

Built For Zero.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

A MOVEMENT TO END HOMELESSNESS

Community Solutions leads Built for Zero, a national initiative of more than 150 cities and counties committed to measurably and visibly reducing homelessness.

Homelessness is solvable. This isn't a statement of aspiration — communities across the country are proving it.

150+ CITIES AND COUNTIES IN BUILT FOR ZERO

16 HAVE REACHED FUNCTIONAL ZERO FOR A POPULATION

40 HAVE DRIVEN MEASURABLE REDUCTIONS

Since 2015, Built for Zero has shown that communities can achieve sustainable, population-level reductions when they align their efforts behind a single, shared community wide goal: fewer people experiencing homelessness each month. The Built for Zero framework guides communities in establishing four foundational practices— and creating the key enabling conditions for success.

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL CAPABILITIES EVERY COMMUNITY NEEDS

BACKBONE ORGANIZATION

A central "backbone" entity (e.g., CoC, local government, community-based organization) that aligns efforts, mobilizes resources, and builds will for shared community goals.

SHARED GOAL

Community-wide, measurable targets embraced by partners, embedded in resource allocation, policy, and strategy, and communicated publicly.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Cross-sector collaboration uniting housing, health, philanthropy, business, government, and lived expertise in an accountable effort.

COMPREHENSIVE DATA

Real-time, person-level data on inflow, outflow, returns, and time-to-housing, built on shared definitions and quality practices to drive effective triage.

