



The Framework for
an Equitable COVID-19
Homelessness Response
#HousingEquity

Is Our Data Helping Us Tell Our Story? Or is Our Data Dictating the Story We Can Tell?

NHSDC 2022 Summer Institute

<http://housingequityframework.org>



The Framework Project



Framework Partners



The Framework's Action Areas

Action Area	Future Vision to Strive Toward
Unsheltered People	Build a System to Immediately End Any Experiences of Unsheltered Homelessness
Shelters	Reimagine and Transform Approaches to Sheltering People through Non-Congregate Options and Other Models
Housing	Provide the Scale and Range of Housing Options Necessary to Meet All Housing Needs
Diversion and Prevention	Implement Diversion and Targeted Homelessness Prevention Assistance to Prevent as Many Entries into Homelessness as Possible
Strengthening Systems for the Future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Center Racial Equity and Pursue Housing Justice ▪ Continuously Improve Homelessness Response and Rehousing Operations ▪ Strengthen and Scale Partnerships Across Systems and Sectors ▪ Develop Resilient Systems Better Prepared for Future Public Health Crises and Disasters



The Framework's Values and Principles

1. Advance racial justice and equity
2. Support people to secure and sustain housing
3. Act and invest resources with both urgency and purpose
4. Ensure investments are addressing the highest needs first
5. Center the rights and expertise of people experiencing homelessness



Framework Project Tools & Resources

Available at

HousingEquityFramework.org





Focus of Today's Session



Disclaimers

- Out of practice
- Never been HMIS end user or administrator
- Statistics classes were a long time ago
- Not a communications professional
- But ...
- Hyperbole
- Expect – and welcome – disagreement
- Impact of data collection on people experiencing homelessness



Want to talk about ...

- The “narrative battle” we’re facing
- Our struggles with narrative and with answering questions
- How trusted are we as narrators?
- Avoiding traps and pitfalls
- Writing the story we need to tell – identifying the data we need to tell it
- Polls and chat dialogue





Where are We Now?

The “Narrative Battle”



1. **Lots of misinformation** - and misrepresentation – regarding Housing First and the role of housing in preventing and ending homelessness
2. **Lack of confidence** that the strategies being implemented are working – or that they ever could work
3. **Rejection of evidence** and data
4. **Increased stigmatization** of people experience homelessness
5. Increased **actions that punish and traumatize people**
6. Elected officials who **state a focus on racial equity and justice – but who do not connect their work on homelessness** to that focus
7. **Real and damaging consequences for people** – that are reinforcing and also worsening racial inequities



Poll Question #1

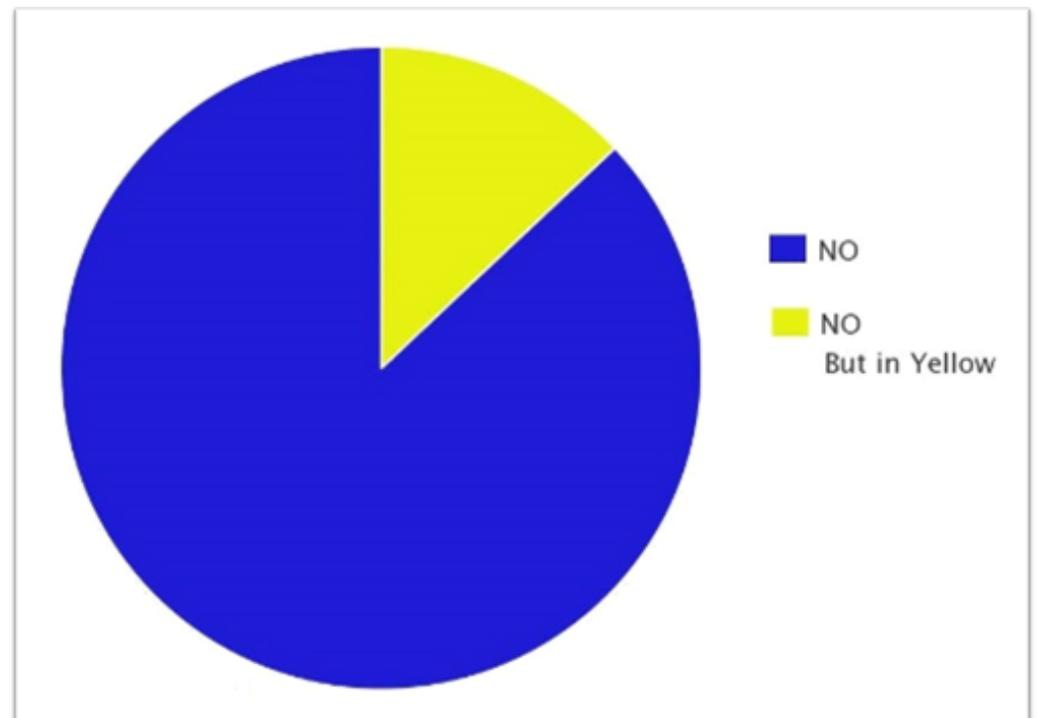
In my community:

