



Implementing a Modern Day Outreach Response

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Introduction

Recent [increases in unsheltered homelessness](#) and [renewed federal focus](#) call on communities to strengthen local responses and interventions addressing unsheltered homelessness.

Unfortunately, many communities still rely on outdated and ineffective outreach strategies, and efforts are often siloed and disjointed from the homelessness response system. Effective outreach response requires a more comprehensive and modern day approach to identifying, assessing, and serving homeless encampments.

This paper provides a framework for implementing a modern-day outreach response centered on an encampment resolution approach designed to improve outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness. Specifically, this paper will address:

- Encampment Resolution Strategy
- Data Collection Processes
- Encampment Data Collection
- Encampment Prioritization Practices
- Service Provision
- Encampment Abatement & Closures
- Reporting & Monitoring

Defining an Encampment Resolution Strategy

Approaches to Encampment Resolution Initiatives

Encampment resolution is a multifaceted approach aimed at addressing the complex issue of unsheltered homelessness and is built on the recognition that no single solution will suffice. At its core, this strategy emphasizes the importance of harm reduction and person-centered care to make encampments safer for everyone, while providing support and assistance to unsheltered individuals.

Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is a central tenet of encampment resolution. It recognizes that individuals living in encampments often face many challenges, including substance use disorders and mental health conditions. Rather than focusing solely on enforcement or abstinence, harm reduction approaches prioritize minimizing the negative consequences of use and improving health outcomes. Harm reduction may involve providing access to clean syringes, safe disposal facilities, or supervised

consumption spaces to reduce health risks and improve overall well-being. Harm reduction strategies should be thoughtfully incorporated into encampment resolution initiatives.

Person-Centered Care

Person-centered care is also a fundamental aspect of encampment resolution. This approach acknowledges that the needs and circumstances of homeless individuals can vary significantly. It places individuals at the center of decision-making processes and tailors interventions to their unique situations. Whether it's connecting them with harm reduction supplies, behavioral health services, or housing options, person-centered care recognizes that a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective when dealing with the diverse needs of encampment residents.

Personal Safety

The ultimate goal of encampment resolution is to create safer living environments within encampments while simultaneously working towards more stable housing solutions for those experiencing homelessness. This involves providing access to sanitation facilities, trash disposal, and, where possible, access to medical care and social services within or near encampments. By making encampments safer, communities can reduce the risks of infectious diseases, violence, and other harms associated with unregulated encampments.

Creating an Encampment Response Entity

To effectively address encampments, a wide array of services and resources must be integrated and accessible to individuals living in encampments. Services include low-barrier interim housing, permanent housing, health care, behavioral health care, legal assistance, and other supportive services. Encampment resolution initiatives benefit from the creation of an encampment response entity responsible for the coordination of providers, deployment of resources, performance monitoring, and reporting.

A variety of community stakeholders should be represented in the encampment response entity, including:

- CoC representatives
- HMIS system administrators
- Outreach providers
- Healthcare & behavioral healthcare providers
- Individuals with lived experience
- Funders
- Local government

Data-Driven Decision Making

Encampment response entities must determine the prioritization of encampments and resource allocation. Strong data collection practices aid decision-making by providing insight into the needs of encampments and encampment residents. Data collection practices should include mechanisms

to collect individual and encampment data and standardized tools to assess encampments and encampment residents. Initiatives should create data collection standards and processes for identifying, assessing, and serving encampments and unsheltered populations while centering encampment resolution practices.

Determining Data Collection Processes

Accurate and consistent data collection supports a comprehensive response to unsheltered homelessness. Data collection strategies should include methods to collect, store, and access encampment and individual data. Strategies should be well defined and incorporated into outreach workflows and documented within policies and procedures. Policies and procedures should also provide parameters for sharing data with providers and community partners. Protecting homeless client data is crucial because it safeguards the privacy and safety of vulnerable individuals, ensuring they can access essential services without fear of exploitation, harassment, or discrimination, thereby facilitating their path toward housing stability.