Explore Built for Zero Framework

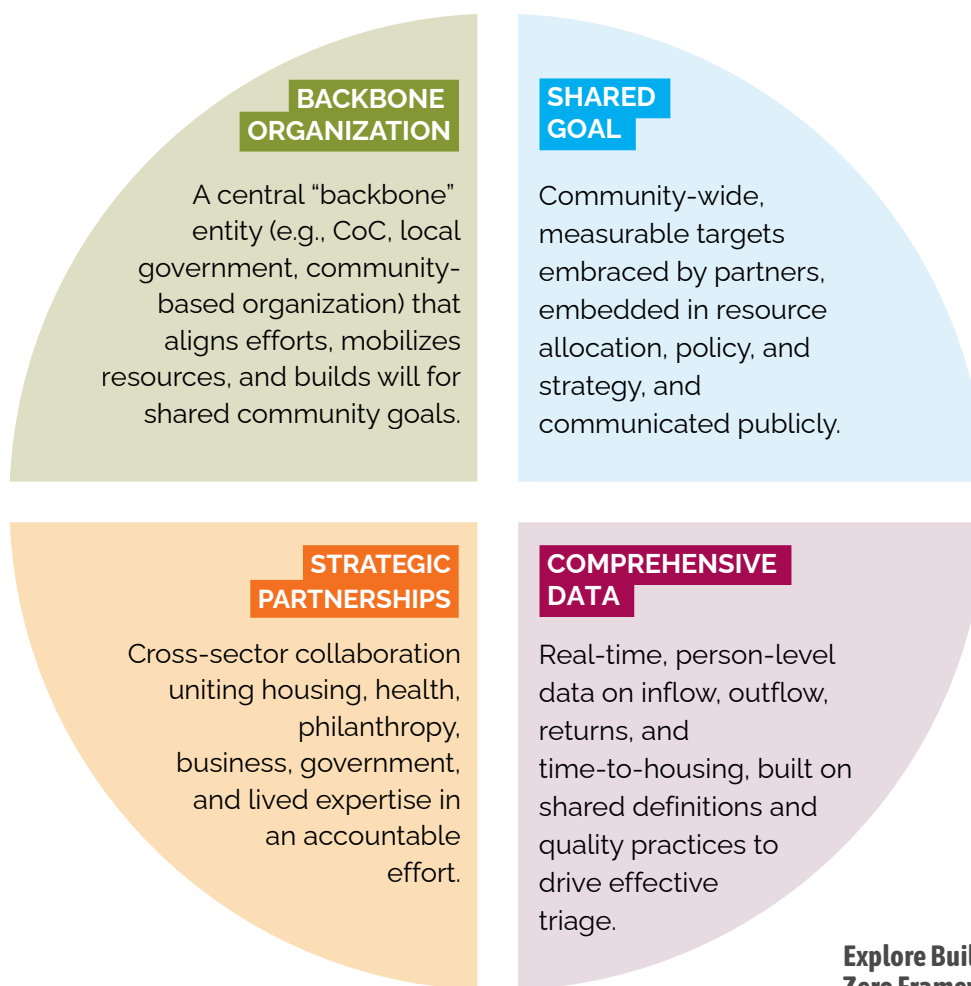


TEAM PLANNING TIME #1

THEORY OF CHANGE

Since 2015, Built for Zero has shown that communities can achieve sustainable, population-level reductions when they align their efforts behind a single, shared community wide goal: fewer people experiencing homelessness each month. The Built for Zero framework guides communities in establishing four foundational practices— and creating the key enabling conditions for success.

FOUR FOUNDATIONAL CAPABILITIES EVERY COMMUNITY NEEDS



Explore Built for
Zero Framework



FIVE ENABLING CONDITIONS THAT ACCELERATE PROGRESS

SUPPORTIVE POLICY



Local policies that remove barriers, center people, and enable coordinated, data-driven, timely responses.

SHARED PUBLIC NARRATIVE



A consistent message, reinforced by leaders and media, framing homelessness as solvable with local accountability.

FUNDING AND RESOURCES



Diversified, flexible funding — public, private, and philanthropic — to support emergency response and system infrastructure.

HOUSING SUPPLY



Adequate and appropriate housing units available that meet basic needs and range of household budgets.

POLITICAL WILL



Strong political leadership to prioritize homelessness solutions, overcome barriers, fund responses, and drive collaboration.

WAYS OF WORKING

To **turn this framework into measurable results**, communities integrate four core practices:

- **Person-Specific:** Use shared, disaggregated data to monitor, disparities, close gaps, and track progress.
- **Collaborative:** Within the backbone structure, co-develop strategies, align resources, and include lived experience.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Test, adapt, and scale solutions quickly, guided by shared data and evaluation.
- **Proactive:** Anticipate challenges, prioritize prevention, and act upstream using data and community input.

TEAM PLANNING TIME #2

IMPLEMENTATION LEVEL

Capability	1 (Minimal)	2 (Early Development)	3 (Established)	4 (Fully Integrated)
Shared Goal The Community has established a clear, measurable, and institutionalized commitment to reducing homelessness that is embraced by partners, elected officials, and community leaders, with shared accountability for achieving results.	The community lacks shared goals and coordination. Organizations operate independently with separate priorities, minimal leadership support and public awareness, and focus on individual program outcomes rather than systematic community-wide solutions.	The community agrees on reducing homelessness but lacks specific, measurable goals and comprehensive coverage. Political support is inconsistent with competing priorities. Limited shared accountability and a mix of both collaborative and separate initiatives exist.	The community has clear, measurable goals that encompass all populations. Most partners are committed and actively participate in collective governance structures, with resources aligned to support shared goals. Elected officials voice public support and there is broad community awareness with some shared accountability for the goal.	The community has systemwide goals institutionalized through formal agreements, policies, and funding decisions. All key partners show sustained commitment through resource allocation/practice changes. Elected officials actively champion goals through policy, funding, and public statements. There is regular public progress reporting with shared responsibility for system outcomes.
Backbone Organization A well-resourced, trusted central entity that coordinates system-wide efforts, mobilizes resources, influences policies at multiple levels, and builds the infrastructure needed to achieve shared community-level goals for ending homelessness.	No formal coalition lead entity tasked with backbone role. Collaboration depends on informal relationships between organizations. Potential backbone lacks authorization and resources. Minimal coordination among traditional service agencies.	Lead organization formally identified but serves primarily as pass-through for resources. Has established trusted relationships with traditional interest holders. Coordinates basic convening functions, though significant gaps remain in credibility, role clarity, system influence, and cross-sector engagement.	Backbone organization has formal designation, broad recognition, and comprehensive coordination across activities and populations. Maintains significant system influence, trusted cross-sector relationships, sustainable funding with core staff, though capacity gaps remain. Balances leadership with partner autonomy.	Backbone organization universally recognized with significant ecosystem influence, sustainable diverse funding, and full staffing. Seamlessly coordinates across all populations, drives system-wide policy change, maintains trusted cross-sector relationships, leads equity work, and provides supportive leadership while ensuring accountability.