1. We are winning the “narrative battle” around Housing First and homelessness solutions
2. We are losing the “narrative battle” around Housing First and homelessness solutions
3. It’s too soon to tell



From Where I Sit ...

What's the ratio of communities in which we are winning the "narrative battle" around Housing First and homelessness solutions?





Our Struggles with Narrative

What's Contributing to Our "Narrative" Struggle?



- Racism and white supremacy
- Stigmatization of people experiencing homelessness, of mental health, of substance use
- Assumptions about causes and solutions
- People's expectations can be unrealistic
- Desire for quick fixes
- People misrepresent the facts and use false information
- People misunderstand what Housing First is – or purposefully misrepresent what it is
- Many other factors

What's Contributing to Our "Narrative" Struggle?

Yes, and ...

- We don't tell a very compelling story or counter-story
- We're focused on data and analysis – but not in ways that support an effective narrative
- Our data often pushes us into a "Well, ..." zone for answering questions



What's Contributing to Our "Narrative" Struggle?

Yes, and ...

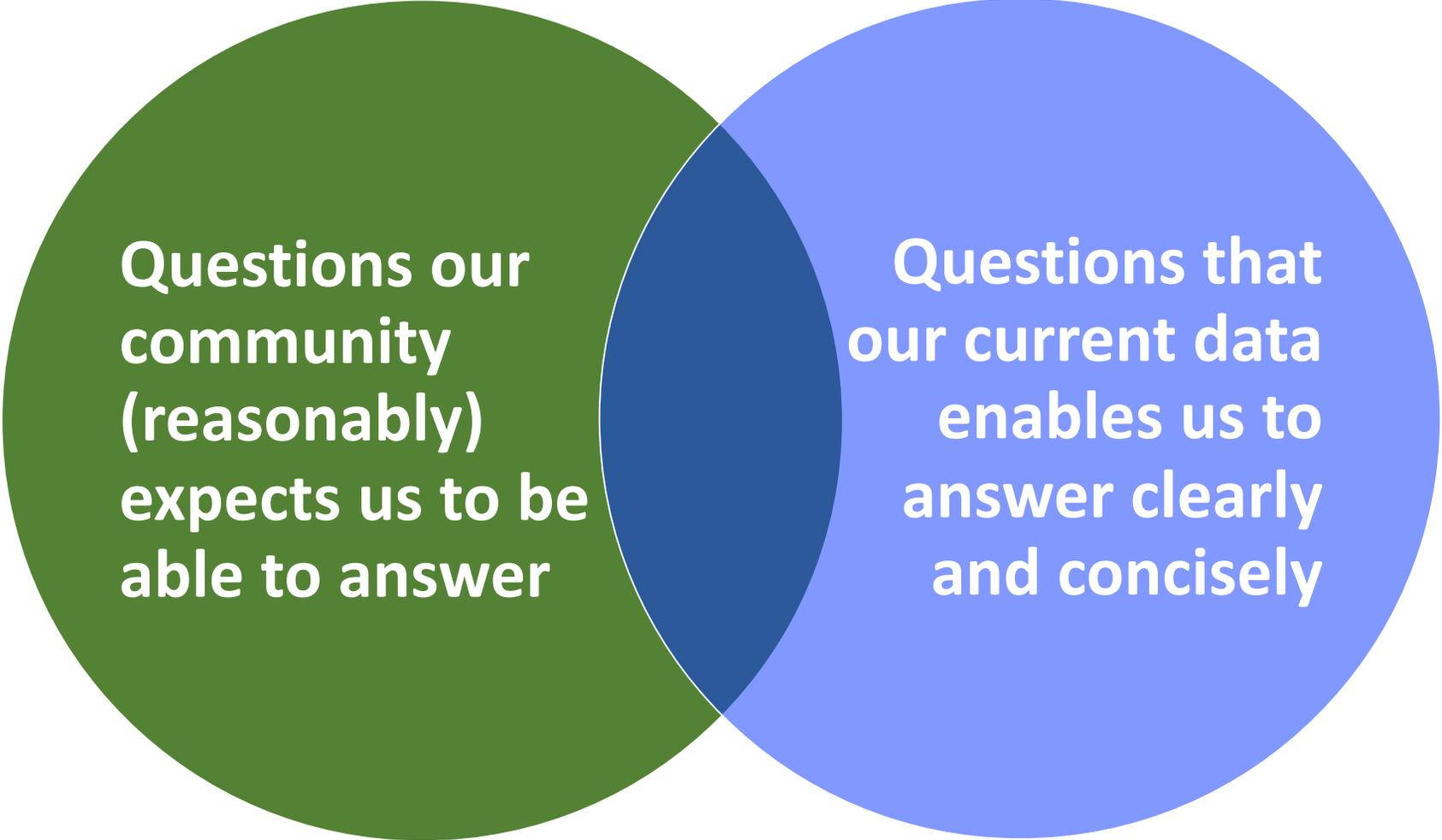
- We're (at least perceived as) "unreliable narrators" = untrustworthy storytellers
- We don't analyze our audiences – and we focus too much on audience who may never be persuaded
- We don't craft the story we want to tell and design our data/information strategies to be able to tell it



