

# HMIS Monitoring:

A story of building relationships,  
improving data quality, stepping on  
toes, and making mistakes



**INTEGRATE  
INNOVATE  
MOTIVATE**

NHSDC 2022 FALL CONFERENCE

Presented by: Lynn Sharpe, State Of Utah - Office of Homeless Services  
Victoria Vuyovich, The Road Home

# Session proposal

- **Title** HMIS Monitoring: A story of building relationships, improving data quality, stepping on toes, and making mistakes
- **Description** In December 2018, the Utah State Legislative Auditor General published an audit describing Utah HMIS data as "impossible to evaluate the state's success over time." The audit then details how Utah's HMIS data was inaccurate, incomplete, late, and in many cases, irrelevant.

Utah HMIS's Lead Agency's response was to start by overhauling our monitoring tool. The toolkit isn't perfect and has undergone several significant revisions since 2019, and it has required providers to spend dozens of hours responding to the questions we ask.

However, the new monitoring process has been vital in improving the system data quality, building relationships with our providers, and zeroing in on the root causes of the poor data quality results the audit found in 2018.

In December 2021, the Utah State Legislative Auditor General published a response to the 2018 Audit, where HMIS data quality was not identified as an issue of concern.

This session will discuss what worked for us and what didn't as we built and rebuilt our monitoring process.

- **Time** 75 minutes
- **Goals** Tools for successful HMIS provider monitoring, Using monitoring to develop HMIS training and ongoing technical assistance, Using HMIS monitoring to improve the overall understanding of the local homelessness system.

# Lynn Sharpe, MBA (She/Her)

- **Work History:**

- 11 years working in Homeless Services in Utah.
- NHSDC Board Member

- **Personal goal:**

- To increase the understanding of HMIS data in Utah while making it less of a burden on those working in the field.

- **Outside of work:**

- Lives that suburban mom life.
- A huge BTS fan (let's talk ARMYs!)
- A bigger fan of my cat.



# Vic Vuyovich (she/her)

- **Work History:**

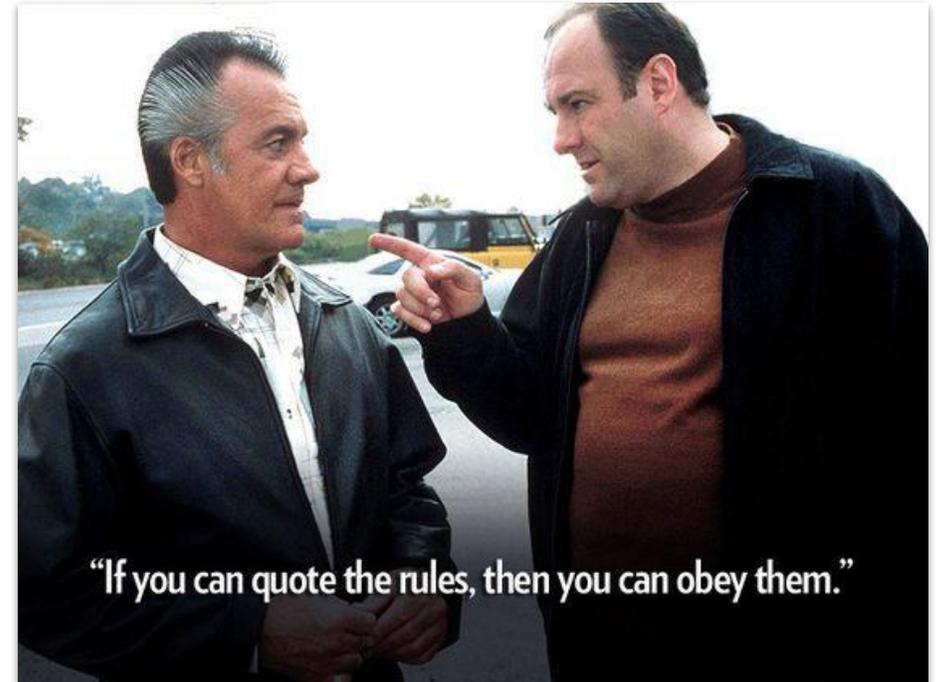
- 7 years working in homeless services
  - 2 years client-facing
  - 5 years administrative