Strategic Partnerships

A broad, inclusive network of partners from the homeless response system, cross-sector, and ecosystem levels working together at different levels of engagement - from direct service coordination to system change to policy influence.

Coalition engages a small subset of traditional homeless service agencies with limited coordination. People with lived experience and cross-sector partners acknowledged but not meaningfully involved. Focus on individual programs' system impact.

Most homeless service agencies engaged with initial cross-sector outreach. People with lived experience and culturally-specific organizations beginning to participate. Partners focus on direct service coordination with limited system change capacity.

Nearly all homeless service agencies plus multiple active cross-sector partners engaged. People with lived experience meaningfully involved in governance. Partners work on service coordination, system change, and beginning policy influence.

Comprehensive network across all partner types with strong cross-sector and ecosystem representation. People with lived experience are integral to leadership. Partners collaborate across all engagement levels with shared accountability.

Comprehensive Data

Real time, high-quality, person-level data for all populations, integrated systems across partners, robust reporting capabilities, Data is used for decision-making and continuous improvement.

No quality data assessment completed, focuses on 1 population with insufficient provider participation. HUD compliance only, isolated systems, inconsistent quality. Limited data use for decision-making and improvement.

Assessment completed but below quality standards, covers 1 population with several partners participating. Minimum HMIS staffing, basic analysis capability, partial integration. Some data used for improvement but inconsistent and reactive.

Quality standards achieved for multiple populations with 90%+ participation. Advanced HMIS skills, most systems integrated, automated reporting. Partners regularly review data for service improvements, prioritization, and equity analysis.

Comprehensive network across all partner types with strong cross-sector and ecosystem representation. People with lived experience are integral to leadership. Partners collaborate across all engagement levels with shared accountability.

COMMUNITY CAPABILITIES JOURNEY MAP

Instructions:

For each capability, there is a description of what it entails, followed by a series of statements that correspond to different maturity levels (from **Minimal** to **Fully Integrated**).

1. Shared Goal

From Minimal to Early Development:

- Facilitate a series of conversations to build general agreement among partners on the importance of a common goal.
- Identify a general target or vision statement for the community's work.
- Begin to communicate this general agreement to the wider community.

From Early Development to Established:

- Work with partners to define a specific, measurable, and time-bound goal.
- Communicate this new, measurable goal widely and ensure all partners understand their role in achieving it.
- Begin to use the shared goal as the primary filter for new projects and resource allocation.

From Established to Fully Integrated:

- Embed the shared goal into formal policy, funding decisions, and organizational work plans.
- Develop a public-facing dashboard or report to regularly track and share progress toward the goal.
- Conduct an annual review to assess progress and make adjustments to the goal as needed.

2. Backbone Organization

From Minimal to Early Development:

- Identify a single lead entity or small group to begin coordinating efforts.
- Define a basic mission for this coordinating group.

From Early Development to Established:

- Formally designate a backbone organization with a clear mandate.
- Secure dedicated staff and/or resources for the backbone organization's functions.
- Develop a clear communication plan to inform partners of the backbone's role and purpose.

From Established to Fully Integrated:

- Formalize partnerships and shared agreements to build trust and accountability.
- Create a sustainable funding model for the backbone organization's work.
- Actively work to broaden the backbone's influence across all relevant populations and sectors.

Instructions:

For each capability, there is a description of what it entails, followed by a series of statements that correspond to different maturity levels (from **Minimal** to **Fully Integrated**).

III. Strategic Partnerships

From Minimal to Early Development:

- Create a list of all relevant stakeholders and begin regular, informal communication with them.
- Hold an initial meeting to discuss shared challenges and potential for collaboration.
- Identify a small group of key partners to meet more frequently to build trust.