The “Well, ...” Zone

- Well, I can't actually answer that question, but what I can tell you is this ...
- Well, ... our data doesn't tell us that, so the closest I can tell you is this ...
- Well, ... the way we define that is ...
- Well, ... HUD doesn't require us to track and report that, so what we do track and report is this ...





**Questions our
community
(reasonably)
expects us to be
able to answer**

**Questions that
our current data
enables us to
answer clearly
and concisely**



(Reasonable)

Questions We Often Struggle to Answer Well

- How many people are experiencing homelessness?
- What do we know about the causes of homelessness in our community?
- Why do you say that structural racism is driving homelessness?
- What do you mean when you say that housing costs are a primary driver of homelessness?
- How many people experiencing homelessness have disabilities, mental health concerns, substance use challenges?



(Reasonable)

Questions We Often Struggle to Answer Well

- What kinds of help do you provide to people?
- How many people do you provide different kinds of help to – and what seems to be working well?
- How many people do you think need permanent supportive housing, or rapid rehousing, or affordable housing, or some other kind of help?
- How many people do you help exit homelessness each week/month/year?
- What kinds of success rates do you have – with PSH, RRH, interim housing, other programs?



Poll Question #2



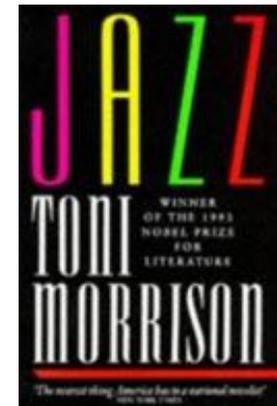
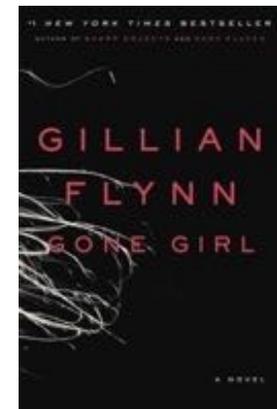
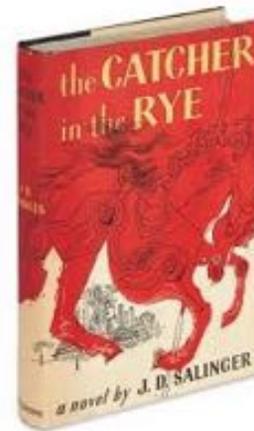
In my community, our data helps us answer, clearly and concisely, the major questions about homelessness that we are asked:

1. Almost all of the time
2. Most of the time
3. Sometimes, but not enough of the time
4. Rarely



Are We “Unreliable Narrators”?

