



**Brno Challenge Convening:
Developing By-Name Lists of
People Experiencing Homelessness
December 9-10, 2015**

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Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[The Convening](#)

[Challenges Addressed](#)

[Budget & Funding:](#)

[Data, Databases and Privacy:](#)

[Bringing Stakeholders into the Process:](#)

[Volunteer Recruitment & Management:](#)

[Assessment/VI-SPDAT:](#)

[Insufficient Resources to meet the Demonstrated Need:](#)

[Challenges Related to By-Name lists Vs. Macro-Counts:](#)

[The Importance of Maintaining By-Name Lists](#)

[Follow Up with Communities](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Appendix A - Q&A on the VI-SPDAT](#)

Introduction

The Institute of Global Homelessness (IGH) supports the emerging global movement to end homelessness. As part of this work, each year we hold small convenings to find practical solutions to challenges people face across regions to quickly and effectively ending homelessness.



In December 2015 IGH partnered with the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) to convene six cities from across the world in Brno, Czech Republic. Representatives took an in-depth look into how they could begin to end homelessness by developing individual profiles of people experiencing homelessness, with actionable data to move them toward permanent housing.

This first-of-its-kind event was called the Brno Challenge Convening, and together the participants thought through how to tackle this challenge, drawing on the knowledge and experience of their peers. For clarity, organizers drew a distinction between high-level, aggregate counts and individual-level, personalized data. The convening focused on the latter, which we will refer to as "by-name lists."

IGH contracted with Community Solutions to provide training on one method for developing a by-name list of people experiencing homelessness known as a Registry Week. Registry Weeks are a proven approach first developed in the U.S. that help communities efficiently identify everyone experiencing homelessness by name and prioritize them for housing based on their needs using a survey assessment tool called the VI-SPDAT. The VI-SPDAT is used to determine the presence of risk factors that may affect an individual's (or family's) ability to find permanent housing or remain permanently housed (but does not determine the severity/extent of these risk factors).

This write-up is meant to capture and explain what participants learned during the Challenge Convening. If you are interested in learning more, please reach out to the contacts below:

For more about IGH's work, contact Molly Seeley at mseeley@ighhomelessness.org.

For more about a Registry Week, developing by-name lists or about Community Solutions, contact Andi Broffman at abroffman@cmtysolutions.org.

To learn about BSHF's work on homelessness, including the European End Street Homelessness Campaign, contact Tom Archer at Tom.Archer@bshf.org.

The Convening

The convening was designed to (1) facilitate expertise sharing amongst the cities present and to (2) address any challenges or concerns cities might face when planning and conducting a micro-level count. It concluded with a day of active work-planning and mapping to move cities toward compiling and maintaining a by-name list. Participants came from the following cities and organizations:

- Brno, Czech Republic - [Brno Municipality](#), [Platform for Social Housing](#)
- Barcelona, Spain - [Arrels Foundation](#)
- Valencia, Spain - [RAIS Foundation](#)
- Santiago, Chile - [CalleLink](#), [Nuestra Casa](#)
- Tshwane, South Africa - [Tshwane Leadership Foundation](#)
- Westminster, England - [Homeless Link](#), [St Mungos Broadway](#)

IGH asked representatives to share their expertise on different facets of the process involved in generating and updating a by-name list and designing policies to end homelessness in their communities. If you would like more information on any of the presentations below, please contact us so we can connect you to the representative.

Using By-Name List Data In Citywide Data Systems

Mark McPherson | Homeless Link | London, England

The Combined Homeless and Information Network (CHAIN) is a robust data system that includes a by-name list of people experiencing homelessness. CHAIN has the ability to track individual-level information over long periods of time, including demographics, contact with caseworkers and basic information on needs for supports such as drug use or mental health situations. This provides a mechanism for connecting an individual to appropriate resources while also enabling London to generate aggregate statistics on their homeless population for advocacy purposes.

An important component of CHAIN is data sharing. The system works in conjunction with London's Point in Time Count and a public reporting system known as Street Link, which allows members of the public to report information on rough sleepers and engage in ending rough sleeping in the city. In CHAIN, multiple agencies can update and access client records to prevent duplication of efforts, provide accountability and help to maintain an updated list of rough sleepers. This requires significant oversight around confidentiality, data protection and obtaining client consent.