From Early Development to Established:

- Expand the partner network to include cross-sector representatives (e.g., health, business, philanthropy, and people with lived experience).
- Formalize meeting schedules and create a shared agenda with clear, shared priorities.
- Establish a process for documenting meeting outcomes and decisions.

From Established to Fully Integrated:

- Develop a shared accountability framework where all partners track and report on their contributions.
- Create a mechanism for conflict resolution and joint problem-solving.
- Establish a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement across the network.
- Establish a data governance team to oversee data quality and security.
- Create a "data-driven" culture where insights from data are used to drive all major decisions and continuous improvement efforts.

IV. Comprehensive Data

From Minimal to Early Development:

- Conduct a data inventory to understand what data exists across different organizations and where it is stored.
- Establish a plan for how and when to collect key data points.
- Start using a basic data system to share and track information, even if it is not yet fully integrated.

From Early Development to Established:

- Implement a system for collecting near-real-time, person-level data.
- Establish clear data-sharing agreements and protocols among partners.
- Begin using data to conduct regular performance management reviews and inform planning.

From Established to Fully Integrated:

- Integrate data systems across all partners to create a seamless, real-time data flow.

Strategy Review Form

Team Planning Time #2



Community Name: _____

Date: _____

Instructions: For each of your top 2-3 current strategies, please fill out the sections below.

Strategy #1	*Current Progress Ranking: (e.g., 1-5, Stalled, On Track)	Where have we seen success?	What has been getting in the way of success?	What needs to be adjusted or changed? How do we need to think differently?	UPDATED Strategy (Use for Session #3)

***Current Progress Ranking:** 1 - progress stalled out or off track, 2 - progress facing significant, unaddressed challenges, 3 - progress is mixed or inconsistent, 4 - progress is on track and expected to meet objectives, 5 - strategy successfully met expectations

Strategy #2	*Current Progress Ranking: (e.g., 1-5, Stalled, On Track)	Where have we seen success?	What has been getting in the way of success?	What needs to be adjusted or changed? How do we need to think differently?	UPDATED Strategy (Use for Session #3)

***Current Progress Ranking:** 1 - progress stalled out or off track, 2 - progress facing significant, unaddressed challenges, 3 - progress is mixed or inconsistent, 4 - progress is on track and expected to meet objectives, 5 - strategy successfully met expectations

Strategy Review Form

Strategy #3	*Current Progress Ranking: (e.g., 1-5, Stalled, On Track)	Where have we seen success?	What has been getting in the way of success?	What needs to be adjusted or changed? How do we need to think differently?	UPDATED Strategy (Use for Session #3)

***Current Progress Ranking:** 1 - progress stalled out or off track, 2 - progress facing significant, unaddressed challenges, 3 - progress is mixed or inconsistent, 4 - progress is on track and expected to meet objectives, 5 - strategy successfully met expectations

Strategy #4	*Current Progress Ranking: (e.g., 1-5, Stalled, On Track)	Where have we seen success?	What has been getting in the way of success?	What needs to be adjusted or changed? How do we need to think differently?	UPDATED Strategy (Use for Session #3)

***Current Progress Ranking:** 1 - progress stalled out or off track, 2 - progress facing significant, unaddressed challenges, 3 - progress is mixed or inconsistent, 4 - progress is on track and expected to meet objectives, 5 - strategy successfully met expectations

TEAM PLANNING TIME #3

CONCRETE EXAMPLE

The following is a concrete example of how a community evaluated their action plans to identify where the four foundational capabilities needed to be strengthened in order to advance their work and achieve their goals.

ABC City is developing a six-month action plan with three primary goals:

- 1 Reduce all population inflow by 30%**
- 2 Increase all population outflow by 30%**
- 3 Increase all population provider participation by 30%**



As a first phase of action planning for goal 1 & 2, the community decides to do a thorough data clean up to ensure their baseline accurately reflects any progress made. During this review they identify two key data challenges.