Before communities proceed with data collection, there are three key data collection processes for communities to consider:

1. Creating an encampment definition
2. Selecting a mapping tool
3. Designing a notification process

Defining Encampments

Before communities begin collecting encampment location data, developing a standardized definition and shared understanding of what does and does not constitute an encampment is important. Providers should have clear criteria to ensure consistent representation, accurate reporting, and effective service delivery. See our [sample definitions](#) in our [Outreach Toolkit](#) if your community does not have a standardized definition.

It is important to consider whether the following living situations should be considered encampments:

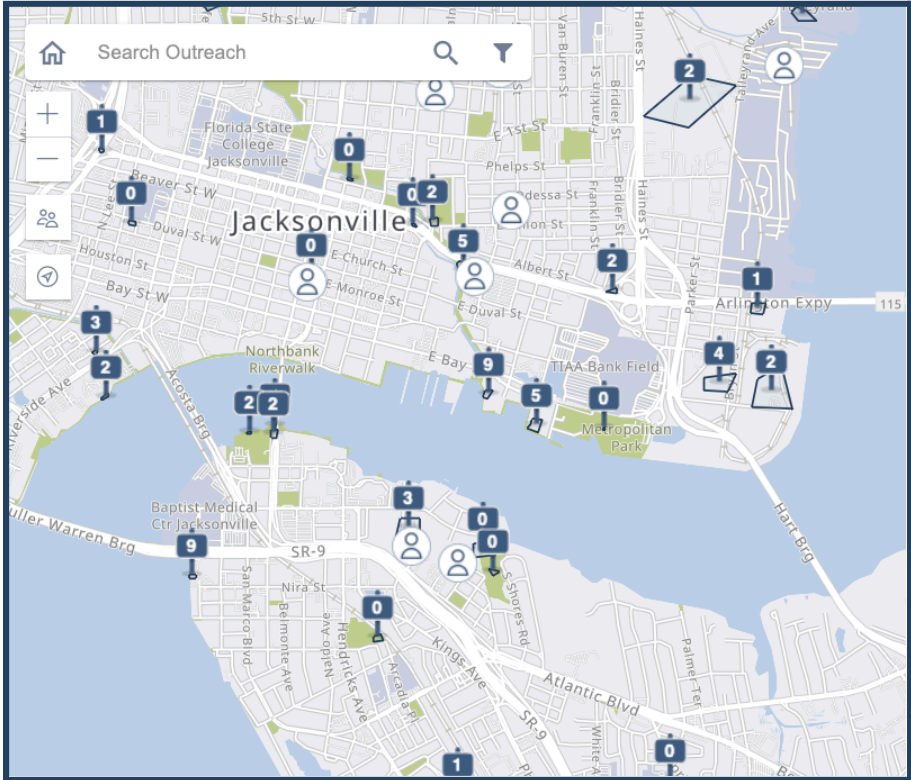
- Single unsheltered individuals
- Residence in abandoned buildings
- Residence in transit tunnels
- Residence in vehicles or RVs
- Groups of individuals residing in vehicles within close proximity

Select a Mapping Tool

After developing an encampment definition, communities should plan for what encampment information will be collected and how it will be stored. Conversations with outreach teams across

the country reveal that most communities lack shared and centralized encampment location data. Encampment-level information is often collected on paper or external sources and is frequently stored separately by each provider. Providers often rely on word of mouth from clients, public service entities, or other providers for encampment identification and location information.

Encampment location data is best collected through the use of a shared mapping tool. Cloud-based mapping tools allow providers to collect and share encampment locations in real-time, aiding with service provision and care coordination. Mapping tools also provide the ability to more accurately represent encampment boundaries and spatial dynamics.



Implementing a shared mapping tool can also assist with:

- Resource allocation: Mapping tools help identify areas with the highest concentration of encampments and individuals, ensuring aid reaches areas of need
- Targeted outreach: Precise location data helps providers locate and assist individuals more effectively, improving their access to essential services.
- Emergency response: In times of crisis, such as extreme weather or public health emergencies, mapping aids in swift response and protection of individuals residing in encampments
- Evidence-based policy development: Accurate data can inform sound policy decisions and aid long-term planning for homeless services

When evaluating mapping tools, consider the following functionality:

- Ability to export or integrate necessary data points
- Ability to create encampment boundaries
- Ability to map sites within encampment boundaries
- Ability to add map layers to assist with local coordination such as law enforcement zones, fire department jurisdictions, public park areas, or FEMA flood zones.