- **Professional Goal:**

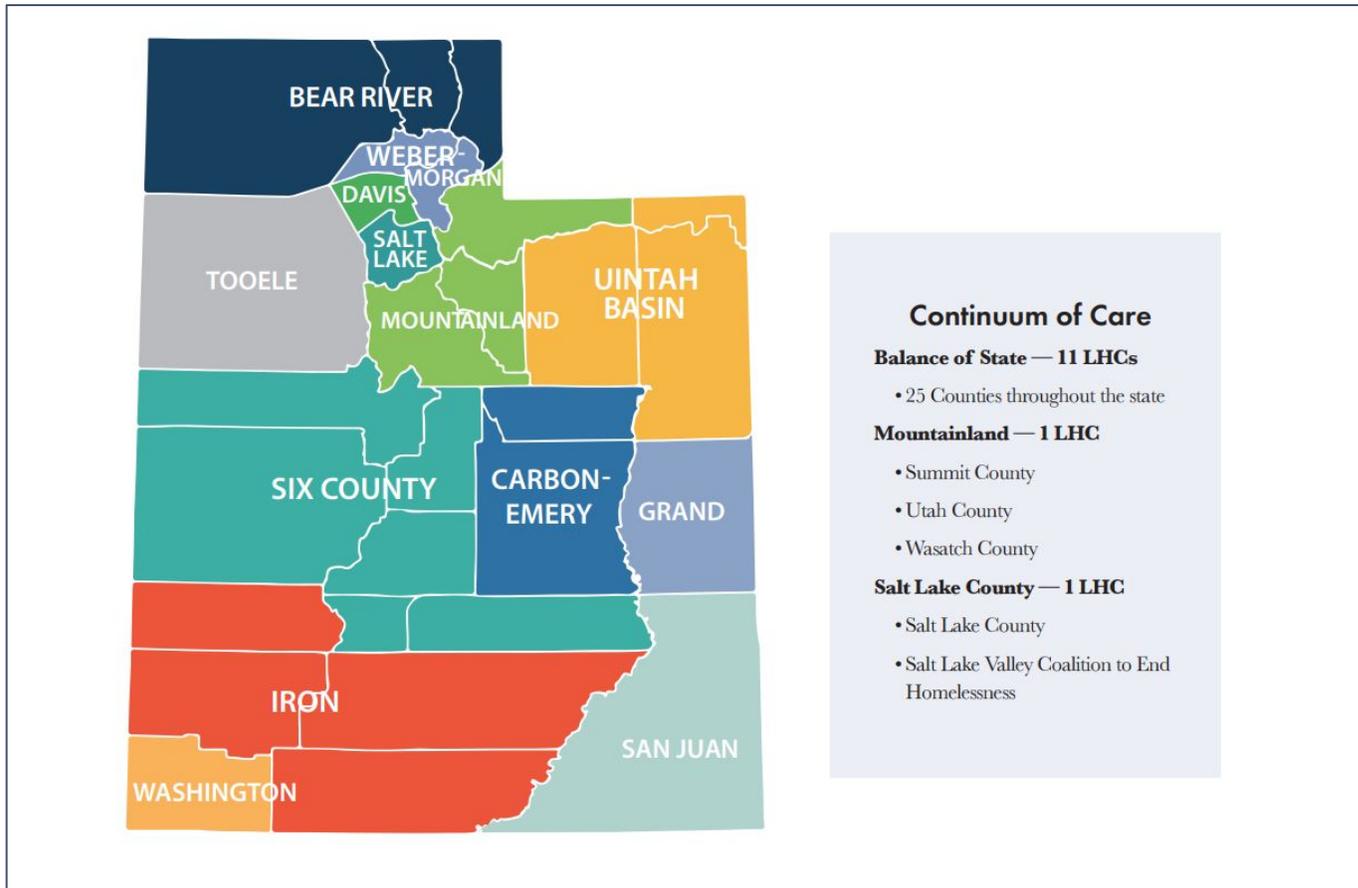
- Reduce unnecessary administrative burdens for both staff and clients while maintaining high data quality agency wide

- **Outside of Work I am:**

- Rewatching The Sopranos
- Hanging at my favorite dive bar
- Daydreaming about the State Fair