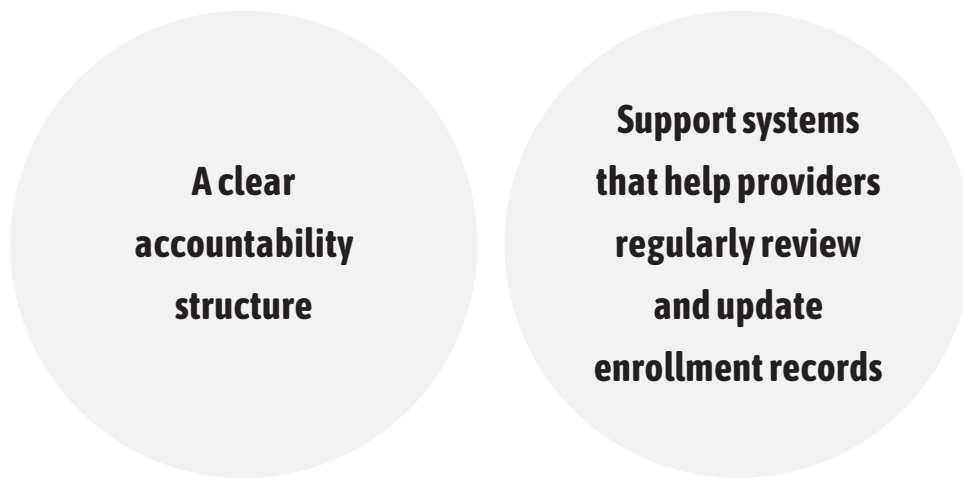
Many households indicted as actively homeless have street outreach and emergency shelter program enrollments that have been open for more than a year.

Many households have been enrolled in a housing project for more than 6 months without a recorded housing move-in date.

To address this, the data team has reached out to providers — sending multiple emails requesting updates on these households. However, they have not received any responses. As a result, they are unable to determine which clients are experiencing literal homelessness, making it difficult to track reductions in inflow and increases in outflow accurately.

In thinking about how to make progress on their goals, the team revisits their self-assessment of the Four Foundational Capabilities. They note a score of “Early Development” (2) for the Backbone Organization category. Although a lead group has been identified, it currently lacks the authority to assign tasks or effectively coordinate efforts across different providers.

To move forward meaningfully on all their goals, the team concludes that they need to establish:



This would ensure that data accurately reflects who is currently experiencing homelessness in the community leading to more informed decision-making and better outcomes.

Consider the following questions to better understand whether the four foundational capabilities are in place to support work plans.

Backbone Organization - given the current position of our lead agency, do we have the decision making and delegation authority, capacity, and resources to move this work forward?

Strategic Partnerships - Whose buy-in do we need to make this plan successful? What communication plans do we need to put in place over the next 6 months to ensure that we can effectively coordinate toward this goal?

Shared Goal - Are these strategies and goals widely shared across our community? Are resources and policies aligned to support this work?

Comprehensive Data - Do we have confidence that our data is an accurate reflection of the way people move through the system and that the data can be used to measure if and where improvement projects are having the intended impact?

Goals and Action Planning

INSTRUCTIONS

For each updated strategy from Team Planning 2, define a 6-month SMART goal and outline the action steps needed to reach it. When completing the form

- **Identify target timeframes** for each phase of the work.
- **Determine specific action steps** that can move your strategy into measurable outcomes.
- **Assign responsibility** where possible (who will carry the work forward)
- Use the **4 Foundational Capacities (4FC)** to note supports, barriers, and adjustments needed.

6-Month Goal (SMART):

Strategy #1

Phase	Timeframe	Key Activities/Tasks	Responsible Person(s)	Feasibility through 4FC Lens (supports, barriers, adjustments)
	<i>When will this happen?</i>	<i>Be specific!</i>	<i>Name/role/organization</i>	<i>What foundational capacities support this? Where might barriers show up?</i>
Phase 1				
Phase 2				
Phase 3				

Additional Notes:

Goals and Action Planning

INSTRUCTIONS

For each updated strategy from Team Planning 2, define a 6-month SMART goal and outline the action steps needed to reach it. When completing the form

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- **Determine specific action steps** that can move your strategy into measurable outcomes.
- **Assign responsibility** where possible (who will carry the work forward)
- Use the **4 Foundational Capacities (4FC)** to note supports, barriers, and adjustments needed.