Aggregate analysis is conducted quarterly to understand demographic patterns, changes in rough sleeping trends over time and service access. Practical uses of the data found in CHAIN include (1) helping to inform the No Second Night Out Triage System, (2) individual case conferencing of entrenched rough sleepers, (3) Social Impact Bonds, and (4) borough strategies on ending rough sleepers.

Engaging People With Experience of Homelessness

Wilna De Beer | Tshwane Leadership Foundation | Tshwane, South Africa

Tshwane held its first Homeless Summit in 2015 to review the city's current policies on addressing street homelessness. The summit also sought to draft and propose a new strategy and investment plan to address homelessness in the community. The guiding principles for the policy they sought to develop were (1) the city as a home for all (2) affirming the human dignity of every person (3) bridging the gap of disparity (4) encouraging and practicing collective citizenship and (5) advancing social justice and holistic freedom.



A very deliberate component of this work was involving people with lived experience of homelessness in the planning process for ending homelessness in Tshwane. They referred to this approach as “trans-disciplinary,” as it brought together community practitioners, city officials and homeless individuals to work with academics to determine priorities for planning. Research methods included action research, ethnographic interviews, focus groups, documentary analysis, literature studies, geographical mapping, and open source technology. Ultimately, the Summit focused on five priority areas:

(1) diverse housing options (2) economic opportunity (3) psycho-social health infrastructure (4) awareness raising and public education and (5) institutional infrastructure.

The Tshwane Homeless Summit and its accompanying work sought to change the political climate around ending homelessness to a more compassionate, more generous and more just system.

Organizing a Country-Wide Census and Leveraging Its Findings

Isabel Lacalle | Nuestra Casa | Santiago, Chile

The initial fieldwork stage for the 2011 countrywide Chilean census took place over a period of 6 days and involved 131 communities in Chile (86% of the country's population). Almost 9,000 volunteers canvassed the streets and discovered 12,255 people experiencing homelessness in 2,129 different localities. Mapping locations for the street survey required a substantial effort that involved NGOs, law enforcement, government

agencies and academics.

The data gathered from the census allowed advocates and policymakers to put together concrete recommendations for policy, budgetary, and programmatic changes to better serve those living on the streets. A new census planned for later in 2016 will not only allow Chile to develop an updated profile of people experiencing homelessness but will also be helpful in tracking progress toward ending homelessness there.

Growing and Sustaining Volunteer Networks

Marta Olaria and Bob Walker | Arrels Foundation | Barcelona, Spain

A major component of volunteer recruitment involves using the media to publicize the need for volunteers and the events where volunteers will work. In Spain, The Arrels Foundation found that using media allows people who are potentially interested in volunteering to understand how to engage with Arrels and its work.

Additionally, a key element of any volunteer network is providing diverse opportunities for volunteers. This allows people to choose what type of role they would like to fill. By providing a choice, volunteers are able to participate in an area of the work where they feel most comfortable. The Arrels Foundation determined that this helps to ensure volunteers have a positive experience, which is one of the biggest predictors of a person returning to volunteer.

Challenges Addressed

During the meeting, organizers provided space to discuss concerns, obstacles and fears about developing and maintaining by-name lists and to problem-solve together.

Budget & Funding:

Developing a by-name list can be done in an environment of constrained resources. Communities have planned and implemented Registry Weeks for less than \$1,000 USD as a result of financial support and in-kind donations.

Ask for support and ask for it often. This support can range from small in-kind donations of survey materials such as pens and gift cards for survey participants to large financial support for security deposits on apartments. We also recommend thanking your sponsors publically. They should be recognized for joining this very moving work, and public recognition can drive other stakeholders to donate so as not to appear unsupportive.

There are sample budgets and requests for sponsorship within the Registry Week Tool Kit (please email abroffman@cmtysolutions.org if you are interested in the Tool Kit).

Data, Databases and Privacy:

By definition, a by-name list requires collecting personally identifying information. For many communities, this rightfully raises questions about why we need such information, where it will be stored and how we ensure it will be kept confidential.

Collecting personally identifying data helps ascertain someone's vulnerability and understand their unique experience so they can be matched with the appropriate housing and/or supports. It is impossible to conduct this type of follow up without a by-name registry of people experiencing homelessness in our communities.

Participating in the survey, and responding to any individual question within the VI-SPDAT, is entirely voluntary. A potential respondent must be made aware that not participating in the assessment will not preclude them from receiving services, and that they can choose to skip or refuse to answer any question.

In order to responsibly store and share information, communities will need to customize a confidentiality/consent form. It must provide details on (1) why this information is being collected (2) where it will be stored (3) who will have access and (4) its intended use. This confidentiality/consent form must be signed by *every* survey respondent before they can begin to answer questions. Without a signed confidentiality form, an assessment cannot be completed. Some communities have also built verbal consent into their forms, which requires the signature of a witness to the verbal consent of the survey respondent.



In order to provide accurate details about which organizations will have access to this data, communities will need to create a coalition of service and housing providers that are willing to commit resources towards housing people found. A full list of these organizations/service providers *must* appear on the aforementioned confidentiality/consent form. If there is any chance that an organization will ever have access to the data system or some of the data, they must be listed on this form.

Finally, this form needs to provide exact information on where a respondent's information will be stored. This should always be a password-protected data system, and no organization or individual should have access to this data system unless they are explicitly listed on the confidentiality/consent agreement signed by each survey respondent.

Bringing Stakeholders into the Process:

Municipalities and larger organizations with a culture of risk aversion might be hesitant to join your efforts. However, we frequently see these stakeholders come to the table once they see success. Lack of support and/or consensus should not stop you from beginning your efforts. Frankly, skeptical stakeholders often join these efforts out of fear of being left behind. It is also not uncommon for it to take months, perhaps years, for certain stakeholders to work with you; do not let this stop you.

You should determine which stakeholders you absolutely must have on your team in order to move your efforts forward and focus on bringing them to the table. Once you have the essential people working with you, it is more than acceptable, even encouraged, to advance your work without buy-in from all stakeholders.

Volunteer Recruitment & Management:

Community Solutions strongly recommends using volunteers to support your community's development of a by-name list. This recommendation often raises two primary concerns: (1) where to look for volunteers and (2) how to ensure their safety/comfort working with a population that they may never have interacted with before.

In regard to the first question, the faith community and university students are two large pools of potential volunteers. People who work within the sector are also often eager to participate. Additionally, advertising on social media and in regular media is a great way to generate volunteer support.

The second question can be addressed in several ways. First and foremost, all volunteers must receive a training on conducting a Registry Week or another model for developing a by-name list. The training should include information on homelessness in your community, tips for approaching someone who is sleeping on the street, and ample time for practice in asking the questions in the VI-SPDAT or other survey you may be using. Outreach workers or other frontline staff can be asked to contribute to portions of this training.

Volunteer training is a good opportunity to address why the survey is conducted in the early morning, between the hours of 4AM and 7AM. The reason for this is threefold: (1) at this time, there is little question as to whether someone is homeless if a volunteer sees



them sleeping on the street; (2) this is before businesses open and business owners begin moving people along; and (3) for an active substance user, this might be the most sober time of the day.

No volunteer should ever conduct an assessment alone. Every volunteer must be a part of a team of at least two and typically no more than five people, with a team leader who is an experienced outreach or other frontline staff who works in this capacity on a daily basis. They can act as a source of

information and comfort to volunteers who may have little experience interacting with people experiencing homelessness.

Assessment/VI-SPDAT:

Providing a few general clarifications about the VI-SPDAT and how/when it can be used/modified can answer many of the questions or concerns that communities might have. For further information on the VI-SPDAT and its potential use in your community, see **Appendix A**.

As a brief assessment that can be conducted by paid staff and volunteers, Community Solutions recommends the VI-SPDAT. That said, communities can conduct Registry Weeks using a different assessment. The only real requirement is that all providers within the community agree to use the *same* assessment.

The [VI-SPDAT](#) combines Community Solutions' Vulnerability Index (VI), which determines the chronicity and medical vulnerability of homeless individuals, and the Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT), an intake and case management tool developed by OrgCode Consulting. The VI-SPDAT creates profiles of an individual's barriers to housing rather than simply enumerating the size of a general population category into which they may fall (e.g., vulnerable, chronically homeless, etc.).

The VI-SPDAT works very well for people who are considered unsheltered/street homeless within the ETHOS framework, or subgroups 1A, 1B, and 1C within the IGH Framework. The assessment also works for people who are in shelters, hostels, and traditional housing. It is possible to add questions to the VI-SPDAT to evaluate people who are in other categories of homelessness, such as people facing eviction or living in inadequate housing.

It's most likely not practical to go door-to-door to see if there's overcrowding, but one way to potentially address that is to have places, centers, or public spaces where people could come to be assessed. It should be noted, however, the the VI-SPDAT was created for and tested on people experiencing homelessness and has not been specifically tested for use with populations at risk of homelessness.

Will the VI-SPDAT work in my context?

Although Community Solutions recommends the VI-SPDAT, the most important thing is using the same assessment across all agencies or groups that are working in your community. For an exact comparison to be made across different communities, core demographic data must be asked in the same way across the board. The VI-SPDAT questions are relevant regardless of culture, but questions can be added as necessary to suit cultural contexts. Just remember to keep the assessment as short as feasible.

The VI-SPDAT questions were developed by researchers, tested with people who worked in homelessness, asked to people who were or who had experienced homelessness, and then refined. That process went on for several rounds. You may want to repeat a similar process for your community.

Insufficient Resources to meet the Demonstrated Need:

Communication while conducting the survey is incredibly important. Be clear that the survey may not lead to immediate housing, but that its purpose is to help you better understand what you need to do in the future.

No community has been able house 100% of the people found during the Registry Week right away. Registry Weeks can provide data on what it would take to end homelessness in a given community. For example, in Canada, Registry Weeks allowed service providers to go to their government with concrete data supporting a need for additional resources toward youth and aboriginal homelessness.



Another benefit of the Registry Week is discovering untapped resources, both fiscal and personal. Once all providers and stakeholders get together, communities often find or are offered additional resources that will help move people into housing. For example, two communities in Canada had the Department of Health step in and provide housing when they saw how many homeless people in their communities had a mental illness.

With enough data, you can make an economic case for providing housing. Not only is providing permanent housing the humane thing to do, it's generally also the most cost-effective thing to do. For example, in the U.S., among people experiencing chronic homelessness, it saves on average \$13,000 each year to provide them permanent housing even after the housing and support services are paid for.

Many communities have convinced elected officials for whom homelessness is not a policy priority to support this effort by framing it as a cost-cutting method.

On a personal level, when people who have never worked in or experienced homelessness participate in a Registry Week, it forever changes how they view homelessness. Community Solutions has seen the lasting benefits when media, the faith community, business owners and others groups volunteer.

Challenges Related to By-Name lists Vs. Macro-Counts:

A Registry Week (or other method for developing a by-name list) can also serve as a macro-count. Communities in the U.S. and Canada have conducted Registry Weeks that also provide a Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, one of the best known forms of macro-level counts in homelessness. This technique reduces the burden of planning and conducting two separate style counts. It also connects people experiencing homelessness with the

appropriate housing and resources while creating a picture of homelessness in your community.

The Importance of Maintaining By-Name Lists

Community Solutions stresses the importance of not just doing a Registry Week, but also putting in place a process for continually updating the by-name list. This includes moving people off the list once they have accessed permanent housing or otherwise no longer require services and adding individuals on the list as they enter homelessness.

Maintaining a real-time by-name list is a critical step in understanding what it will take to end homelessness in each community. Please email abroffman@cmtysolutions.org if you are interested in more information about developing and maintaining real-time by-name lists.

Follow Up with Communities

Since the Brno Challenge Convening, Community Solutions has supported IGH and BSHF as they help cities plan for developing and maintaining by-name lists. The following section will provide updates to the above commitments from cities that we have worked with in the time that has elapsed.

Madrid/Valencia: completed translating the VI-SPDAT into Spanish. They have decided to conduct their Registry Week to April 19-22, 2016.

South Africa: finished customizing the VI-SPDAT for their community. They are seeking to conduct a pilot Registry Week process with the VI-SPDAT in a shelter in Spring 2016.

Chile: also in the process of translating the VI-SPDAT. Chile will conduct a pilot Registry Week in Spring 2016. In addition to translating the VI-SPDAT, they are in the process of generating and submitting any additional questions they would like to ask during this pilot.

Barcelona: is also finalizing the translation of the VI-SPDAT into Spanish. They are committed to conducting a micro-level count the week of May 30, 2016.

Conclusion

In order to end homelessness, it is necessary to understand exactly who is experiencing it and to gather actionable data to move them toward permanent housing. Through the Brno Challenge Convening, six cities learned from one another how to do this across varied contexts with limited resources. Though this is the first step in a longer journey, we are energized by what we saw in the room: adaptable leadership, open knowledge exchange, and partnership toward shared goals. We look forward to seeing the work each of these cities takes forward in the next year as they move closer to ending

homelessness.

Appendix A - Q&A on the VI-SPDAT

What does the VI-SPDAT do?

The VI-SPDAT is a screening/triage tool and is not meant to be an in-depth assessment or the only source of data used in making decisions. After the Registry Week, communities can conduct more in-depth assessments of individuals and families. As an example, some communities in the U.S. and Canada do the full SPDAT (and in-depth assessment that can be conducted only by a clinician trained on its use) for individuals who score 5 or higher on the VI-SPDAT. Other data points (medical and mental health records, length of time homeless, clinical assessments, etc.) should also be used in determining the most appropriate intervention for each individual or family experiencing homelessness.

The VI-SPDAT is designed to help communities calibrate their response based on the individual, not merely the general population category into which they may fall (e.g., vulnerable, chronically homeless, etc.). Our systems must know homeless individuals personally to identify the best ways to help them escape homelessness. In the U.S. and Canada, the VI-SPDAT helps identify the best type of support and housing intervention for an individual by relying on three categories of recommendation:

- **Permanent Supportive Housing**: Individuals or families who need permanent housing with ongoing access to services and case management to remain stably housed.
- **Rapid Re-Housing**: Individuals or families with moderate health, mental health and/or behavioral health issues, but who are likely to be able to achieve housing stability over a short time period through a medium or short-term rent subsidy and access to support services.
- **Affordable Housing and other Mainstream Resources**: Individuals or families who do not require intensive supports but may still benefit from access to affordable housing. In these cases, the tool recommends affordable or subsidized housing but no specific intervention drawn uniquely from the homeless services world.

The VI-SPDAT helps identify who should be recommended for each housing and support intervention, moving the discussion from simply who is eligible for a service intervention to who is eligible and in greatest need of that intervention.

Can we make changes to the VI-SPDAT?

Generally, the scored questions on the VI-SPDAT cannot be changed or removed from the assessment. If your community would like to request a change to the VI-SPDAT, please contact Paul Howard at Phoward@cmtysolutions.org to discuss whether this proposed change can be accommodated.

The creators of the VI-SPDAT purposely did not include a comprehensive section on demographics (race, ethnicity, nationality, etc.), but communities should feel free to add these questions as needed.

Other questions can be added to the VI-SPDAT as needed to help communities customize the VI-SPDAT to their unique context, but the number of additional questions should be kept to a minimum to ensure that the VI-SPDAT does not take more than 15-20 minutes to complete or that would require a surveyor to have clinical or other expertise. When considering adding a question, communities should determine whether the question is absolutely essential as part of the initial screening triage/screening or would be more appropriate as part of a more in-depth assessment (that could be conducted once the individual or family has been assigned a caseworker/navigator).

How can you adapt the VI-SPDAT for specific subpopulations of people experiencing homelessness?

If specific sub-populations are important (e.g. Veterans, Immigrants, Youth Aging-Out of Foster Care, etc.), communities can add questions to determine if people surveyed are members of one or more of these sub-populations. As an example, U.S. communities included questions related to subpopulations such as veterans, youth, seniors, people living with HIV/AIDS, LGBT, and undocumented people. In Canada, communities also included native/aboriginal peoples. Questions can be added to the VI-SPDAT so that you can collect data on the sub-populations that make sense in your community.

Adding questions for sub-populations allows you to see not only how many of each subgroup you have but how many of those have a mental illness, how many have substance abuse issues, how many are veterans, etc. Any time you add a segment/sub-population, you will have data and statistics just for that subpopulation.

There is also a version of the VI-SPDAT that is tailored for youth in order to account for their typically lower scores.

How accurate is the VI-SPDAT?

There have been some studies in the U.S. about whether self-reported answers were true or accurate. There were some discrepancies, both in underreporting (a client had a condition/characteristic that was not reported), and, in limited cases, over-reporting (a client not actually having a condition/characteristic that they claimed to have). That's why it's so important that the VI-SPDAT is not the only source of data used.

The purpose of a Registry Week is to cultivate a list so you can begin to prioritize. It's meant to be a conversation starter and not the be-all, end-all of data. It's important to hear the client's' perspective, as sometimes clients report a disability or traumatic experience a social worker didn't know about. A more accurate picture emerges when data from other sources (doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, caseworkers, police) are added, but the VI-SPDAT is a efficient way to both find out some information about the client and engage her/him into services.