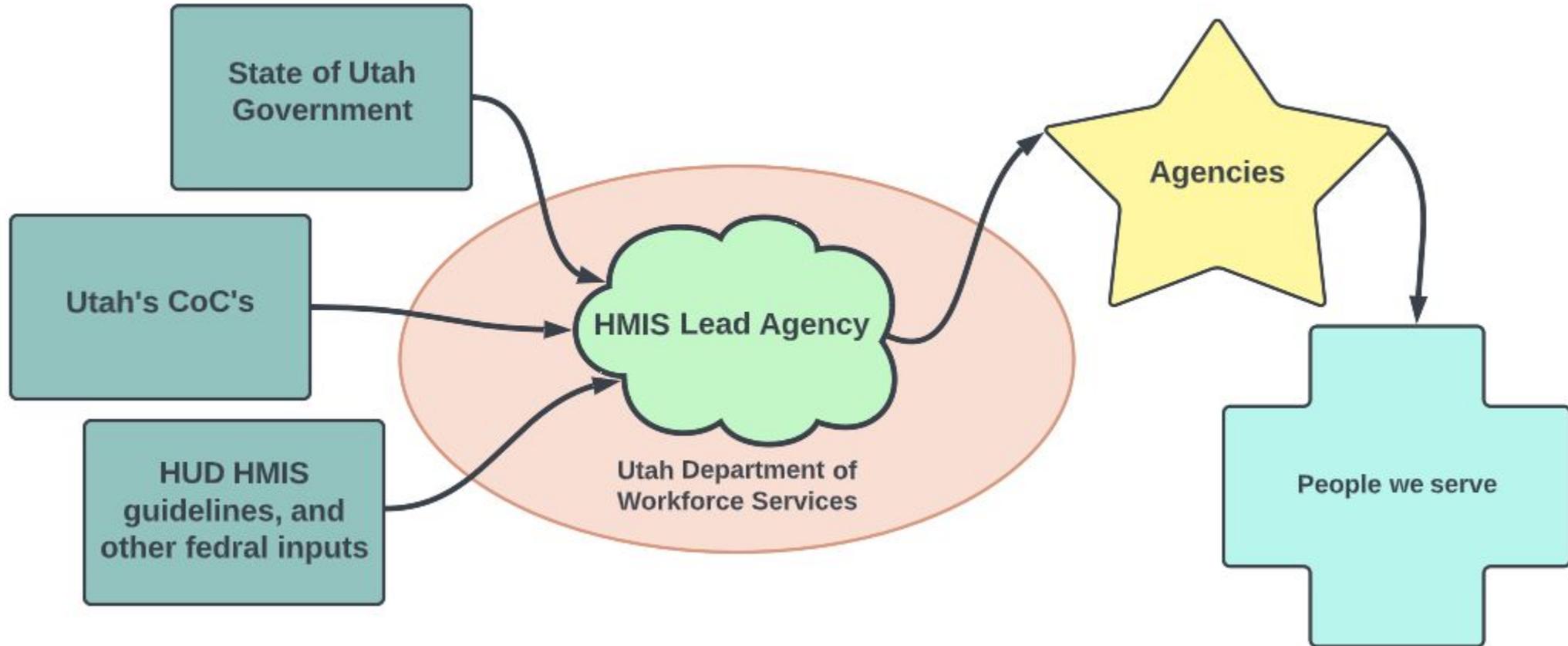
# About Utah's HMIS



By the numbers:

- 63 Active Agencies
- 600(ish) users.
- 350 active programs
- 25,700 people served in the last fiscal year.
- 6 system admins

# UHMIS Lead Agency



# Monitoring

The bread and butter of this session



Image Credit: Song Kaiyue, pexels.com

# The Tools (Just for NHSDC!)

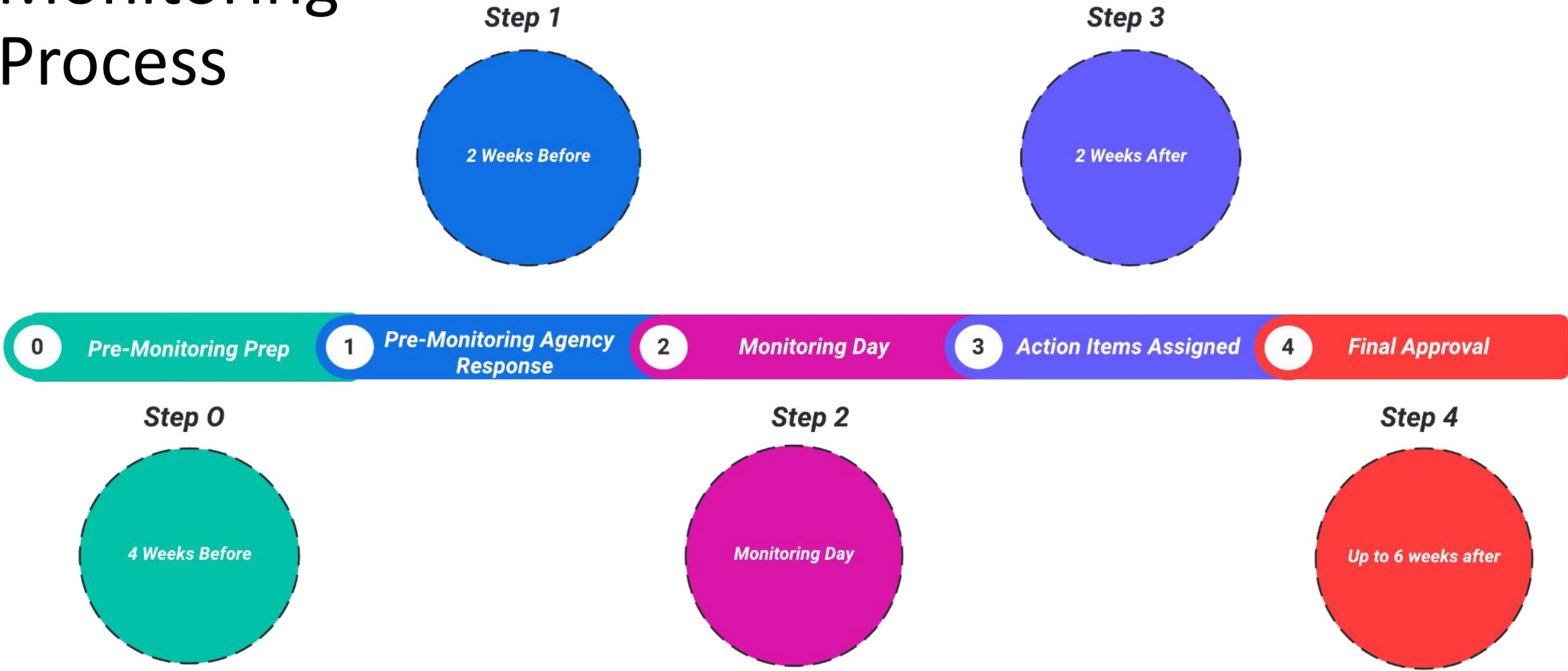
- Monitoring templates
  - Standard (all four versions)
- A big ol' monitoring procedure
- Example agency policy and procedures
- And more!