6-Month Goal (SMART):

Strategy #2

Phase	Timeframe	Key Activities/Tasks	Responsible Person(s)	Feasibility through 4FC Lens (supports, barriers, adjustments)
	<i>When will this happen?</i>	<i>Be specific!</i>	<i>Name/role/organization</i>	<i>What foundational capacities support this? Where might barriers show up?</i>
Phase 1				
Phase 2				
Phase 3				

Additional Notes:

Goals and Action Planning

INSTRUCTIONS

For each updated strategy from Team Planning 2, define a 6-month SMART goal and outline the action steps needed to reach it. When completing the form

- **Identify target timeframes** for each phase of the work.
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6-Month Goal (SMART):

Strategy #3

Phase	Timeframe	Key Activities/Tasks	Responsible Person(s)	Feasibility through 4FC Lens (supports, barriers, adjustments)
	<i>When will this happen?</i>	<i>Be specific!</i>	<i>Name/role/organization</i>	<i>What foundational capacities support this? Where might barriers show up?</i>
Phase 1				
Phase 2				
Phase 3				

Additional Notes:

TEAM PLANNING TIME #4

Stakeholder Mapping

In this session, you will have the opportunity to identify who is in your coalition, who's out but should be in and who's blocking or boosting your progress towards your strategies. It is critical to be honest. In this case, a coalition is defined as the group of people who are implementing, leading or responsible for achieving the aims around homelessness.

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

Who is "IN" the coalition (people, organizations, affiliations, etc)

Who is "OUT" of the coalition but should be in (people, organizations, affiliations, etc)

Who is "BLOCKING" the work of the coalition (people, organizations, affiliations, etc)

Who is "BOOSTING" the work of the coalition (people, organizations, affiliations, etc)

STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

As you think about the OUT or BLOCKING categories, is there anyone from that list who someone at the Learning Session could email today requesting a call or meeting in December 2025?

OUT or BLOCKING person or people to email:

Contextual elements of the email that should be included:

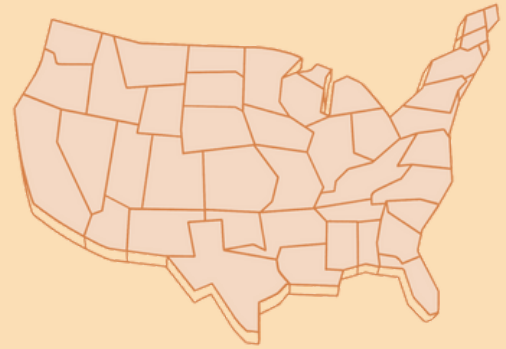
As you think about the IN or BOOSTING categories, is there anyone from that list who someone at the Learning Session could email today with an appreciation or gratitude for their involvement?

IN or BOOSTING person or people to email:

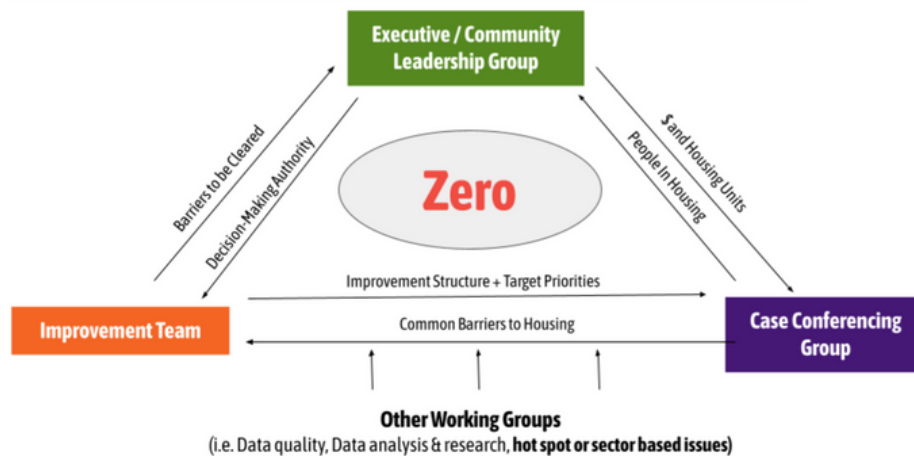
Contextual elements of the email that should be included:

Governance Structure

In this session, you will have the opportunity to clarify decision-making structures, sunset or transform existing meetings that no longer serve you and set up the right meetings in order to achieve your strategies. You may want to reference:



SAMPLE Shared Governance Structure



As you think about the Executive / Community Leadership group...

