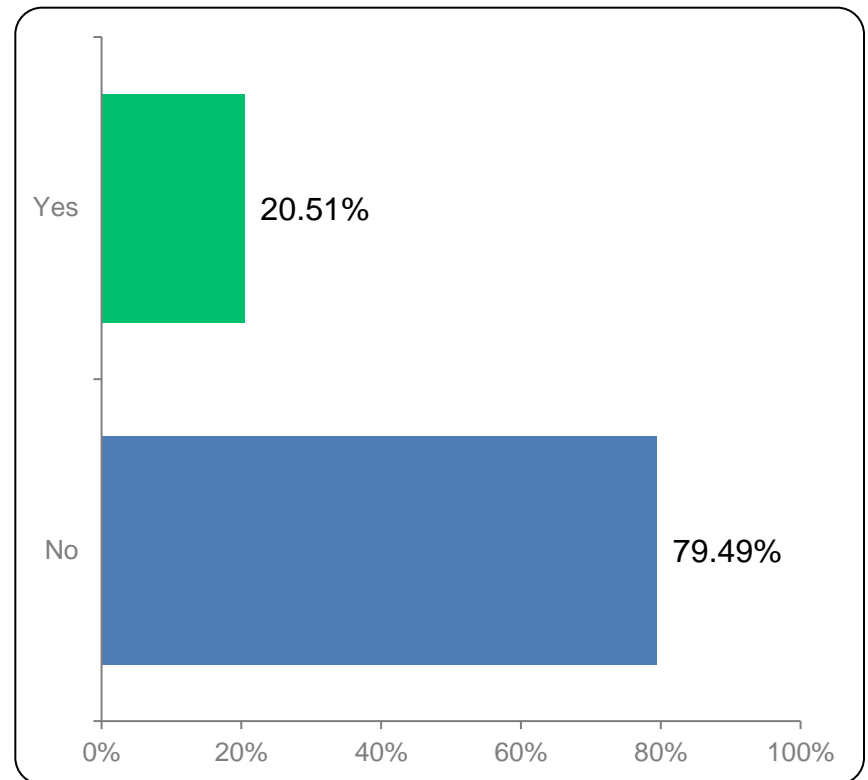


Lived Experience + Expertise

When I first became homeless, I was assisted in developing a plan to find permanent housing within the first month of connecting with services.



Before you became homeless, were you offered support to keep your housing or to find other housing that met your needs?



Role of Coordinated Entry

- Many communities have not yet integrated shelter entry/prioritization together with coordinated entry and diversion strategies
- Shelters are therefore **critical** in implementing diversion strategies as it serves as the “front door” of the homeless response system
- Shelters have an incredible opportunity to engage households and assist in solving their immediate housing crisis **before they become homeless**
- Shelters **are not** denying service when employing diversion strategies. Instead, they are providing a chance to avoid trauma of homelessness and find safe, appropriate alternative
- In employing diversion strategies, shelters ensure resources dedicated to those who will need them most

Coordinated Entry and Shelter Diversion

Old “Front Door System”

New “Front Door System”

Need for Change

Confusion

Anxiety/Loss

Clarity

Restructuring

Integration

New Vision

Coordinated Entry and Shelter Problem-Solving Techniques

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

PROBLEM-SOLVING/DIVERSION STRATEGIES

Data Collection and Analysis



Diversion: Desired System Outcomes

- Why do you collect data?
- What happens with the data you collect?
- What does it tell you?
- Does the data you collect tell you what you need to know to improve performance?
- How often do you look at it?
- Do you use it to make design, policy and staffing decisions?

Successful Outcomes

**Permanently Back with
Friends or Family**

**Return to Own
Residence**

**Temporarily Diverted
While Seeking New
Housing**

**Permanent Relocation
To Safe Place Out of
Town**

Desired Outcomes and Shared Measures

- Decrease number of first time homeless
- Decrease number of people entering shelter
- Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
- Increase all exit destinations from shelter
- Percentage of people diverted from homeless response system
- Increase exits to permanent housing
- Increase lengths of shelter stays

Evaluating Performance

MUST HAVES

1. Decrease in the number of first time homeless
2. Decrease number of people entering shelter
3. Decrease number of people on shelter waiting list
4. Percentage of persons diverted from the homeless response system
5. Percent of positive exits from shelter
6. Decrease in LOS in shelter from entry to PH exits

HIGHLY ENCOURAGED

- Decrease in Prior Residence to shelter categories
- Type of diversion service provided
- Destination or resolution
- Changes in need and barriers to sheltered population
- Percentage of people who were diverted that return to shelter/system (TBD: timeframe to track)

DIVERSION: MAKING THE SHIFT



Advancing the Role of **Diversion/HPS** in
Reducing Homelessness

Philosophical Shift

Operational Shift

Practice Shift

Shift Happens!

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

- Housing First orient that..
 - Everyone is ready for housing now
 - People experiencing homelessness don't experience it in a vacuum: they have connections, skills, and resources
- Try problem-solving with every household
 - You can't predict who you will be able to problem-solve with and who you won't
- You aren't helping someone by admitting them into shelter before trying to problem-solve

Safe and Appropriate Diversion Philosophy Shift

**Diversion before, during and
HPS after Intake!**

Shift From	Shift Towards
Are you willing to enter shelter and follow our rules?	Is the place you were staying safe? What can we do to help you remain there? What can we do to help you find a safe place other than shelter?
What programs are you eligible for? Who has a bed?	What would resolve your current housing crisis?
Beginning with eligibility determinations and intake questions	Begin with brainstorming and structured problem-solving conversations about household's situation and resources
Beginning with screening and assessment tools and shelter waitlists	Support crisis resolution to avoid shelter entry through problem solving conversation

Safe and Appropriate Diversion

Operational Shift

- **Re-envision Intake Process**
 - Again, diversion before intake
 - What does intake process consist of?
 - Keep in mind Housing First
- **Space & time**
 - Private space conducive to a conversation
 - Flexible, not rushed timing is optimal
- **Staffing**
 - Incorporate diversion culture, “right fit”
 - Training in mediation skills
 - Job descriptions and structure
 - People with Lived Experience



Activity

1. Where is diversion happening now?
2. How much time is dedicated to each conversation?
3. How do we hire for positions that do diversion?
4. How do we maintain the skillset for ongoing success?

Anything We Missed?