Clarity Outreach is a map-based module to map encampments and unsheltered data and provides numerous tools to support communication and collaboration. Clarity Outreach meets all the mapping tool criteria below and provides many more features like encampment notes, alerts, and outreach team assignments that can help communities make advancements in unsheltered initiatives.

- Ability to export or integrate necessary data points
- Ability to create encampment boundaries
- Ability to map sites within encampment boundaries
- Ability to add map layers to assist with local coordination such as law enforcement zones, fire department jurisdictions, public park areas, or FEMA flood zones

Bitfocus offers free access to Clarity Outreach for Clarity Human Service customers. Learn more about [Clarity Human Services & Clarity Outreach](#).

There are also several other free or low-cost software solutions available to communities, including ARG GIS, Zeemaps, and QGIS. See the [HUD CoC GIS Toolkit](#) for more information on how GIS tools can assist with local data collection.

Design an Encampment Notification Process

Once a tool has been selected, an encampment notification process should be designed. This process provides the opportunity for public partners, local businesses, outreach personnel, or concerned citizens to report encampment or request outreach engagement. The initial notifications should be received and reviewed by the Encampment Response Entity to assign outreach personnel for engagement and ensure that the map remains current when developments occur.

Communities interested in receiving notifications from the general public are encouraged to use an electronic form that can be embedded within a community website. The form should collect sufficient information for outreach personnel to locate the encampment without requiring the requestor to engage with encampment residents. Examples of this process include the [LA Homeless Outreach Portal](#), [New York City's Homeless Encampment Portal](#), and [City of Tucson's Encampment Reporting Tool](#).

When designing a notification process, communities should plan for the following:

Who

- Who will submit notifications. This may include outreach personnel, public services, law enforcement, and the general public.
- Who will receive notifications
- Who will respond to notifications

What

- What information will be collected
- What information will be conveyed

When

- When will teams be deployed
- When will teams respond to assignments

Where

- Where will notifications be submitted
- Where will notification data be stored

How

- How will information be transferred to outreach personnel

At a minimum, the information collected through the notification form should include:

- Site address or GPS coordinates
- Site description
- Estimated number of occupants
- Contact information for follow-up

Determining Encampment Data Collection Processes

Effective service engagement of encampments and encampment residents requires an in-depth understanding of the needs and conditions of each encampment. Universal encampment assessment tools can strengthen community insight, identify the gaps in service contributing to unsheltered homelessness, and target areas for performance improvement.

Recommended assessment tools include an encampment-level tool and a resident assessment tool. The encampment assessment tool evaluates the health, safety, and environmental impact of the encampment while the resident assessment aids in understanding individual factors leading to unsheltered homelessness. When analyzed together, these tools can provide more comprehensive insight into conditions and causes of unsheltered homelessness within your community.

Developing an Encampment Assessment Tool

Encampment assessments are designed to collect encampment-level information for coordinating resources, service delivery, prioritization, monitoring, and reporting. HUD encourages using encampment assessment tools but does not endorse a specific tool. Instead, communities can design a tool or adapt an existing tool to meet local needs.

Recommended assessment domains & sample content include:

< Active: Southbank Encampment

GENERAL INFORMATION





Please describe the site including surrounding area and types of structures.
Growing encampment on South bank directly behind hospital. Four tents included with some other temporary structures.

Number of individual sites or structures observed
6

Please describe the best access point for Emergency Services in the event of an emergency.
Best accessed using the walking path from the parking lot of the hospital.


Are there indications that children may be present?
No

Are there any indications that one or more residents may be pregnant?
No

 GENERAL INFO	 HEALTH	 SAFETY	 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Location• Access instructions• Number of sites• Types of structures• Children present• Pets present	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to potable water• Medical conditions• Behavioral health conditions• Access to harm reduction tools• Provision of basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harassment against residents• Violence against residents• Victimization within encampment• Observation of weapons• Observation of dangerous behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Level of debris• Presence of waste• Risk of waterway pollution• Presence of fire hazards• Risk of flooding• Sanitation stations present

See these sample tools to begin evaluating the needs of your community:

- [Bitfocus sample assessment](#)
- [City of Detroit Encampment Health & Safety Assessment](#)
- [City of Houston Site Assessment](#)


 Clarity Outreach can be used to customize and collect encampment assessments. Using advanced logic, customers can configure a complex multi-phased assessment to support data collection protocol at any stage of the encampment lifecycle. Clarity's data analysis tools also allow for the development of custom reports to analyze encampment assessment data. Learn more about how Clarity's [encampment screen](#) can be used to support data collection practices.