- ☐ Is that group clearly delegating decision-making, bringing forth resources and actively clearing barriers?
- ☐ Is that group regularly reviewing both qualitative and quantitative data when they meet?
- ☐ Is that group meeting at the right frequency, with the right people and discussing the right agenda items to achieve your aims?

Actions to take: STOP/START/CONTINUE

As you think about the Improvement group...

- ☐ Is that group clearly identifying systematic barriers to housing, noting barriers for the Executive / Leadership Group, and defining priorities for improvement?
- ☐ Is that group regularly reviewing both qualitative and quantitative data when they meet?
- ☐ Is that group meeting at the right frequency, with the right people and discussing progress on improvement priorities to achieve your aims?

Actions to take: STOP/START/CONTINUE

As you think about the Case Conferencing group...

- ☐ Is that group clearly identifying systematic barriers to housing, celebrating wins (big or little), remaining person centered, and not 'meeting just to meet'?
- ☐ Is that group regularly reviewing both qualitative and quantitative data when they meet?
- ☐ Is that group meeting at the right frequency, with the right people and generally a meeting that partners look forward to attending because it is an effective use of their time?

Actions to take: STOP/START/CONTINUE

As you think about Other Working Groups...

- ☐ Is that group clearly connected to the governance structure above, with a feedback loop or agenda items at any of the three governance group meetings?
- ☐ Is that group regularly reviewing both qualitative and quantitative data when they meet?
- ☐ Is that group meeting at the right frequency, with the right people and generally a meeting that partners look forward to attending because it is an effective use of their time?

Actions to take: STOP/START/CONTINUE

EXERCISE: BUILD YOUR CORE MESSAGE HOUSE

Every day, life-saving work is happening in your community and across the nation to give people pathways out of homelessness. But if you don't talk about this great work, people may never know it's happening. The more people can see the great work you're doing, the easier it becomes to get buy-in from key stakeholders, forge creative alliances, generate funding, and build resilient and sustainable community solutions.

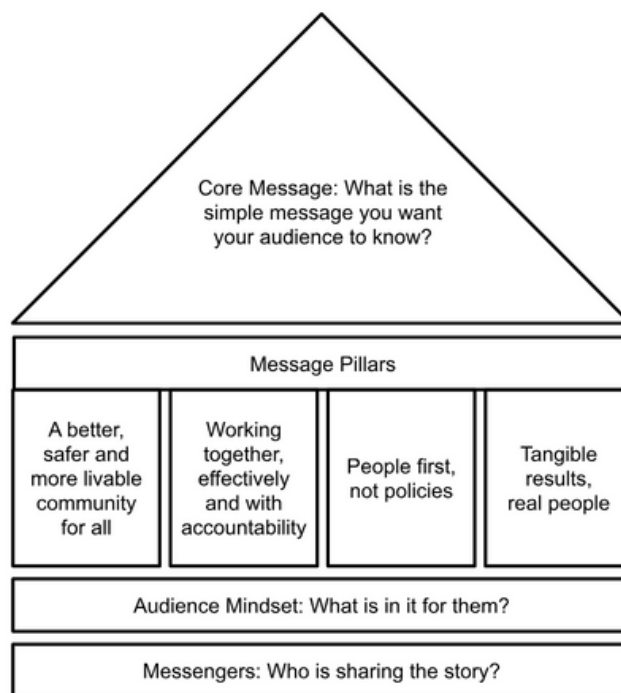
To tell the story of the work you're doing, you need a communications plan. The **Message House** is a simple tool that helps identify the component parts of your communications plan. Think of it as a structure you can keep coming back to whenever you talk about your work.