# The Point Of Monitoring as a Lead

- Ultimately to ensure the system and providers are compliant.
- Opens opportunities
  - To ask questions and get feedback from providers.
  - To ensure each agency's needs are being met.
  - To identify gaps in your support as a lead.
- Reduces Risk
  - Client data sharing risks
  - Audit findings
  - Data errors

# Monitoring Process



# Types of Monitoring

| Agency Type  | Basic (Annual)  | Full (Every 3rd Year)   |
|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Standard</b><br/><i>(An agency that enters identified data into the system for at least one program that is not Coordinated Entry.)</i></p>  | <p><b>What we review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of Data Quality elements, as appropriate for the agency.</li> <li>• A review of agency-wide current UHMIS set-up.</li> <li>• Standard agencies, a review of current data collection documents.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Policy Review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An in-depth review of an agency's UHMIS policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Agencies of different types have different policy and procedures required of them.</li> </ul> <p><b>In-Person:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An in-person walkthrough of the agency's primary operating space.</li> <li>• Not required of Read-Only agencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>File Review:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any agency that enters data into any program (other than Coordinated Entry) will have data validated.</li> <li>• Additional file reviews can happen if issues arise during the initial review as considered necessary.</li> <li>• The monitor will visit the agency in person if the agency uses real-time data entry.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Read-Only</b><br/><i>(Agencies with no ability to edit data in the system.)</i></p>  |   |   |
| <p><b>Coordinated Entry</b><br/><i>(Agencies with limited editing access to the system explicitly to participate in Coordinated Entry activities.)</i></p>   |   |   |
| <p><b>Domestic Violence Service Provider</b><br/><i>(Otherwise known as Victim Service Providers who access UHMIS for coordinated entry. They do not enter identified data into the system.)</i></p> |   |   |

# Action items

| Step 3: Post-Monitoring Response |  | Example |
|----------------------------------|--|---------|
| SFY22 Action Item:               | <b>Issue found:</b><br>The CHO data collection documents do not collect all required UHMIS data elements.<br><br><b>Suggested correction:</b><br>Update the CHO's data collection documents to collect all required UHMIS data elements, or use the UHMIS Lead Agency provided basic assessment forms. |         |
| CHO action item response:        | We are updating our documents and will have them compliant with HUD data standards by November 2022.   |         |

- Instead of requiring agencies to correct all issues found by the conclusion of the monitoring, we identify what is not meeting system standards and then ask for a 'reasonable action plan.'
- Action plans allow agencies to look at their ability and processes to address weaknesses.

# Monitoring History



Image Credit: Suzy Hazelwood, pexels.com

In 2015...

**THE DAILY SHOW**  
WITH JON STEWART

*The Salt Lake Tribune*

OCTOBER 8, 2014

Utah praised for initiative to end chronic homelessness

*The Washington Post*  
*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

The surprisingly simple way Utah solved chronic homelessness and saved millions



By Terrence McCoy

April 17, 2015 at 8:00 a.m. EDT



Utah Reduced Chronic Homelessness By 91 Percent; Here's How

December 10, 2015 - 6:08 PM ET

Heard on All Things Considered

NHSDC Fall 2022 Conference | Seattle

# The AUDIT

December 2018 changed everything



Image Credit: Pixabay, pexels.com

# Then in 2018 . . .

We concluded that HMIS is not sufficiently reliable to identify the performance of individual programs.

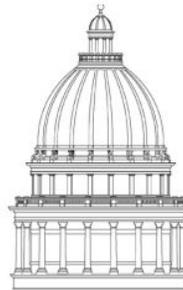
Utah erroneously showed a 91 percent decrease in chronic homelessness.

We could not rely on the accuracy of the exit destinations being recorded by case workers.

We could not identify which clients should be included in our study of the program outcomes.

The practice of not entering an exit date when a client no longer occupies a permanent housing facility is not consistent with HMIS data requirement.

REPORT TO THE  
UTAH LEGISLATURE  
Number 2018-12



## A Performance Audit of Utah's Homeless Services

December 2018

Office of the  
LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL  
State of Utah

We found numerous problems with client enrollment data in HMIS

We found that 74 percent of clients who were classified as "returning to homelessness" never received subsidized housing.

The HMIS data appears to include hundreds of cases in which the enrollment dates do not represent actual occupancy in a housing program.

Utah needs to ensure the data collected is consistent and accurate to measure performance pertaining to the goals.

A management information system is of little use if the users do not have sufficient training to enter data correctly.

# We built our response from scratch

- Existing HUD and State tools weren't enough for the lead agency or agencies to hit state expectations (and HUD) expectations.
- We had to create the wheel with all the tools we created.
- We didn't know all of the active agencies or have contacts with the ones who were active.