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Developing an Encampment Resident Assessment Tool

The encampment resident assessment tool is designed to collect client-level information to better understand the personal factors contributing to an individual's unsheltered status. At a minimum, we recommend including the following domains and questions:



 Clarity offers global and program-level assessments to support Encampment Resident Assessments. Clarity assessment screens can be fully customized to meet data collection needs and include advanced logic and tools to improve data quality. [Learn more](#) about how to use Clarity to issue custom assessments.

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Determining Encampment Prioritization Strategies

Prioritization standards and strategies can be a helpful additional tool to planning encampment response, especially when outreach and mitigation resources are limited in relation to demand. There are multiple methods to consider when planning prioritization approaches. Options for prioritization may include:

- Size & scope of the encampment
- Legal & regulatory violations
- Flood or fire risk

- High risk health conditions
- Intersection with public spaces and thoroughfares
- Risk of victimization

Communities are encouraged to develop methods to score and prioritize encampments based on encampment assessment results. Encampment prioritization strategies assist with the allocation of outreach and mitigation resources. Once prioritization strategies are developed, communities may choose to create response tiers that dictate the priority, level of service, and may also influence resolution determinations. The [Bitfocus Sample Assessment Tool](#) is structured to provide intervention recommendations based on the encampment conditions assessed:

Indicator	Response
No Risk Observed	No action
Low Levels Observed	Continued Monitoring
Moderate Levels Observed	Mitigation Recommended
High	Immediate Mitigation or Intervention Required

Delivering Services to Encampments

The provision of services within an encampment resolution initiative is the most important component in the effort to address unsheltered homelessness. Service provision should be informed by the encampment assessment, and a service plan should be developed for each encampment that specifies the type and intensity of the services and support individuals and encampments receive.



Encampment Service Plan

ENCAMPMENT INFORMATION	
Encampment Name	
Location ID	
Notification Date	
Assessment Date	
Service Plan Date	
Notes	

ENCAMPMENT TEAM ASSIGNMENTS & SERVICES	
Assigned Encampment Teams	
Service Interval	
Requested Services	
Notes	

MITIGATION SCORES & RESPONSES	
Health	
Safety	
Environmental Impact	
Notes	
Reassessment Date	

Encampment assessments serve as the foundation upon which service provision strategies are built. By systematically collecting data on the health, safety, and environmental conditions of encampments, as well as individual factors contributing to homelessness, service providers gain invaluable insights into the unique needs and challenges present. This data-driven approach enables providers to prioritize their interventions effectively and allocate resources according to the highest level of need.

Type of Services

The type of services offered can vary widely based on the findings of the encampment assessment. For example, if an assessment reveals high levels of substance use, mental health conditions, or infectious diseases within an encampment, harm reduction and medical services should be prioritized. In contrast, encampments with less acute conditions may not necessitate prioritization for services.


Intensity of Services

The intensity of services should also be guided by the assessment results. Encampments deemed to be at high risk or with vulnerable populations may require more intensive, immediate interventions, while others in less critical conditions may benefit from ongoing support aimed at gradually transitioning residents to stable housing. This flexibility in service provision allows

encampment resolution initiatives to adapt to the diverse needs and circumstances of encampment residents.

Timeline of Services

It's important to note that encampment resolution initiatives operate within specific timeframes, reflecting the urgency of addressing unsheltered homelessness. These initiatives aim to provide rapid responses to encampment conditions while simultaneously working toward longer-term solutions, such as permanent housing. Timely and targeted service provision, as informed by encampment assessments, plays a critical role in achieving the ultimate goal of these initiatives: improving the well-being and stability of individuals experiencing homelessness, with a focus on compassion, dignity, and respect throughout the process. Communities should create reasonable timeframes and benchmarks to guide the encampment resolution initiative and determine when the initiative is complete.