At the top of your **Message House** is the "roof" — this is a simple message that explains the "what" — the change you're trying to impact. The roof is supported by key pillars that show "why" and "how" you'll do it.

But a strong house is built on more than walls and a roof — it rests on a foundation. In this case, that foundation is understanding who you're speaking to (your audience) and who is carrying the message (your messenger). A message that works for a city leader won't land the same way with a neighbor taking their kids to soccer practice. And the messenger matters just as much as the words themselves. A mother who's experienced homelessness can move people in ways a policy expert can't, while a councilmember might be the best person to convince another elected official.

Starting with the house gives you clarity. Building on the foundation of audience and messenger gives your message power. Together, these component parts make sure your story isn't just well-framed, but well-heard.

These are message pillars that our research shows are effective at persuading diverse populations. Use them as a guide, but also feel empowered to tailor them as you see fit. No one knows your community better than you.



MESSAGE + MESSENGER = MATCH THE MOMENT

Once you've put your core message house together, it's time to figure out how to live in it. A message sitting inside a diagram won't do much on its own. The real power comes when you amplify your message through people, social media, the press, newsletters, and more.

The roof and pillars of your house give you clarity on what you stand for and how you want to be understood. Now the question is: who's going to carry that message out into the community, and how will they do it in a way that feels real and believable?

This next section will help you take what you've built in the message house and turn it into something actionable by pairing messages with the right messengers and thinking about how, together, they can spark action.



Step 1: Identify your core message

What is the one message you want "John Q. Public" (your everyday neighbor who is not directly involved in this work) to know and repeat?

Tip: Use "people first, not policies" language. Think about a human story rather than a statistic.



Step 2: Tailor your message to your audience

How might you adjust your message to suit your audience? How would you adapt your core message from step 1, if you are talking to "Jane Q. Councilperson" (an elected official) instead of "John Q. Public"?

Tip: Consider how to show value, progress, process, and accountability. Remember: people want to know what it's in it for them, and leaders need to be able to see results they can point to.



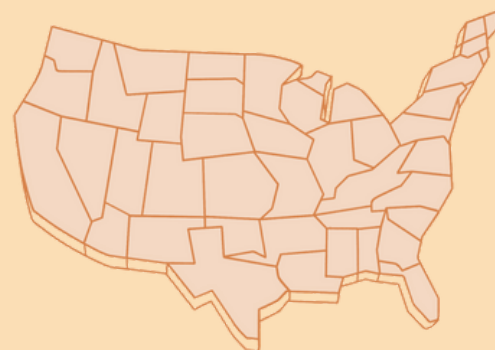
Step 3: Identify trusted messengers

Prompt A (For John Q. Public): Who would be the most credible voice for your everyday neighbor?
Options to consider: real people with lived experience, community leaders, faith leaders.

Prompt B (For Jane Q. Councilperson): Who would be the most effective messenger for decision-makers?
Options to consider: elected officials, business leaders, nonprofit executives, data paired with lived experience.

Project Management Workplan

In this session, you will have the opportunity to review all of the action items above and identify deadlines, owners and key elements. You will need this for the final activity of the Learning Session.



	What Needs to Happen?	Who Will Do It?	By When?
Stakeholders: IN/BOOSTING			
Stakeholders: OUT/BLOCKING			
Governance: LEADERSHIP			
Governance: IMPROVEMENT			
Governance: CASE CONFERENCEING			
Governance: OTHER			
Communications: John Q. Public			
Communications: Jane V. Mayor			

BUDDY SYSTEM

We don't do this work alone, and peers across the U.S. can be helpful partners in supporting your work. You'll be matched with a 'Buddy' Community and given 15 minutes to share context about your work, insights from the exercises and next steps on your workplan. They'll provide feedback and other considerations to help you succeed.

We highly recommend setting up a 30 minute virtual call in January or February 2026 with both buddy teams in order to check-in and see how you each are progressing.

Our Buddy System Check-In Date & Time: