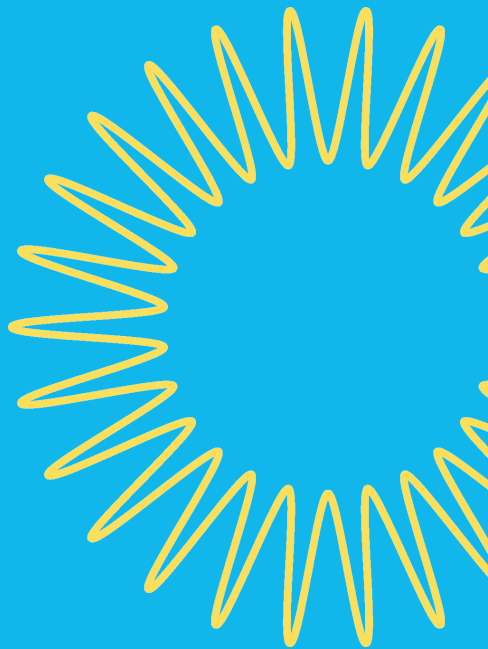


Five Years of Evidence

What We've Learned
and Where We Go Next



Five Years of Evidence

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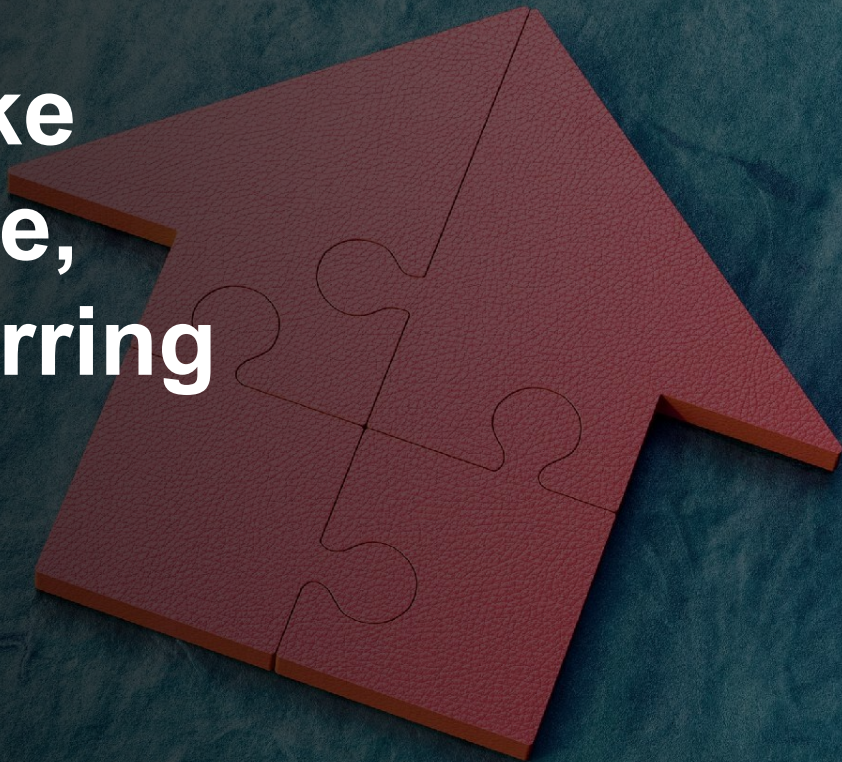
ORS Impact,
Director



What Works to Make Homelessness Rare, Brief, and Nonrecurring

Lessons for communities from five years of Built for Zero evaluation

October 2026



A Shared Agenda to Reduce Homelessness:

These priorities work together...

**Enough housing
for people at
every income
level.**



**A response
system
accountable for
results.**



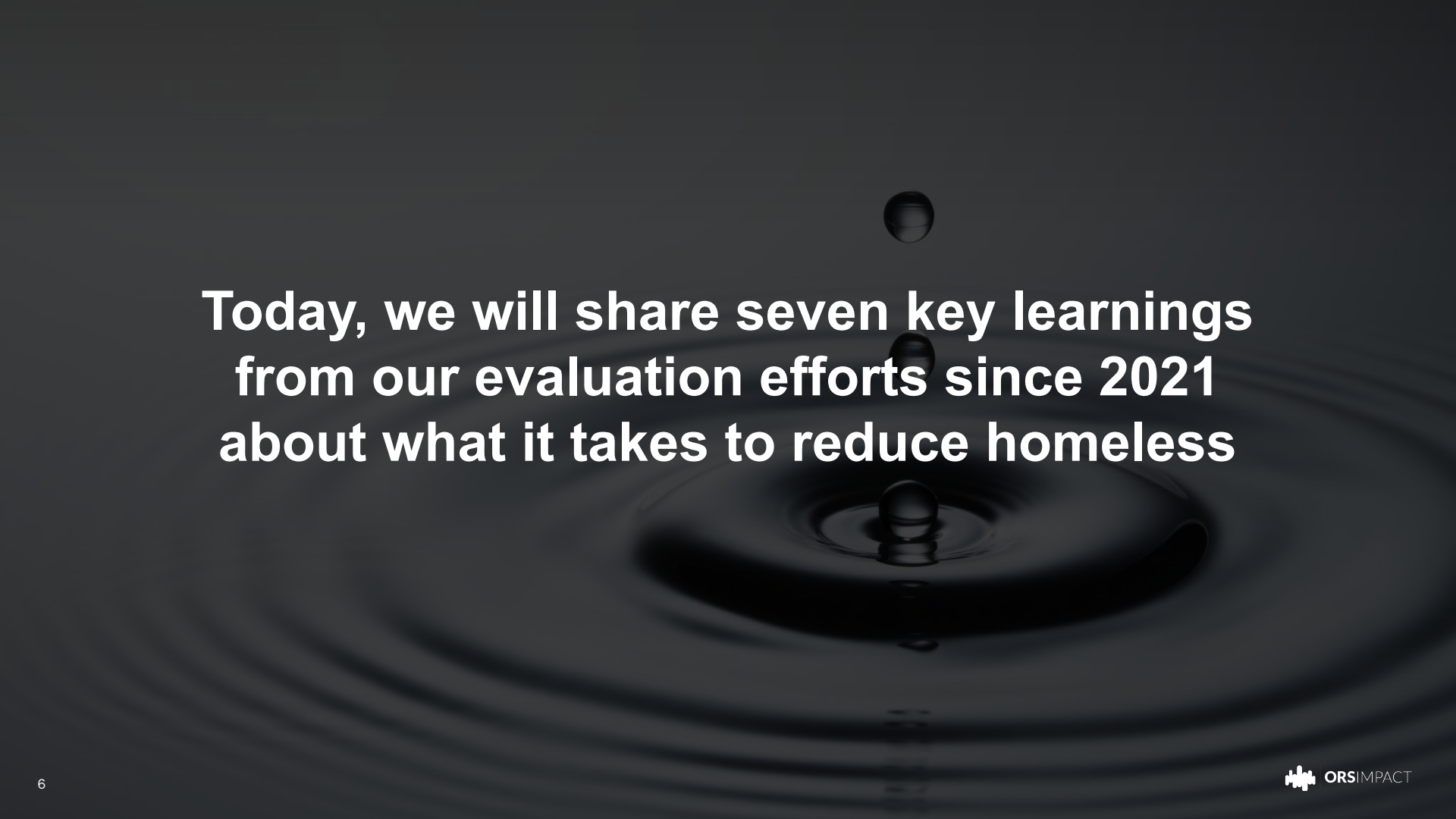
**Help that is
provided when
people need it.**



And how we get there is through strong systems that shape conditions—and conditions that set the ceiling on results.



Lasting Reductions in Homelessness

A dark, monochromatic background featuring a water droplet in the process of falling. The droplet is captured mid-fall, with a small, spherical drop just above a larger, more complex shape that is creating concentric ripples on a surface below. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of the water and the ripples.

**Today, we will share seven key learnings
from our evaluation efforts since 2021
about what it takes to reduce homeless**

**SYSTEM FOUNDATION:
BACKBONE AND GOVERNANCE**

1

Invest in a backbone with clear governance and authority

A dedicated, credible backbone convenes partners around the shared goal and turns data into decisions. Governance is formalized and spreads leadership across partners so that progress isn't tied to one person.



What Creates Momentum

A dedicated, funded lead with real authority
A neutral, credible convener with influence
Governance groups close to implementation

What Sustains Results

Distributed leadership and responsibility
Formal roles and public accountability
Secure funding for the backbone

Tensions to Navigate

Different backbone/CoC models
Structure without ownership/accountability
Invisible, underfunded work

SYSTEM FOUNDATION: SHARED GOAL

2

Make your goal(s) shared, measurable, and institutional

Shared goals give partners a reason to coordinate, help them choose among priorities, and create accountability. The strongest combine public support, buy-in, and a formal, written commitment.



What Creates Momentum

Specific, clear, and measurable targets

Visible progress based on data

Public commitment from leaders

What Sustains Results

Shared goal written into institutions

Numerical and directional goals

System-wide and population goals

Tensions to Navigate

Personal will without institutional will

Agreement without action

Milestones that reward easy wins

SYSTEM FOUNDATION: QUALITY DATA

3

Make data a decision tool, not a reporting requirement

Real-time, by-name data shows who is homeless now, who is entering and leaving, and where people get stuck. Communities stand out not for just collecting data but for having the capacity and culture to act on it.



What Creates Momentum

- A shared, real-time by-name list**
- Dedicated data staff**
- Data that makes the case publicly**



What Sustains Results

- A culture of continuous improvement**
- Formal data agreements**
- Measuring flow, not just list size**



Tensions to Navigate

- Data rich, information poor**
- Better counting can look like failure**
- Legal and coverage gaps**

MEASURING PROGRESS AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

4

Use multiple measures of success to keep improving

Successful communities track system, housing, and population outcomes; progress is visible and credible. They use data to test changes quickly, keep what works, and share ownership of results through case conferencing and public reporting.



What Creates Momentum

- Milestones that recognize progress
- Learning from what works and doesn't
- Public reporting of progress

What Sustains Results

- Solutions-focused mindset
- Shared ownership for results
- Keep improvement cycles short and regular

Tensions to Navigate

- Population functional zero vs. overall rates
- Data used for misleading progress/attribution

SYSTEM FOUNDATION: CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

5

Build partnerships of depth over breadth

Communities name cross-sector collaboration as the most important factor in their success, be that in health care, housing authorities, local government, businesses, and people with lived experience.



What Creates Momentum

Partnerships that change what's possible
Layers of structured interaction
Early, transferrable results that build trust



What Sustains Results

Written roles and agreements
Collaboration that grows into influence
Relationships held by institutions



Tensions to Navigate

Presence is not commitment
Collaboration stuck at the service level
Partners with their own agendas

PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES: HOUSING PATHWAYS

6

Treat housing as a system connected the by-name list

Successful communities work with housing authorities, landlords, developers, and providers to know what units exist and fill them. A well-run system manages flow but can't end homelessness without housing.



What Creates Momentum

Coordinated entry linked to every unit
Landlord partnerships that fit owners
Acquisition to unlock units



What Sustains Results

Housing paired with services
Housing actors at the table
Dedicated funding for vouchers



Tensions to Navigate

Access, not supply
Incentives don't work for everyone
Gains can mask a shrinking pool

**ENABLING CONDITIONS:
POLITICAL & PUBLIC NARRATIVES**

7

Visible wins build political will and public narratives

The public judges progress by what it can see, so visible reductions and public commitments build the will. Momentum lasts only when it rests on strong foundations and reductions from housing (not displacing).



What Creates Momentum

Visible reductions as quick wins
Elected officials who commit publicly
Trusted messengers shifting beliefs

What Sustains Results

Political will built into institutions
Broad coalitions beyond services
A clear public definition of progress

Tensions to Navigate

Visibility versus reduction
Short-term versus lasting energy
A negative feedback loop

What does this all mean for communities?

1 **Build foundations that deliver**

Fund a backbone with authority, use data daily, and give partners clear roles, so the system can deliver results and make the case for more.

2 **Shape conditions from the start**

Use that capacity to build political will, funding and housing access now, rather than waiting until the system hits a ceiling.

3 **Lock in what works**

Write roles, goals, and funding into budgets, laws, and formal agreements, so progress doesn't depend on the people who created it.

4 **Win visibly, but on solid ground**

Pursue visible reductions only where the system can house people and keep them housed, and claim only gains that last.

Executive Summary



Invest in a backbone with strong authority and clear governance regarding who makes what decisions. A dedicated, credible backbone convenes partners around the shared goal and turns data into decisions. Governance is formalized and spreads leadership across partners so that progress isn't tied to one person.



Make your goal(s) shared, measurable, and institutional. A shared goal gives partners a reason to coordinate, helps them choose among priorities, and creates accountability and a shared sense of responsibility. The strongest combine public support, buy-in, and a formal, written commitment to the goal.



Make data a daily decision-making tool, not a reporting requirement. Real-time, by-name data shows who is homeless now, who is entering and leaving, and where people get stuck. High performers stand out not for collecting data but for having the capacity and culture to act on it.



Use multiple measures of progress and success for continuous improvement. Successful communities track system-building, housing outcomes, and population change together, so progress is visible early and credible over time. They use those measures to test changes quickly, keep what works, and share ownership of results through case conferencing and public reporting.



Build partnerships of depth over breadth, focusing on what each partner contributes, decides, and owns. Communities name cross-sector collaboration as the most important factor in their success, reaching health care, housing authorities, local government, businesses, and people with lived experience—aim for depth of partnership over breadth.



Treat housing as a system, connecting every resource to the by-name list. Successful communities work with housing authorities, landlords, developers, and providers to know what units exist and fill them. A well-run system manages flow but can't end homelessness without housing.



Use visible wins to build political will—on systems that keep people housed. The public judges progress by what it can see, so visible reductions and public commitments build the will. Momentum lasts only when it rests on strong foundations and reductions come from housing (not displacing) people.