**The old UHMIS Monitoring**  
(it was 2 pages of policy questions, and nothing else)

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Appendix H: Security Checklist STANDARD OPERATING POLICIES & PROCEDURES

UTAH HMIS

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**UTAH HOMELESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM**  
**SECURITY CHECKLIST**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Organization \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of the Review \_\_\_\_\_

| A. | CHO Security Office Section  | Yes | No | Comments to Improve/Fix |
|----|--|-----|----|-------------------------|
| 1. | Do you have a signed copy of the "Agency Partner Agreement for Utah Homeless Management Information System" for your agency? |     |    |                         |
| 2. | Do you have a signed copy of a "UHMIS End-User Agreement" for each authorized user within your organization?                 |     |    |                         |
| 3. | Have all employees entering/viewing HMIS data attended the UHMIS end user training?  |     |    |                         |
| 4. | Have you reviewed the policies and procedures manual (December 2013 Version) with in the past year?                          |     |    |                         |
| 5. | Has your agency conducted a background check on the  |     |    |                         |

# Monitoring Mistakes



Image Credit: Ketut Subiyanto, pexels.com

# Our response to the audit was to fight

- Leadership wanted system-wide change overnight.
- We had to have an expedited response
  - We were told it had to be perfect by an unreasonable timeline.
  - We got to work and implemented everything we could.
- The HMIS Lead reported some results were to the Lt. Governor in mid-2019.



Image Credit: irasutoya.com

# Lead Agency Mistakes

- The time to prepare was too short.
  - We needed another year to prep monitoring tools.
- We were monitoring the first time we met with some of our agencies.
  - We asked for things they had never thought of before.
  - They thought it was an audit like ‘the AUDIT.’
- Our team built our knowledge base of how agencies should manage their HMIS data while we were monitoring agencies.
  - Staff knowledge in the community significantly impacted the success of monitoring toolkits.

# Lead Agency Mistakes

- No supporting documents:
  - It didn't include any support for the lead agency to keep it consistent.
    - Our first two years of responses weren't consistent between lead agency monitors.
  - No guidance to agencies on how to answer questions.

# Lead Agency Mistakes

- The original tool had little focus on data quality improvement.
  - Instead, we read a lot of policies and procedures.
- The tool was too big for the lead agency to manage.
  - We couldn't review everything agencies sent
  - Follow-up on every question
  - Or follow the timelines we set for ourselves.