- **“A narrator that is not trustworthy, whose rendition of events must be taken with a grain of salt.”** - purdue.edu
- **“An unreliable narrator is a narrator whose credibility is compromised.** In some cases, the [audience] discovers that in the foregoing narrative, the narrator had concealed or greatly misrepresented vital pieces of information ...” - Wikipedia
- **“... a storyteller who withholds information, lies to, or misleads the reader, casting doubt on the narrative.”** - Dan Brown



Are We “Unreliable Narrators”?

Sometimes we say we’re measuring ...	Sometimes what our data is actually measuring is ...
The number of people experiencing homelessness	The # of people accessing services while experiencing homelessness
The # number of people who become homeless for the first time	The # of people who are newly identified as experiencing homelessness by the homelessness response system
The # number of people exiting homelessness into permanent housing:	The # of people exiting the homelessness system to permanent housing.
The length of time people experience homeless	The lengths of time people are known to be experiencing homelessness by the homelessness response system
The # of people who return to homelessness after exiting homelessness to permanent housing	The # of people who exited the homelessness response system to permanent housing and then returned to the system

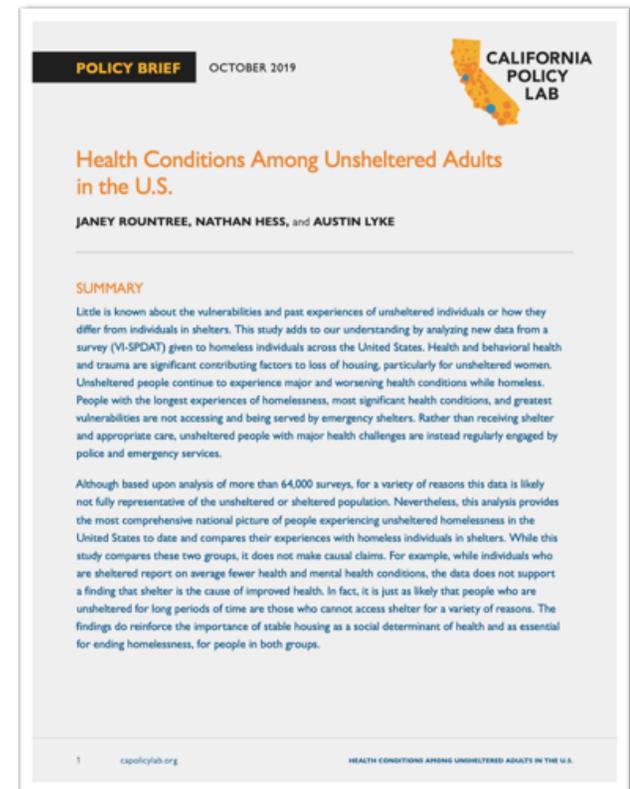


Are We “Unreliable Narrators”?

Health Conditions Among Unsheltered Adults in the U.S.

Brief released in October 2019

Available at <https://www.capolicylab.org/publications/>



Prevalence of Health Concerns

Unsheltered people:

- More than **4 times as likely** as sheltered people to report a physical health concern (84% vs. 19%)
- Nearly **1.5 times as likely** to report a mental health concern (78% vs. 50%)
- More than **5 times as likely** to report a substance abuse concern (75% vs. 13%)
- And **25 times as likely** to report all three concerns concurrently (50% vs. 2%)



Prevalence of Health Concerns

Unsheltered women:

- About **4.5 times as likely** as sheltered women to report a physical health concern (90% vs. 20%)
- Nearly **2 times as likely** to report a mental health concern (95% vs. 50%)
- More than **6 times as likely** to report a substance abuse concern (88% vs. 14%)
- And **38 times as likely** to report all three concerns concurrently (76% vs. 2%)



Lengths of Homelessness

- Unsheltered people reported **average lengths of time since stably housed more than 6 times longer** than sheltered people (2,632 days vs. 410 days)
- More than **50% of individuals in shelter have been unstably housed less than one year**
- **Unsheltered people have been unstably housed an average of nearly 6 years longer** than sheltered people



Lengths of Homelessness

Unsheltered women reported an average of
5,855 days
since they were last stably housed

(that = 16 years)



Poll Question #3

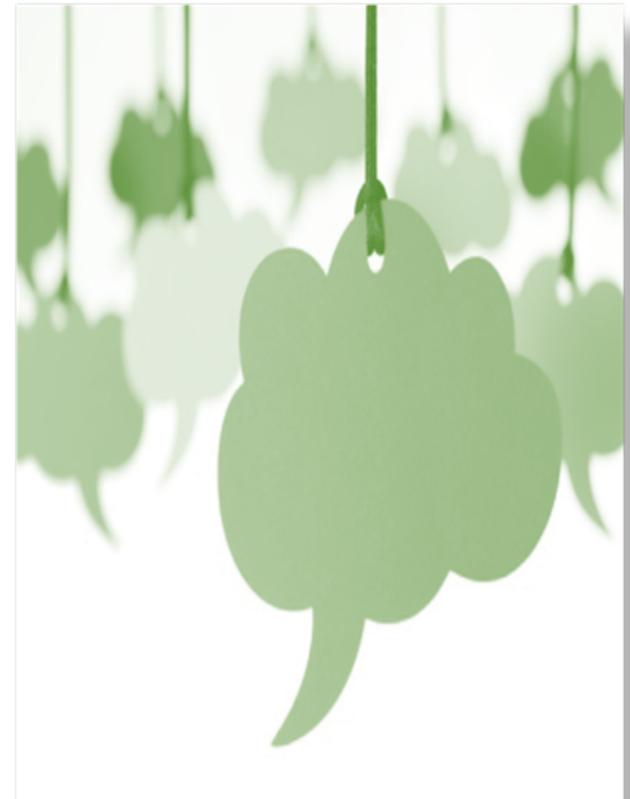
Are you and your partners perceived as RELIABLE narrators about homelessness and solutions:

1. Always
2. Most of the time
3. Some of the time
4. Rarely
5. I'm not sure



Answer in the Chat Box

A question that we've gotten much better at using our data to answer, clearly and concisely, is ...



