

BUILT FOR ZERO

COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

**Built
For
Zero.**

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**COMMUNITY
SOLUTIONS**

Built for Zero.

COMMUNITY COMMUNICATIONS TOOLKIT

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As a part of Built for Zero, you are on the leading edge of a movement of communities redefining what is possible and what it takes to measurably end homelessness. This toolkit aims to respond to common communications needs and challenges that were shared with us by communities.

We hope to continue updating and refining this toolkit and partner with your community. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact comms@community.solutions.

Twitter: [@BuiltforZero](#) / [@Cmtysolutions](#)
Facebook: [@Cmtysolutions](#) / [@BuiltForZero](#)

Instagram: [@Cmtysolutions](#)
LinkedIn: [Community Solutions, Inc.](#)

#BuiltforZero #FunctionalZero #HomelessnessisSolvable

KEY TERMS

Brief	Specific
<p>Built for Zero is a national movement of more than 80 communities working to measurably end homelessness led by the nonprofit, Community Solutions.</p>	<p>Built for Zero is a movement of over 80 communities working to measurably end homelessness, one population at a time. Led by the nonprofit Community Solutions, Built for Zero is a methodology, a movement, and proof of what is possible. Communities in Built for Zero embrace a data-driven strategy to reach functional zero, a state where local systems are actively reducing and ending homelessness so it remains rare and brief for a population.</p>
<p>Community Solutions is a nonprofit that leads the Built for Zero movement and works toward a lasting end to homelessness that leaves no one behind.</p>	<p>Community Solutions is a nonprofit organization that works to create a lasting end to homelessness that leaves no one behind. Community Solution leads Built for Zero, a movement of more than 80 cities and counties working to measurably end homelessness, one population at a time.</p>
<p>Chronic homelessness describes the population of people experiencing long-term or recurring homelessness.</p>	<p>Chronic homelessness is long-lasting or recurring homelessness for a community's most vulnerable neighbors. It is defined by the federal government as impacting people who have experienced homelessness for at least a year — or repeatedly over the last three years — while living with a disability.</p>
<p>Functional zero for chronic homelessness is a milestone demonstrating a community has ended long-term homelessness for a vulnerable population.</p>	<p>Functional zero for chronic homelessness indicates that the community is actively reducing and ending chronic homelessness to three or fewer people. Specifically it means a community has less than three people experiencing chronic homelessness or .1% of the total number of individuals reported in the most recent point-in-time count.</p>
<p>Functional zero for veteran homelessness is a milestone that means a community has fewer veterans experiencing homelessness than they can routinely house in a month.</p>	<p>Functional zero for veteran homelessness indicates that a community is sustaining a reality where fewer veterans are experiencing homelessness than it can routinely house, with a minimum threshold of three veterans. This means that the community is actively reducing veteran homelessness so it is rare overall and brief when it occurs. Video</p>
<p>A by-name list is a dynamic and comprehensive list of people experiencing homelessness in your community that is updated at least monthly but as often as possible.</p>	<p>The by-name list is a real-time, person-specific list of everyone experiencing homelessness. The by-name list provides communities with a full and real-time view of homelessness in their geography. Using this data, cities and counties are able to triage individual cases, understand the broader patterns of homelessness in their community, and ensure that resources and efforts are driving down the overall number of people experiencing homelessness. Read more</p>

WHAT IS BUILT FOR ZERO?

- Built for Zero is a movement of more than 80 communities committed to measurably ending homelessness — and proving that it is possible.
- Communities in Built for Zero have adopted a data-driven methodology to change how homeless response systems work and the impact they can achieve.
- Fueled by collaboration and data, more than half of those cities and counties have driven reductions in a population of people experiencing homelessness.
- Communities in Built for Zero have reached functional zero, a milestone that proves the community has a data-driven, coordinated system in place that ensures fewer people are experiencing homelessness than can be housed in a month. This results in a reality where homelessness remains rare overall and brief when it occurs.

Communities in Built for Zero have designed operating systems that can reduce and end homelessness at a population level. These changes include:

- **An integrated, command center team.** To harness the collective power of an entire community, key actors like nonprofit organizations, the Continuum of Care, the housing authority, local government, and the VA come together around a shared aim.
- **A shared aim.** Built for Zero communities establish a shared aim to reach functional zero for one or more populations on the way to ending homelessness for all. They measure success toward this goal by whether they are driving population-level reductions in homelessness, rather than program-level outcomes. By reaching functional zero, communities are able to demonstrate that coordinated, data-driven systems are in place to continuously keep homelessness rare and brief.
- **Comprehensive, real-time, by-name data.** Built for Zero communities know everyone experiencing homelessness by name, in real time. As modeled in public health, communities can also track the dynamics of homelessness at a population level, understanding inflow, outflow, and whether efforts are driving reductions in homelessness.
- **Strategic, data-driven housing investments.** Built for Zero communities use real-time data to help secure housing resources and target them for the greatest possible needs.



Watch a [4-minute video](#) that provides an overview of Built for Zero.

WHAT IS FUNCTIONAL ZERO?

What does it mean to reach functional zero for chronic homelessness?

The Built for Zero definition for ending chronic homelessness is the same as the federal government's definition. A community has ended chronic homelessness when the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness is zero, or if not zero, then either three or .1% of the total number of individuals reported in the most recent point-in-time count, whichever is greater.

What does it mean to reach functional zero for veteran homelessness? | [See video](#)

- By reaching functional zero for veteran homelessness, a community has proven it has fewer veterans experiencing homelessness than it can routinely house in permanent housing in a single month. For example, if my community is housing four veterans a month on average, we must only have four veterans or fewer experiencing homelessness at all times.
- Ending homelessness does not mean that no veteran will ever experience homelessness in a community. It means that systems are in place to ensure that any experience of homelessness is brief and permanently resolved, and rare overall.

What is the difference in functional zero and the Federal Benchmarks and Criteria for ending veteran homelessness?

- The Federal Criteria and Benchmarks and functional zero for veteran homelessness standard represent different approaches to measurement, but they are not exclusive.
- Achieving the Federal Criteria and Benchmarks and/or Mayor's Challenge criteria for ending veteran homelessness is an important milestone and a major accomplishment for a community.
- The Federal Criteria and Benchmarks are complex and lay out valuable outcomes and system behaviors for communities.
- Communities are usually committed to achieving the Federal Criteria and Benchmarks for ending veteran homeless **and** achieving functional zero, which will ensure the sustainability of the community's efforts. The initiative will work on systemic change to maintain a smooth system of ensuring that veteran homelessness remains rare overall and brief when it occurs.

If you've ended homelessness, why do I still see people on the street?

- Reaching functional zero for a population does not mean that no person will ever experience a housing crisis or homelessness in a community. Functional zero means that systems are in place to continuously end homelessness at a population level, ensuring that any experience of homelessness is brief when it occurs, and rare overall.

RESOURCES

- Visit our page dedicated to [functional zero](#)
- Visit a page that includes definitions and responses to [FAQs](#)

DATA AND THE BY-NAME LIST

You cannot solve a problem you cannot see. Homelessness is a dynamic problem that changes night over night. That is why Built for Zero communities have a comprehensive, real-time understanding of the changing population of people experiencing homelessness. With real-time data, a community can better understand homelessness at two levels:

- **The individual level.** Who is experiencing homelessness, what are their names and needs?
- **The population level.** How many people are experiencing homelessness? How is that number changing month over month? What are the dynamics behind those numbers? How much inflow did the community see, versus outflow?

By-name lists allow systems to understand the population experiencing homelessness, and remove the systemic and individual barriers that stand in their way.

- **At an individual level,** the by-name list enables communities to know everyone experiencing homelessness by name, in real time, which allows their system to better triage an individual's needs and ensure a positive exit from homelessness.
- **At the population level,** by-name data allows a community to design strategies and systems. With this information, communities can test changes and understand whether those efforts are driving down the number of people experiencing homelessness. This data is also critical to making targeted investments to ensure the greatest possible reductions in homelessness.

Communities track seven key data points that account for people entering and exiting homelessness every month, analyzing this information in Tableau dashboards.

- These data points look at **inflow** (who is entering into homelessness), **actively homeless** (who is experiencing homelessness now), and **outflow** (who was able to exit homelessness).

RESOURCES

- Watch [a 5-min video](#) that describes by-name lists and functional zero
- Watch [a 3-min video](#) of Built for Zero Co-Director Beth Sandor demoing the Tableau dashboard
- Watch [a 1-min video](#) describing by-name data

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

This resource aims to provide leaders of Built for Zero with guiding questions to begin developing a communications strategy.

1. **Map out the core issues that communications must address.** What issue is communications trying to address?
 - a. **Lack of awareness** of community strategy, efforts, progress, or needs
 - b. **Misunderstanding** of community strategy, efforts, or needs
 - c. **Lack of community or political will** to support community efforts

Guiding Questions:

- How are misperceptions / lack of awareness creating barriers to progress?

2. **Identify the targets for the communications strategy, and the desired behavior change.**

Guiding Questions:

- Who are the key actors who are influencing our ability to drive population-level reductions?
- How are their behaviors helping or hindering progress?
- Where are their behaviors now, and where would we like to see their behaviors?

Example:

Audience and current behavior	Audience and desired behavior
Homeless service providers or other stakeholders in the homeless response system are not bought in or aware of the community's Built for Zero strategy	Homeless service providers understand the Built for Zero mindset and methodology, and behave as key partners in the work
Journalists are unaware, or misguided, in their focus on the problems needing to be solved, efforts underway in the community, or progress being made	Journalists consistently educate the public in a way that is accurate and create accountability for actions that would support progress
Local electeds are motivated to end homelessness, but disconnected to the needs needed to drive population-level reductions	Local electeds serve as messengers and champions for needs identified by local leaders, amplify progress, and educate constituents on what is being done
Funders including local government and private funders are not funding the activities needed to drive population-level reductions	Funders invest in the activities needed to drive population-level reductions

3. **Identify the key messages that must be heard and understood by these target audiences to drive behavior change.**

Guiding Questions:

- We have identified issues with the current state, and who will be critical targets to get us to the ideal state. What is the information that must be understood and internalized to help change these behaviors?
- How is current messaging failing to promote the understanding needed?
- What messaging is working?

4. **Brainstorm the best communications strategies to achieve this change.** Community Solutions staff are happy to help communities map out potential strategies.

Guiding Questions

- Who are key allies and trusted messengers who can be deployed?
- What are tools that can be developed to equip key stakeholders? *(For example: Talking points? FAQs? Infographics / visual content?)*
- What are the key communications channels that can be leveraged? *For example: local media, national media, social media, owned content, Built for Zero/Community Solutions channels, events/meetings)*
- How can we create sustained communications to repeatedly inform, engage, and address misconceptions held by key stakeholders?

5. **Set the strategy, and the appropriate measures, to learn whether they are working.** In the following sections, you will see examples of aims and measures for various communications channels. You will also see the example of a functional zero announcement strategy, which could be applied to other milestones and efforts.

ANNOUNCING FUNCTIONAL ZERO

Functional zero announcements are a critical time to:

- Generate visibility and momentum of achievement
- Promote understanding of accomplishment and support needed to sustain
- Build political will for their efforts to end homelessness for next population, and
- Create a sense of shared victory and ownership among community partners.

Please find examples of activities, measures, and support provided by Community Solutions:

Objective	Activities	Process Measures	Support provided by CS
Generate visibility and momentum of achievement	Press release and pitch (example)	# of press placements	CS can draft press release and pitch
	Social media - original posts and amplifying press (example)	# of engagements # of impressions	CS will create a social media toolkit and graphics
	Email newsletters (example)	% open rate % click to action rate	CS will send an email to our audience
Promote understanding of achievement and support needed to sustain	Blog posts (example)	Avg. time spent on page Unique views	CS will write and publish
	Case study (example)	Avg. time spent on page Unique views	CS will write and publish
	Media coverage	% of coverage accurately representing milestone	CS can pitch
Sustain/build will among partners, constituents and political champions	Event/press conference (run of show)	# key stakeholders attend # of journalists	
	Social media (toolkit example)	# of partners participating	CS will help drive activity
	Press release and pitch (example)	# of partners participating	CS can draft press release and pitch

MORE RESOURCES

- **Planning.** [Template](#)
- **Press Release.** [Chronic Template](#) [\(example\)](#) | [Veteran Template](#) [\(example\)](#)
- **Learnings from other communities.** [Lynchburg](#) | [Abilene](#)
- **Press Conference.** [Run of Show Template](#)

PRESS / TRADITIONAL MEDIA

This section includes guidance on how to leverage press and traditional media to advance common communications objectives:

Objective	Activities	Process Measures
Create visibility and understanding of efforts, partnerships, and goals	Press Release / Pitches	# of positive press placements (tv, radio, print, web)
	Op-Eds / Editorial Board	# of placements
Rebut and reframe harmful narratives	Engage regularly with journalists	X engagements per quarter
Strengthen relationships with journalists	Regular engagement	# of engagements (inbound/proactive)
	Create and maintain press list	% of regional publications reflected

Best practices for engaging with the press

- **Enter every interview with three key messages** you'd like to see reflected in the coverage. Swim back to those islands every opportunity you have.
- **Develop relationships** by creating a list of journalists and media outlets in your region. Get to know them and make sure they know you.
- **Establish the terms of an interview before it begins.** Be clear about whether you are on the record, off the record, or on background (and what "background" means to the reporter).
- **Provide as much background information as possible.** **Fact sheets** can prevent confusion. Provide definitions of functional zero and USICH criteria and benchmarks.
- **Provide statistics, stories, and visuals to illustrate progress.** These should include a **run chart**, stats like overall reductions or length of time, or examples of systems improvements.
- **Create opportunities for people with lived experience to share their stories, and encourage trauma-informed practices.** Be mindful of the harmful and common inclination to blame individuals for their experience of homelessness. Highlight the role of systems.

PRESS RELEASES

The goal of a press release is to:

- Create shared ownership and acknowledgment among the partners on the community team
- Provide the language and information you want to see in the story (and prevent errors)
- Convince a journalist that a milestone or event is newsworthy and worth covering

TEMPLATES. [New BfZ Community](#) | **Functional zero** ([veteran](#), [chronic](#))

OP-EDS / EDITORIAL BOARD / LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Op-eds and letters to the editor are ways to reach readers and deliver a call to action or framing for the work. Op-eds are usually 600-800 words and letters to the editor are usually 150-400 words.

The challenge, for each of us, is to ask ourselves, "What one thing can I try today that might help someone who is homeless get housed faster? And what do I need to track to know it worked?" ... I will be looking forward to seeing the results – with all the butterflies in our community flapping their wings, who knows what impact we can have? [- Andrea Kurtz, Meeting the challenge of local homelessness](#)

BRIGHT SPOT: PRESS COVERAGE

These excerpts from The Florida Times Union's "[Northeast Florida homelessness numbers down, affordable housing still limited](#)" and Next City's "[The City That Plans to Completely End Homelessness](#)" highlight how the Jacksonville and Rockford teams effectively used the press to

HIGHLIGHT COMMUNITY COLLABORATION AND SHARED OWNERSHIP. Cindy Funkhouser, president and CEO of Sulzbacher: "That's how big, complicated issues get solved," she said. "When everybody is at the table, we can make some really big things happen."

ENGAGE ELECTEDS. "The city of Jacksonville is committed to working with our partners to end homelessness in our community," [Mayor Lenny] Curry said. Those partnerships "are having a profound impact on the lives of our community's most vulnerable citizens."

LIFT UP COMMITMENT AND STRATEGIES. "If John Smith is on the list, we talk about where he's staying, ask who has had contact with John, and figure out where we can get John housed at and how fast can we do it," said Angie Walker, Homeless Program Coordinator at City of Rockford Human Services. "Every population is slightly different. But one of the main things about this work is just believing that it's possible."

REFRAME HOMELESSNESS AS A SYSTEMS PROBLEM AND HAVE A CALL TO ACTION. "The public must hold our elected officials accountable to using resources created for affordable housing for that purpose," [Nazworth] said. "Look past the stigma and recognize that too many people in our community are a paycheck away from housing instability. Many of the people I work with have told me how they never thought they would be homeless. ... This isn't the person's fault, it is the result of a broken system."

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is an powerful way to:

- Create visibility and understanding of efforts, partnerships, and goals
- Engage digital audiences, partners, electeds, and other key stakeholders
- Educate the public on key pillars and components of your work

Objective	Description	Process Measures
Increase frequency	Post updates, information, and links to content	# of posts
Increase reach	Followers have "subscribed" to receive updates from your social media accounts	# of followers
	Impressions track how many times your post has shown up on a feed	# of impressions
Increase engagement	Engagement includes shares, reactions, and clicks	# of engagements per post
	Average engagement rate allows you to measure the performance of your posts.	% average engagement rate (total engagements OR total impressions / posts)

QUICK TIPS

- **Include hashtags.** #BuiltforZero #FunctionalZero #HomelessnessIsSolvable
- **Tag the appropriate stakeholders.** @BuiltforZero @CmtySolutions
- **Promote engagement.** Algorithms on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter make it more likely that posts with higher engagement show up on newsfeeds.
- **Use visuals.** People are 3X more likely to engage with Tweets that include **visual content**.
- **Tag partners.** Make sure you tag the handle of partners when talking about the work.
- **Measure what's working.** On Twitter, use the "Analytics" tab to evaluate which posts are performing well, and what types of stories appeal the most to your supporters. On Facebook, you can also assess page activity by clicking on the "Insights" tab.

LOGOS AND CONTENT

LOGOS



Need to brand the efforts of your local Built for Zero team? Use these Built for Zero logos designed for each team in the collaborative. **DOWNLOAD:** [Built for Zero logos](#).

Don't see your community listed?

Contact mpoirot@community.solutions

VIDEOS



What does it take to end homelessness? An explainer video on Built for Zero follows the key shifts: a shared aim, data, collaboration, targeted investments.

WATCH: [Solving homelessness with Built for Zero](#)



What is a by-name list and how does it help a community get to functional zero for veteran homelessness?

WATCH: [By-name list for Veteran Homelessness](#)



Complex social challenges aren't simply about checking the right boxes or implementing the right policy ideas; they're about responding to changing information in real time.

WATCH: [Beth Sandor Talks Complex Social Challenges](#)