 Clarity Human Services provides tools for issuing and tracking services to individuals residing in encampments, and services can be customized to meet data collection needs. Issue services at the agency level or associate services with a specific program. Clarity is also equipped with options to track time, funding, and accounts that are associated with a specific service. [Learn more](#) about how Clarity can be used in service provision.

Bitfocus offers free access to Clarity Outreach for Clarity Human Service customers. [Learn more about Clarity Human Services & Clarity Outreach.](#)

Developing Encampment Abatement & Closure Procedures

The primary objective of encampment resolution initiatives is to support the well-being and stability of all community members, including those experiencing homelessness. Abatement is not a driving strategy, but closures may become necessary in certain situations. Encampment response entities should always make closure decisions with careful consideration of the circumstances and the understanding that displacement does not solve homelessness.

The community should develop policies and procedures that specify when abatement is necessary and create standards to ensure a person-centered approach prioritizes the needs and dignity of the affected residents. Communities should evaluate the following considerations when devising protocols for abatement:

Legal considerations

Before making abatement determinations, communities should consider any local and state legislation surrounding encampments and abatement processes. The most sweeping legislation is *Martin vs City of Boise*, a case decided by the United States Court of Appeals of the Ninth Circuit. The case established that it is unconstitutional to enforce anti-camping ordinances on public property if individuals experiencing homelessness do not have access to shelter or housing options. The Ninth Circuit covers the western United States including California and Washington which have the highest concentration of unsheltered populations in the United States. While this legislation does not cover all jurisdictions, it establishes a legal framework for encampment abatement.

Abatement Criteria & Procedures

All communities should develop abatement criteria that define what conditions require an encampment's closure and procedures that document the closure process. Communities should develop criteria and procedures through an inclusive and transparent process that includes input from various stakeholder groups. Input from individuals with lived experience, homeless providers, and policymakers should be prioritized to ensure the criteria are legal, ethical, and humane. Once developed and approved, the criteria and procedures should be posted on public websites and available to individuals residing in encampments.

Abatement Notices & Timeline

It is important to provide encampment residents with as much notice as possible before an encampment is closed so that they can identify suitable alternatives, seek appropriate services, arrange for storage, etc. Where possible, all encampment residents should be personally notified, and written notices should be posted in common areas within the encampment. Once an abatement determination has been issued, on-site services should be established to assist with service coordination. Communities may consider temporary prioritization of encampment residents within coordinated entry processes to expedite access to shelter or housing options. It is important to provide all residents with temporary shelter or permanent housing options to mitigate the impact of closure for encampment residents.

Provision of Interim Housing

Service providers and local authorities should offer transition support to all displaced individuals well before the closure. Research shows that low-barrier interim housing options are the most effective alternative to address encampment closures. Interim housing ensures that encampment residents have a safe and dignified transition from the encampment to temporary shelter, reducing the risk of displacement-related harm. It may also serve as a bridge to more permanent housing solutions helping individuals to stabilize before placement. Ultimately, interim housing upholds the principles of compassion and respect for the rights and well-being of those affected by encampment closures.

Access to Personal Storage

When closing an encampment, providing access to personal storage for encampment residents is critical to the transition process and should be offered to all residents expressing a need. Personal storage helps protect residents' personal property, including documentation needed for services, medication, clothing, or other valuables. Storage helps preserve personal belongings, protects personal dignity, fosters rapport between residents and service providers, and can ease the stress of transition for residents.

Establish Reporting & Monitoring Protocol

Effective reporting and monitoring practices are essential components of successful encampment resolution initiatives. These practices help communities track progress and ensure transparency and accountability in addressing unsheltered homelessness. Consider incorporating the following best practices into reporting and monitoring policies:

Data Collection and Analysis

- Implement a standardized data collection process to consistently capture information about encampment conditions, resident needs, and outcomes.
- Analyze the data regularly to identify trends, assess the impact of interventions, and make data-driven decisions for resource allocation and strategy adjustments.
- Use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and mapping tools to visualize encampment locations and changes over time, aiding in resource allocation and strategic planning.