# Changes made

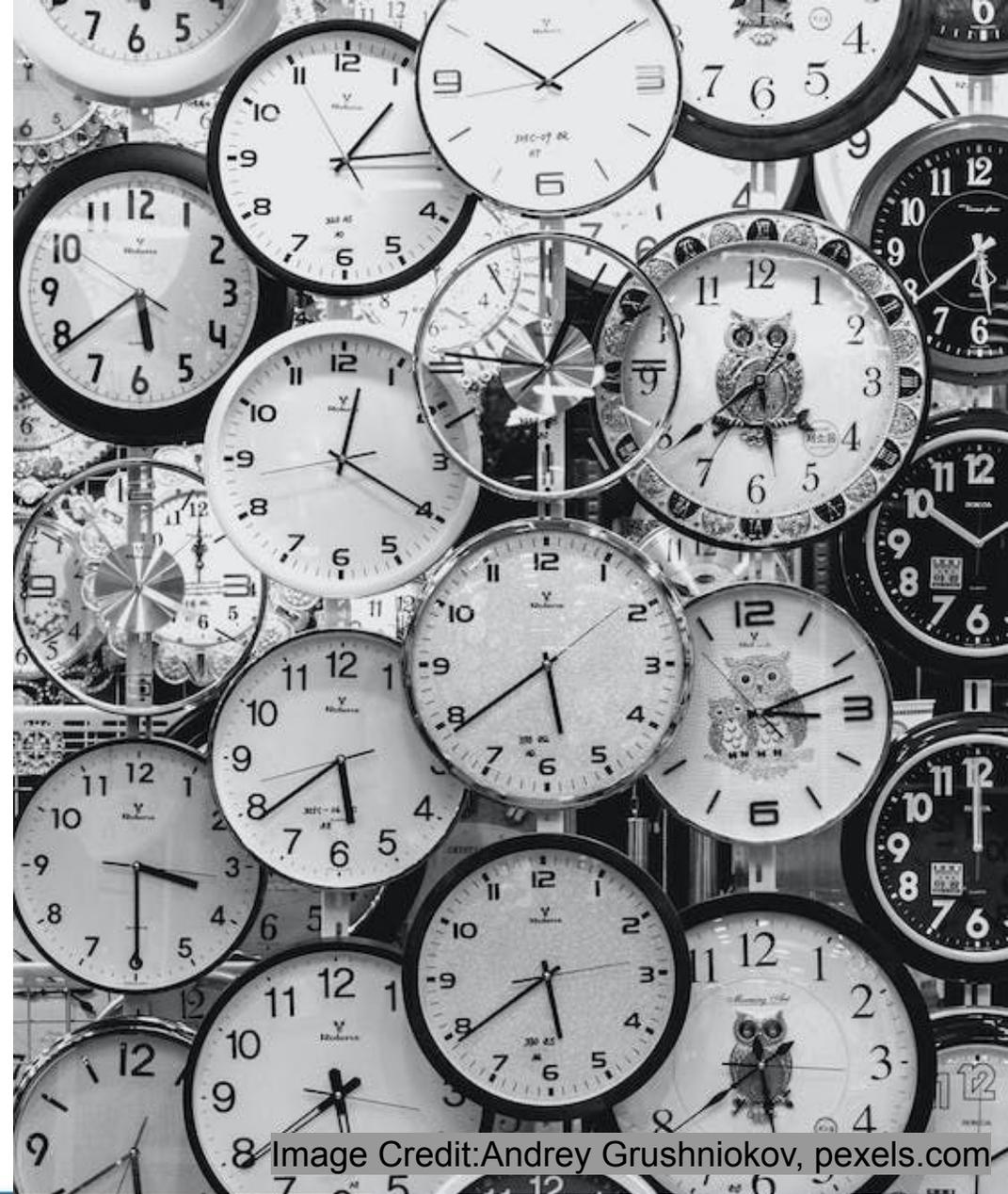


Image Credit: Andrey Grushniokov, pexels.com

# ♪ Ch ch ch changes ♪

- The toolkit sent to agencies in 'step 0' only includes the question, and support. **The original toolkit had everything for the entire monitoring process.**
- Removed **footnotes** and replaced them with a line below the question.
- Colors!

## Original

| Standard Operating Procedures <sup>1</sup> Compliance Check |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1   | Monitoring Level(s):                                | Medium, High   |
|   | Question  | Do you have a signed copy of the "Agency Partner Agreement for Utah Homeless Management Information System" for your agency? |
|   | CHO policy (include references)                     |  |
|   | In Compliance?                                      |  |
|   | Action plan to rectify                              |  |
|   | Action plan approved by UHMIS System Administration |  |



## Current

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Question:                           | Does the CHO have any additional "UHMIS Data Sharing Memorandums of Understanding" in place to allow for UHMIS access?   |
| Additional Information:             | The UHMIS Data Sharing Memorandum of Understanding can be found in Appendix D of the 2021 UHMIS Standard Operating Procedures. <a href="https://utahhmis.org/about/governance/">https://utahhmis.org/about/governance/</a> |
| Step 1: Pre-Monitoring day response |  |
| Pre-Monitoring Response:            |  |
| Additional requirements:            | If the CHO has any additional data sharing MOU's please include them with your response.   |



# ♪ Ch ch ch changes ♪

- Data Quality Report in years 1 and 2 of monitoring was pulled by agency, in year 3 by project type.
  - Data Quality Reports by project type allow the monitor to better identify where an agency is struggling and easily guide improvement focus areas.
- Fewer files are requested.
- Focus on agency set-up
  - Projects
  - Grant's
  - Users
  - Providers
  - Services
  - Etc.

# ♪ Ch ch ch changes ♪

- Year 2 and 3 versions were not 'pass/fail.'
  - Action items instead of failure, ask for plans to improve
  - Giving a feasible process to get buy-in
  - Going beyond 'pass/fail' looking at ways to make gradual changes to the failing process.

# Monitoring Success



Image Credit: Nina Uhlikova, pexels.com

# The Victories!

- Identified a poor data entry practice that resulted in ‘perfect’ data quality, the data isn’t perfect now, but it is accurate.
- 30% improvement in Emergency Shelter exit destination data



Image Credit: irasutoya.com

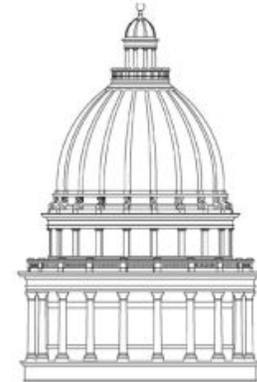
# The Audit 2021

A broad measure of homelessness outcomes shows 29 percent of homeless return to homelessness.

Data show that Utah programs aimed at helping homeless individuals get into housing have been successful.

Once they find permanent housing, homeless individuals tend to remain housed.

REPORT TO THE  
UTAH LEGISLATURE  
Number 2021-14



## An In-Depth Follow-Up of the Oversight and Management of Utah's Homeless Services System

November 2021

Office of the  
LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR GENERAL  
State of Utah

# Key's to our success

## The agencies!

The agency partners, like The Road Home, were the ones that improved the system data quality.

The Lead Agency was only there to help.

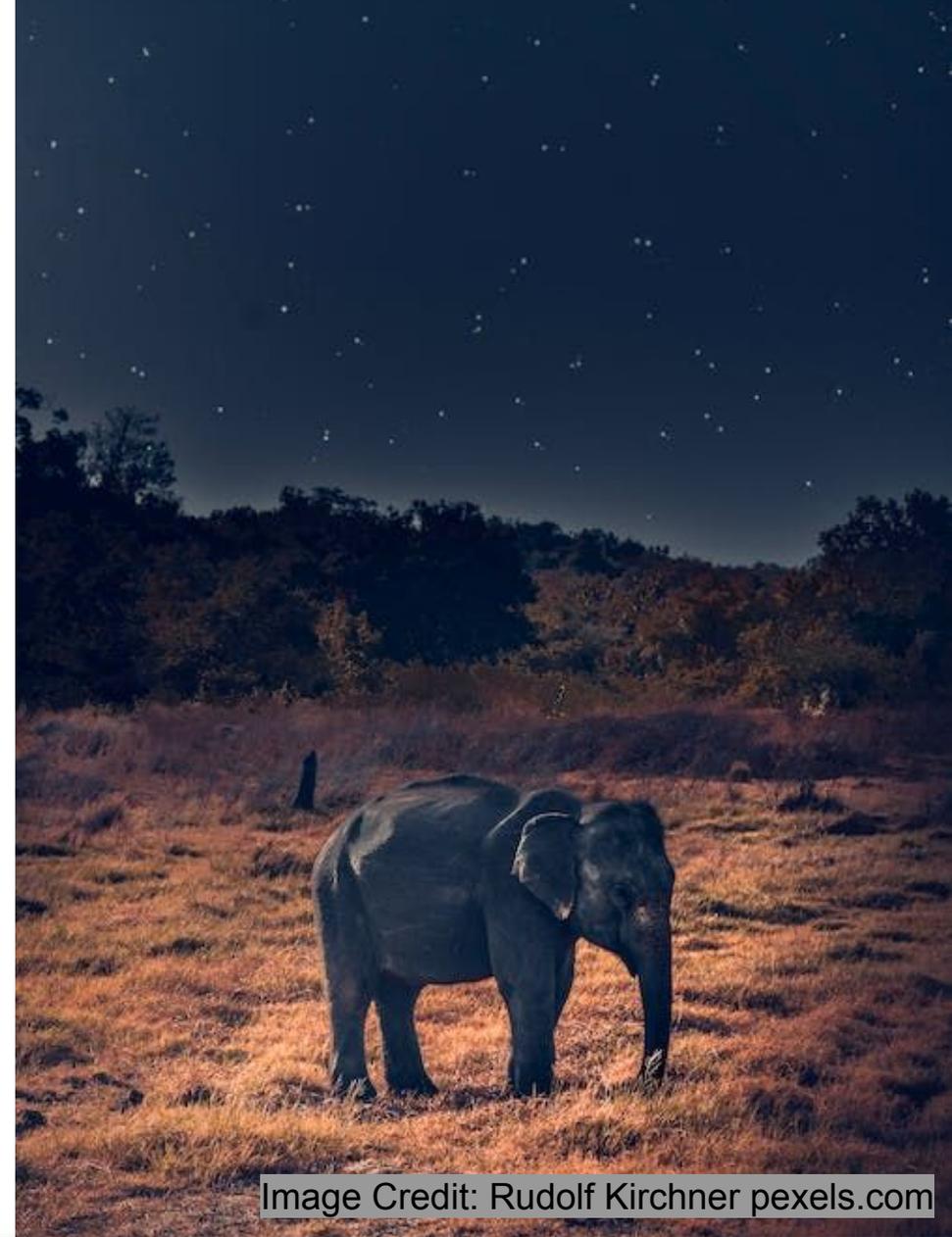


Image Credit: Rudolf Kirchner pexels.com

# Key's to our success

- Collaborating rather than commanding.
- Time
- Not waiting for perfection to start.
  - But also recognizing that it isn't perfect.
    - Listening to agencies to improve.
    - Leaning on auditing experts within UHMIS Lead Agency.
    - Then fixing what we know can change.



Image Credit: irasutoya.com

# The questions (almost) don't matter

- It was the process itself that made change happen for agencies.
- Simply asking for a response was enough to get agencies thinking of overall improvements.
- The conversations started in monitoring started a butterfly effect of system improvements.
  - New data subcommittee
  - New data standards
  - Improved training
  - Improved resources from UHMIS Lead Agency.



Image Credit: irasutoya.com

# Community Success

- Community data conversations
  - We now look at ways to improve the system and the data together
  - More support from community members improves data quality.
    - Data knowledge sharing between organizations as new projects come online.
- Agencies became advocates for data improvement.
  - Agencies share with other agencies their success and ideas.
  - When it comes from agencies, it's heard differently than from the lead.

Image Credit: Donald Tong, pexels.com

# What else did we create?

- **Training:**
  - Complete revision of all existing training
  - New training
  - Monthly newsletter
  - Annual recertification training for all users.
- **Support:**
  - Open Office Hours
  - More communication via email
  - More technical assistance online.
- **Data Quality checks:**
  - Improbable data tool
  - Data Quality Reports

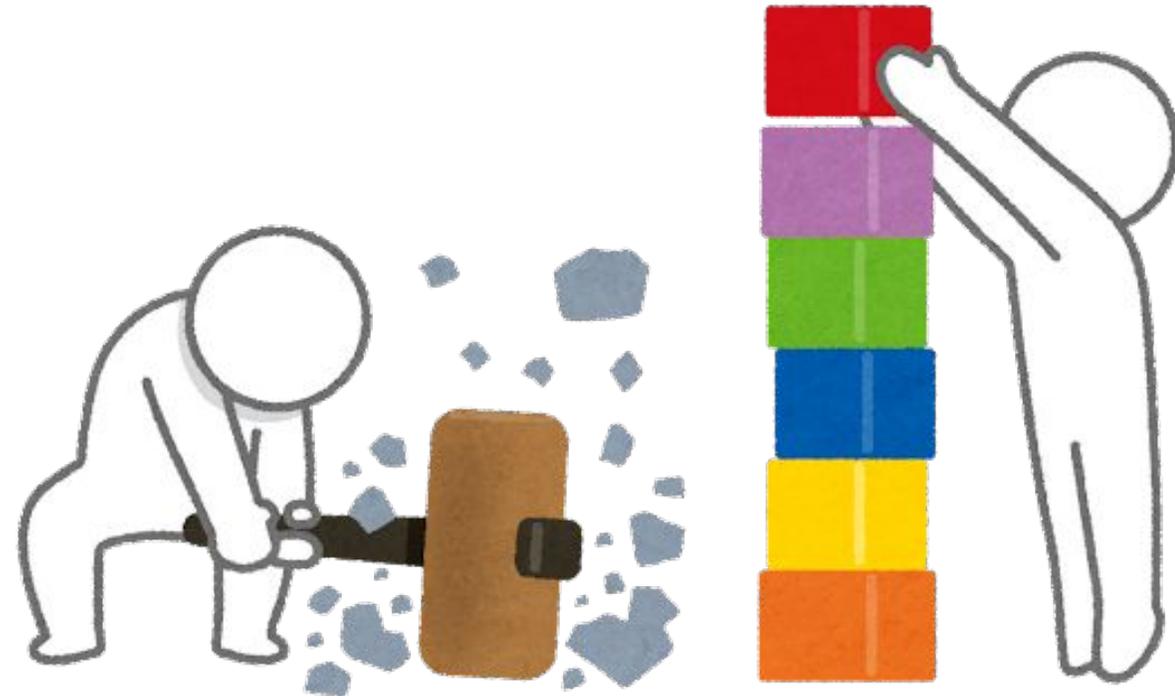


Image Credit: irasutoya.com

# The Future

- More focus on data quality and less on policy
- In-depth improvement plans for struggling agencies.
  - Data Quality Improvement Plan (the first one is in progress now)
  - Outside of monitoring, but started by monitoring.
- We will spend more time in agencies as a team to listen to people doing the work.
- Focus on improving technical knowledge bases that many of our agencies.

Image Credit: Pisabay, pexels.com

# The Road Home

One Agency Perspective on the HMIS Monitoring Process



# The Road Home

- **Roughly 100 years of service delivery**
  - est. in 1923 as Travelers Aid Society in train stations & bus stops
- **Largest private, homeless services provider in Utah**
  - Operate emergency shelter, street outreach, case management, and housing programs
- **Compared to State numbers (current):**
  - 25% of the active HMIS users
  - Manage data for 15% of the HMIS projects

# Bear in Mind

- **Not all organizations are the same:**
  - We have a unique flexibility due to our history, size, and experience
- **Success might look different for different organizations**
  - One approach does not always work for everyone
  - We can only speak to our own experience with this process

# Being Monitored

- **What we expect of ourselves and the HMIS Lead:**
  - Proactive vs. reactive approach
  - Clear, consistent, and reasonable standards
  - Collaborate and be flexible when possible

# Proactive vs. Reactive Approach

- **No Surprises**
  - Assess own risk and weak spots
- **HMIS Lead Monitors Annually**
- **Self-Monitor at Least Annually**
  - Utilize available tools
  - Review data frequently
    - Turn your action items into goals

# Clear, Consistent, and Reasonable Standards

- **As a HMIS Lead you determine whether data collection practices are in compliance with HUD, local CoC, and HMIS guidance**
  - Set a very clear standard of the requirements and give context
  - Ensure expectation and message is consistent for all orgs/teams
  - If no hard rule, make sure the standard is reasonable
    - Confirm if the goal is feasible for anyone

# Collaborate and be Flexible

- **Schedule recurring TA calls**
  - We meet very frequently with the HMIS Lead agency
- **Troubleshoot where data practices can be flexible**
  - If the requirements are clear, then you can more easily identify unnecessary data collection that can be changed or removed
  - Reducing unnecessary data can help to:
    - Increase capacity for both organization and HMIS Lead
    - Focus attention on the most important data elements

# Monitoring History

- **2018 Legislative Audit triggered a series of events**
  - Triggered a reactionary response for the State & The Road Home
- **Simultaneously Took Action**
  - State increased oversight and expected immediate change
  - We restructured and increased our capacity and scope
    - Pre Audit: data responsibilities shared in an overburdened dept.
    - Post Audit: data responsibilities in one dedicated data dept.
  - Hit the ground running

# Mistakes



- **Reactionary Approach**
- **Tool unable to measure common trends**
  - i.e., everyone in the community misunderstood a few data elements, documentation requirements, etc.

# Mistakes

- **Administrative Burden**
  - File selection was by client rather than project
  - Data Quality
    - Pass/Fail with all data pulled together rather than by project type
    - Only documented one year and did not capture any improvements
    - Included unachievable goals
  - Included unknown requirements with limited guidance
  - Scheduled simultaneously with data clean up and reporting deadlines

# Successes

- **Established ongoing collaboration**
- **Helped define expected scope of duties**
- **Helped prioritize goals by listing out action items**
- **Improved Overall Knowledge**
- **Improved Data Quality**



# Questions?

(And any ideas for us to improve)

## Contact us!

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Image Credit: irasutoya.com