Utilizing Bridge Building to Support Street Engagement

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for City of Los Angeles Council District 10

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Executive Summary

The following report details the results of a discovery process designed and implemented by Bridges Intergroup Relations Consulting at the request of Los Angeles Council District 10. This comprehensive discovery process explored the ways we might enhance and support the homeless street engagement process and reduce conflict by utilizing “bridge building” techniques. “Bridge building” work increases our individual and collective capacity to resolve conflict, work across differences, and lead empathically and effectively, and includes interventions such as facilitation, mediation, and deliberative dialogue. In January and February 2022, Bridges held a series of 11 listening sessions with 104 participants that are deeply involved with the street engagement process (including people with lived experience of homelessness, City and County leaders, field staff, advocates/activists, faith leaders, service providers, and neighbors) in order to understand the greatest needs related to bridge building. We designed an intentional agenda to ensure participants could share their experiences fully and honestly.

These participants shared a range of major challenges and successes related to the homelessness crisis, the street engagement process, and connecting people with housing resources. We first list those themes that highlight relational and communication challenges and successes, because these are the topics bridge building interventions are uniquely situated to address. They include the jurisdictional challenges that arise from a sprawling and divided governance structure, the challenge of fostering effective communication and coordination among the many entities involved in street engagement, and the damaged relationships and broken trust between those entities. They also described some successful examples of coordination and communication, and the need to provide a human-centered approach to any homelessness strategy.

Beyond these relational challenges, participants also emphasized the complexity and systemic nature of homelessness, and the need to address it through holistic policy interventions. They described the systemic roots and nature of the crisis, including the lingering impacts of systemic racism, the multi-layered trauma caused by the crisis, and the numerous intersecting laws and policies that impact stakeholders’ ability to intervene. They also described the pressing need for accessible and human-centered resources (namely, housing and services).

We conclude the report with a set of three major recommendations for utilizing bridge building strategies to improve the street engagement process. These include 1) fostering a culture shift among leaders by building relationships, trust, and opportunities to troubleshoot, 2) building the City’s capacity and “muscle” for bridge building, and 3) creating a hub for centralized coordination, problem solving, and conflict resolution. The “Recommendations” section details some specific ways to implement these strategies. While we do not presume that these interventions would “solve” the systemic challenges underlying the homelessness crisis, they would ameliorate some of the negative impacts of the “relational” themes listed below, and support the City of Los Angeles to support its unhoused residents more responsively, efficiently, and humanely.

We would like to give our thanks to each person who shared their time, experience, and ideas with us during the listening sessions. We would especially like to acknowledge and thank Dhakshike Wickrema of Council District 10 for her partnership in shepherding this process.
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Introduction

Context
Throughout 2021, the City of Los Angeles took a series of policy steps related to street engagement (the process of on-the-ground engagement with unhoused individuals to connect them with services and housing). These actions included the approval of a citywide street engagement strategy in September 2021, and a movement toward the creation of a “Right to Housing” framework for the City of Los Angeles that incorporates an integrated “street strategy.” These developments took place in the midst of numerous other policy developments around homelessness in the region, including the passage of Section 41.18, the establishment of an LA County Blue Ribbon Commission to study the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority’s governance structure, litigation against the City and County by the LA Alliance, and the implementation of a settlement in response to a court order by Judge David Carter (to shelter people living adjacent to highways).

In April 2021, Council District 10 approached Shaphan Roberts, Director of the City Attorney’s Dispute Resolution Program, and Maia Ferdman, founder of Bridges Intergroup Relations Consulting, in the aftermath of the conflict over the clearance of an encampment in Echo Park.1 As seasoned mediators and facilitators, Maia and Shaphan are uniquely positioned to advise on ways to avoid and address conflict and to build bridges across intense divides. At the request of Council Member Mark Ridley-Thomas, they began brainstorming ways that “bridge building” strategies might support street engagement in the future.2 In August 2021 they held a pilot dialogue with stakeholders (neighbors, advocates, staff, and service providers) involved in an encampment located at the 6th St. and Berendo intersection in Koreatown, with the goal of directly addressing conflict that had arisen among them. While that conversation allowed stakeholders to share their frustrations openly with each other, it became clear that this kind of one-time conversation was not enough to address some of the underlying rifts in trust and communication that these stakeholders were experiencing.

As a result, Maia and Shaphan embarked on a comprehensive discovery process to explore the ways we might enhance and support street engagement and reduce conflict by utilizing “bridge building” techniques - approaches that include mediation, facilitation, and intergroup communication. The following report is a result of “Phase 1” of this project. This report was compiled by Maia, Shaphan, and Dr. Daniel Wehrenfennig, expert in conflict resolution and founder of the Center for International Experiential Learning.