Metrics & Benchmarks

- Define clear metrics and benchmarks that align with the goals of encampment resolution such as the number successfully housed, reduction in encampment size, and improvements in health and safety conditions.
- Regularly track and report on metrics & benchmarks to measure the effectiveness of interventions and strategies.

Regular Reporting

- Develop a reporting schedule to provide stakeholders, including policymakers, service providers, and the community, with regular updates on encampment resolution efforts.
- Ensure reports are accessible and easy to understand, using visual aids like graphs and maps to convey key information.
- Include both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive picture of progress and challenges.

Transparent Communication

- Maintain open and transparent communication with the public, local media, and advocacy groups about encampment resolution activities, progress, and challenges.
- Share report findings with community stakeholders to inform future policy and practice.
- Address concerns and provide context to build community understanding and support.


Continuous Improvement

- Use monitoring data to identify areas where improvements can be made in service delivery, resource allocation, or policy adjustments.
- Provide training and resources to refine encampment resolution initiatives based on reporting and feedback.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

- When collecting individual-level data, Ensure reporting and monitoring practices align with legal and ethical standards, including privacy regulations and informed consent.
- Protect the safety of individuals residing in encampments by keeping encampment location data confidential and shared only with need-to-know staff and entities.
- Maintain a commitment to upholding the dignity and rights of individuals experiencing homelessness throughout the reporting and monitoring process.

By implementing these best practices, communities can establish a robust framework for reporting and monitoring encampment resolution initiatives. This framework helps track progress and fosters transparency, accountability, and a data-driven approach to addressing homelessness, ultimately working towards more effective and compassionate solutions.

 Clarity's Data Analysis tool includes an Outreach model designed to support reporting needs in Clarity Outreach. The model includes encampment-level information, client-level information, as well as custom fields. Develop custom reports and dashboards to assist with performance monitoring and gain insight into unsheltered homelessness within the community. [Learn more](#) about the Outreach model & data analysis tools.

Bitfocus offers free access to Clarity Outreach for Clarity Human Service customers. [Learn more about Clarity Human Services](#) & [Clarity Outreach](#).

Sample Reports

Encampment Prioritization Report

Encampment assessments can be scored using Clarity's Data Analysis tools or another application to help prioritize encampment response and ensure resources are directed to the greatest area of need.

Encampment Name	Encampment ID	Active?	Last Updated	Health Domain	Safety Domain	Environmental Domain	Total	Teams Assigned
1 Active: Shipyard Encampment		42 Yes	6/6/23	20	10	40	70	Mitigation Team, Medical Team
2 Active: 5th Street South		49 Yes	3/20/23	10	20	10	40	Mitigation Team, Medical Team
3 Active: Arlington MLK		53 Yes	3/20/23	30	10	20	60	Mitigation Team, Navigation
4 Active: Springfield Park		55 Yes	3/20/23	20	20	10	50	Mitigation Team
5 Active: Talleyrand Encampment		44 Yes	3/20/23	0	10	10	20	Mitigation Team
6 Pending: Union St		54 Yes	9/26/22	30	40	10	80	Mitigation Team
7 Active: Southbank Encampment		72 Yes	5/11/23	10	10	20	40	Medical Team
8 Active: Arlington MLK		53 Yes	3/20/23	30	10	20	60	Medical Team
9 Active: Springfield Park		55 Yes	3/20/23	20	10	10	40	Medical Team

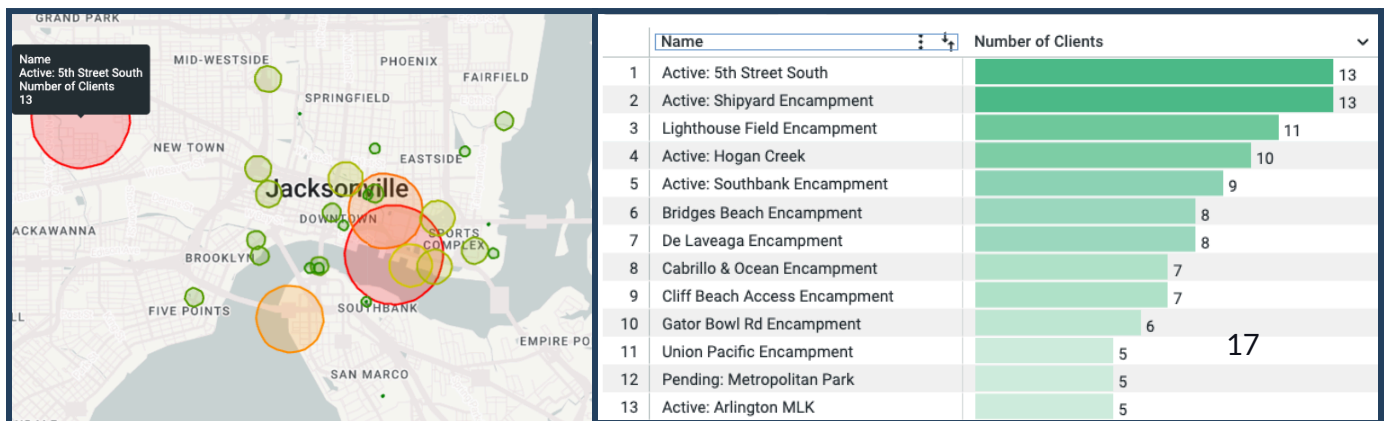
Encampment Roster

An encampment roster report is a By Name List of all encampment residents. The sample below includes client-level information pulled from the encampment resident assessment. It is designed to assist with individual and encampment level service planning.

Location History				Resident Assessment					
	Resident ID	Encampment Name	Date Added to Encampment	Document Ready Status	Chronic Status	Open to Shelter	Current Bans	Total Monthly Income	Services Requested
1	E4ED84B18	Active: 5th Street South	2/12/23	∅	No	No	Yes	∅	None
2	F596C6986	tive: Southbank Encampm	1/4/23	Complete	Confirmed Chronic	No	No	∅	Health, Meals
3	75F4D6DD3	tive: Southbank Encampm	12/17/23	In process	No	Yes	Yes	∅	Dental
4	7AA0C58EB	Active: 5th Street South	3/20/23	Complete	No	Yes	No	∅	None
5	2C7E1F18A	Active: 5th Street South	3/1/23	Complete	Confirmed Chronic	No	No	∅	Documentation
6	C26D747AF	tive: Shipyard Encampm	3/20/23	∅	No	No	No	600	Dental, Health
7	7D5E427F3	tive: Shipyard Encampm	3/20/23	In process	No	No	Yes	700	None
8	419E03267	Active: Hogan Creek	3/20/23	In process	No	No	Yes	∅	Meals
9	A057015CD	Active: 5th Street South	3/20/23	In process	Confirmed Chronic	No	No	400	Documentation
10	E1F9D591F	tive: Shipyard Encampm	3/20/23	Complete	No	No	No	1200	None
11	2F158051A	Active: Hogan Creek	3/20/23	Complete	No	No	No	∅	None
12	2B4F169DF	tive: Southbank Encampm	3/20/23	In process	No	No	No	∅	None

Density Mapping

Density mapping of homeless encampments is the process of creating visual representations or maps that illustrate the concentration and distribution of homeless individuals or makeshift shelter sites within a specific area. Density mapping helps to better understand the spatial patterns and needs of homeless populations in urban or rural areas.



Conclusion

Advancing outcomes for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness requires communities to implement a comprehensive and collaborative approach and to ensure outreach interventions are well integrated into the community's homelessness response system. The outlined solutions provide a framework for communities to address unsheltered homelessness using a person-centered and data-driven approach. The insight gained through encampment mapping, assessments, and individual data collection help communities make more strategic and informed decisions in service delivery.

Communities should invest time to effectively design and plan outreach interventions. Bitfocus has worked with numerous communities across urban and rural CoCs to implement Clarity Outreach, encampment assessments, and improve location data collection. The [Clarity Outreach Toolkit](#) provides guidance and resources for communities implementing Clarity Outreach. Bitfocus also offers a range of assistance options to support the implementation of Clarity Outreach,

The road to ending unsheltered homelessness is paved with the principles of collaboration, data-driven decision-making, and a strong commitment to person-centered care. By embracing these solutions and the tools offered, communities can improve the lives of those impacted by unsheltered homelessness. It is only through comprehensive planning, continuous pursuit of performance improvement, and consistent service delivery that progress towards ending homelessness can be made.