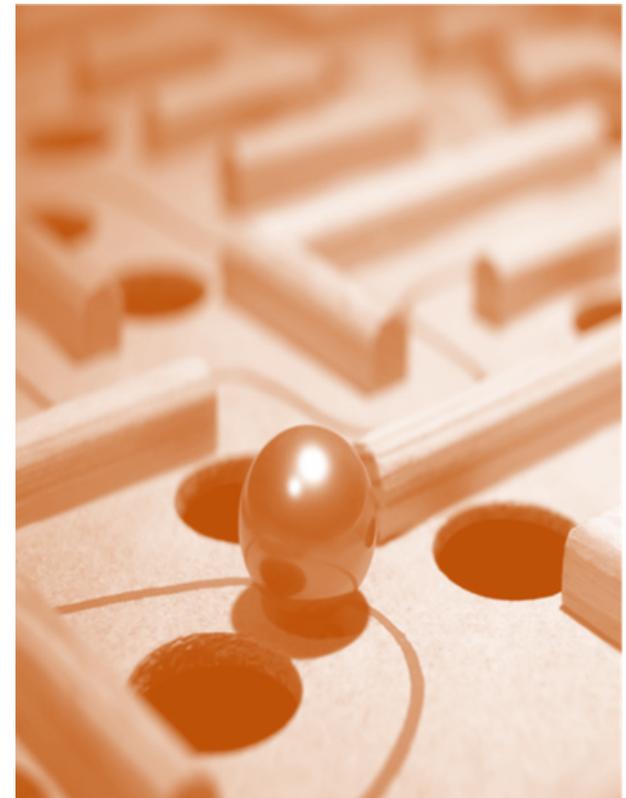
Answer in the Chat Box



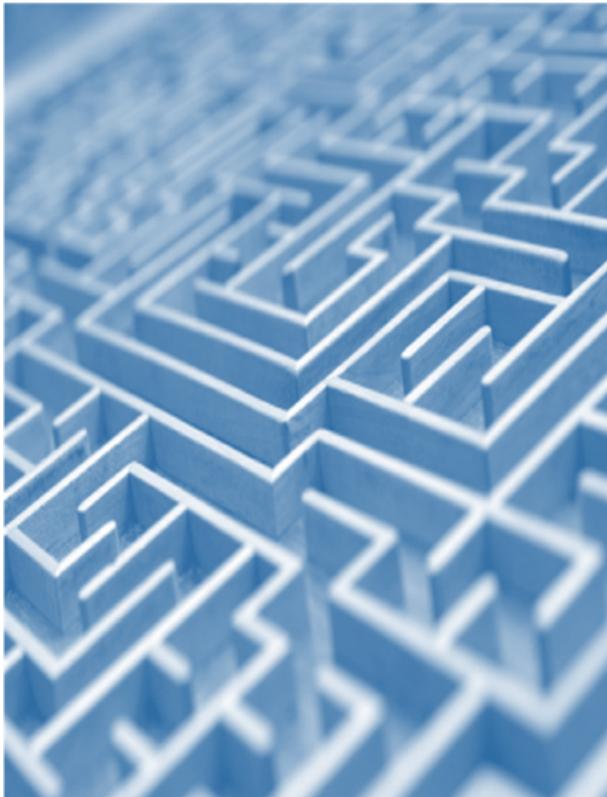
A question that we still struggle to use our data to answer, clearly and concisely, is ...

Avoiding Traps and Pitfalls

- Not all questions/expectations are reasonable
- Build capacity to answer the reasonable ones
- Develop your skills at pivoting from unreasonable questions to answers you have confidence in
- **Don't repeat misinformation in attempts to counter it**



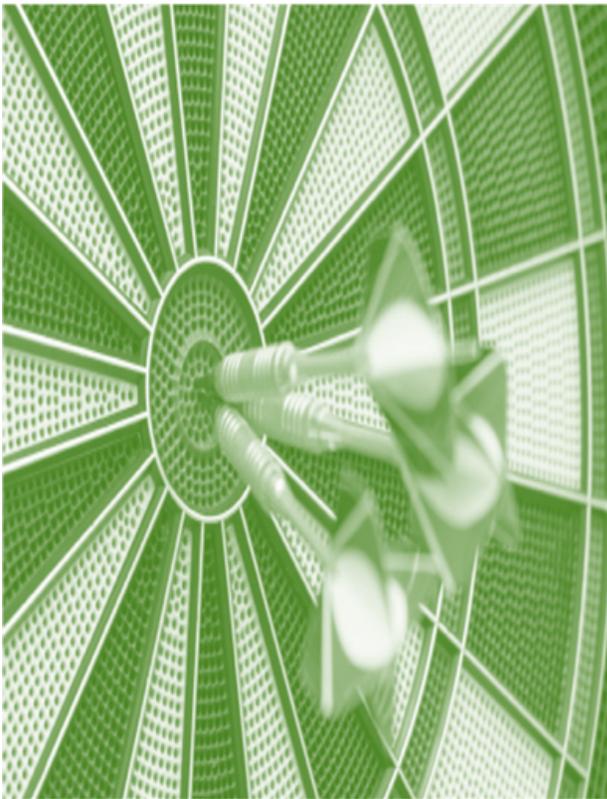
Avoiding Traps and Pitfalls



- Be a **reliable narrator**
- Use **language that means what people would expect it to mean**
- **Express what you are measuring** clearly and truthfully
- **Avoid false precision** in your use of data



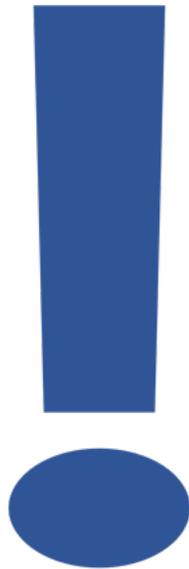
Avoiding Traps and Pitfalls



- **Get better at assessing and measuring what people reasonably expect you to be able to express**
- **Assess gaps in your data that make you vulnerable** – i.e., what are the questions you can't answer clearly, concisely, persuasively
- **Develop reasonable data collection and analysis systems to fill those gaps**



Answers Alone are Not a Narrative



**If we're only
answering questions
– even if we're
answering them well
– we're probably not
telling a story that
shapes people's
understanding**



Telling the Story We Need to Tell

Telling a Good “Story”

“Research proves two things about good stories:

- **Treatment trumps topic.** How a story is told is more important to the audience than its topic, what it is about. The best story is a well-told tale about something the reader feels is relevant or significant.
- **The best stories are more complete and more comprehensive.** They contain more verified information from more sources with more viewpoints and expertise.”

- American Press Institute



Who's Your Audience?



Identifying Audience Segments

Segmentation Approach

FACTOR ANALYSIS

Identifies which variables are most impactful.

CLUSTER ANALYSIS

Identifies well-differentiated segments.

SEGMENT PROFILING

Provides insights into how these different audiences think.



**What's the story we
want - and need - to
tell about
UNSHELTERED
HOMELESSNESS
in our communities?**

When we do our point-in-time counts, we're able to count ##### people

- It's hard to be precise because ...
- Accounting for those concerns, our best estimate of the number of people is probably more like

Here's what we know about people who are unsheltered in our community:

- Demographics, racial disparities, disabilities, behavioral health concerns, roots and ties to our community
- We're seeing increased in XXXX population among those who are unsheltered

People who are unsheltered have told us that the things that would be most helpful to them are ...



What's the story we want - and need - to tell about unsheltered homelessness in our community?

Among people who are unsheltered, we think:

- About XX% need permanent supportive housing
- About XX% could succeed with rapid rehousing
- About XX% primarily need access to an affordable unit
- About XX% just need some flexible financial assistance

Things that we're doing to help people who are unsheltered include:

- Addressing health concerns and risks
- Outreach and engagement strategies
- Connections to low-barrier interim housing
- Directly housing people who are unsheltered
- Expanding investments into RRH and PSH
- Providing "rapid exit" flexible assistance

Things we're doing to address racial inequities include:

- Diversifying our board and staff
- Hiring more people with lived expertise
- Partnering with and funding BIPOC-led organizations
- Ensuring providers are reaching the communities most impacted and at-risk



What's the story we want - and need - to tell about unsheltered homelessness in our community?

Successes that we're having include:

- Successful placements from outreach
- Preventing a public health crisis
- Increasing entries into interim housing
- Increasing exits to permanent housing
- Individual success stories

Challenges we're facing for reducing unsheltered homelessness include:

- Lack of low-barrier shelter
- Lack of housing that people can afford
- Lack of clinical services to address people's physical health and behavioral health challenges
- Punitive measures traumatizing people, creating distrust, making it harder to find and connect with people

Here's what we'd like to be able to do more of

Here's some ways that the public could help support our work in this area ...



What Data and Information Do We Need to Tell that Story?

- **PIT Count data** – perhaps with multiplier applied to account for undercounting
- **Demographics data** – PIT data, HMIS, sample surveys, coordinated assessment data
- **Asking unsheltered people what they want and need** – focus groups, surveys, assessment processes
- **Needs estimates** – coordinated assessment data, system modeling if need greater sophistication
- **Output and outcome data** – placements from outreach, health services provided, entries into interim housing and exits to permanent housing, entries directly into permanent housing, etc..
- **Housing cost data** and vacancy rates
- **Success stories and the voices of people with lived expertise**



**What's the Story We
Need to Tell about
Housing First?**

We focus on Housing First approaches and strategies because:

- Housing costs and needs are what cause people to fall into homelessness, and
- If we don't address those needs, people can't fully address their challenges or pursue their goals for themselves.

Housing First approaches work because they connect people to both the housing they need and can afford and to the services that can help people succeed.

The kinds of services people most need are ...



What's the Story We Need to Tell about Housing First?

Housing First approaches are **designed to address people's specific and unique needs.**

Some people will only need a few services – others will need pretty intensive services for a significant amount of time, even forever, in order to be stable and not return to homelessness.

So, let's be clear – **if a program is connecting people to housing and not also addressing their services needs, they are not implementing Housing First approaches. Full stop.**



What's the Story We Need to Tell about Housing First?

Here's why we know Housing First approaches are working in our community:

- Increases in the number of people exiting homelessness to permanent housing
- Success rates for people entering RRH programs
- Success rates for people entering PSH programs
- Successfully reaching and serving people with significant challenges, behavioral health conditions, other barriers
- Client feedback / satisfaction surveys
- Individual success stories

Challenges we're facing scaling our Housing first approaches include:

- Lack of low-barrier shelter
- Lack of housing that people can afford
- Lack of clinical services to address people's physical health and behavioral health challenges
- Punitive measures traumatizing people, creating distrust, making it harder to find and connect with people



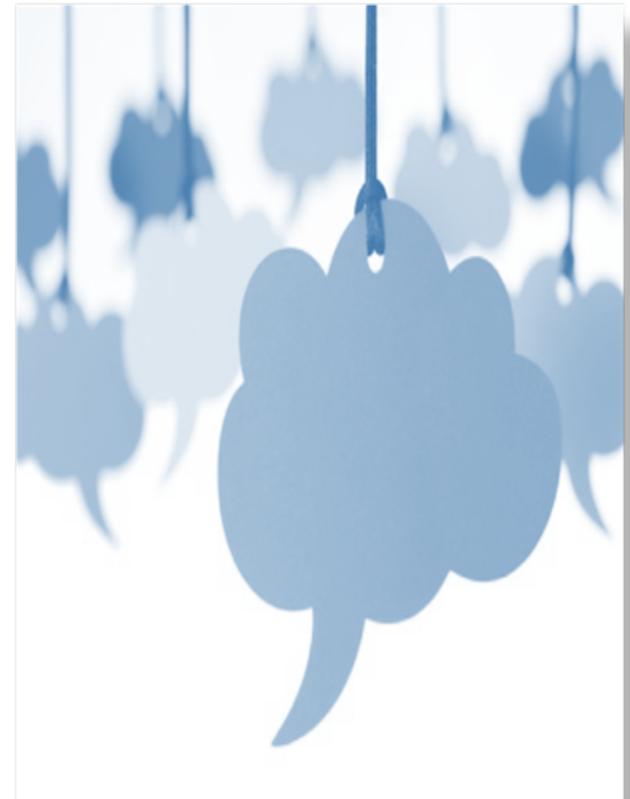
What Data and Information Do We Need to Tell that Story?

- **Services needs assessment info**, gaps analyses
- **Exits to permanent housing**, changes over time
- **Success rates in RRH and PSH** – housing stability, rates of returns to homelessness
- **Information about people being served in programs using Housing First approaches** - demographics, disabilities, behavioral health concerns
- **Client feedback** – surveys, focus groups, etc.
- **Comparative data** – with non-Housing First programs (optional)
- **Success stories and the voices of people with lived expertise**



Answer in the Chat Box

What other data do you think is essential for telling an effective, compelling narrative about Housing First approaches?





Final Thoughts

Final Thoughts

1. **The “narrative battle” is part of our work** – because losing has consequences for people experiencing homelessness
2. **Identify the questions you struggle to answer well** – can your current data help you to better answers? Can you develop other data that provides better answers and ensures your credibility?
3. **Decide upon meaningful data/info that you want to communicate** – pivot from unreasonable questions and expectations to data/info that answers reasonable questions and that you have confidence in
4. **Develop the stories/narratives you need to tell** – Put your data in service to those stories, develop reasonable data collection and analysis systems to fill those gaps





Questions?



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Thank you!

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