What is Bridge Building?
“Bridge building” work increases our individual and collective capacity to resolve conflict, work across differences, and lead empathically and effectively. This capacity is

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central to a healthy city and civil society. “Bridge builders” have training and expertise in conflict resolution, communication across differences, facilitation, and models of deliberative and collective decision-making.

By transforming seemingly intractable conflict into opportunities for empathy, inclusion, consensus, and shared governance, bridge builders not only address the challenges of polarization, division, and hatred, but build healthier, effective, and more resilient people and communities. Effective bridge building has been shown to improve problem-solving, to increase creativity and productivity, and to elevate a sense of “belonging,” which is key to a functioning community and society.³

Bridge building programs take on a range of formats. For example, the City Attorney's Dispute Resolution Program provides mediation between individuals who are in conflict, and between police officers and community members. Numerous non-profit organizations and initiatives (e.g., Days of Dialogue) provide opportunities for facilitated conversation across differences on issues of concern and/or between members of different identity groups. Bridge building practices and skill sets can also be integrated in an array of contexts – for example, Maia provides “intergroup relations” training about how to improve communication across cultures and across strong ideological differences.

**Using Bridge Building to Address Homelessness**

Bridge building strategies and skill sets are fundamental to multiple levels of the engagement with and housing of people experiencing homelessness. In its published advisory “Core elements of effective street outreach to people experiencing homelessness,” the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) strongly emphasizes the centrality of coordination and effective collaboration between stakeholders.⁴ The advisory paper also highlights the importance of using problem solving techniques as a way of engaging with people experiencing homelessness: “The most critical element of problem-solving is a client-centered, housing-focused, and exploratory conversation that should happen with everyone regardless of perceived needs and barriers,”⁵ it reads. In other words, it names the need for a dialogue in which active listening is practiced to create a space for empathy, inclusion and consensus with the people experiencing homelessness.

Similarly, the National Alliance to End Homelessness has identified bridge building as a major part of their progressive engagement strategy. They also recommend that providers start any engagement with people experiencing homelessness through a “problem solving conversation” and maintain this posture throughout the engagement to continuously build bridges and deepen trust and relations between the providers and the unhoused population.⁶ In other words, it encourages a move away from a “one size fits all” strategy, toward an integrative and adaptive approach that utilizes practices and skills in the spirit of bridge-building.

³ This definition of bridge building was drafted by the Los Angeles Bridge Builders Collective, a small group of bridge building leaders who are exploring ways to elevate and support the professional field of bridge building in the region. Maia convenes this group and both Shaphan and Daniel are members.
⁶ [https://endhomelessness.org/blog/what-is-progressive-engagement/](https://endhomelessness.org/blog/what-is-progressive-engagement/)
This emphasis on collaboration and effective communication is present in the Los Angeles context as well. A group of USC researchers at the Homelessness Policy Research Institute focused on outreach practices in their 2019 study, “Homeless Outreach: The Los Angeles County Context.” In it, they again highlight the centrality of coordination and collaboration between those engaged in outreach efforts, and in building trust with the unhoused population.\(^7\)

While any homelessness policy or program should be tailored to the nuances and particularities of a given regional context, it can be useful to see where bridge building discourse appears in other contexts. Other U.S. cities like Columbus (Ohio)\(^8\) and Salt Lake City (Utah)\(^9\) and global cities like Vienna (Austria) and Helsinki (Finland)\(^10\) have emphasized deep and ongoing communication and coordination among agencies and providers, and have also utilized bridge building techniques in both the direct dialogue with the unhoused population and in the education of the general population.

In one distinct example of unique bridge building, the Shade Tours in Vienna features unhoused guides who show participants the city using a socio-political lens, giving an insight into one of three categories: poverty and homelessness, refugee and integration, or drugs and addiction. These tours educate the public about the challenges the unhoused individuals face, foster more understanding and empathy,\(^11\) and provide guides with an income. Over ten countries in Europe also have an established public body that is tasked with settling disputes between landlords and tenants through mediation (though they do not necessarily extend this service to the homeless population).

These examples demonstrate the utility of bridge building models in other contexts – however, there is not an intentional and sweeping “bridge building” intervention in a context that is comparable to Los Angeles’ scope and scale. Further, any interventions would need to be mindful of and responsive to the unique history, governance structure, geography, and capacity of this region.

**Our Approach**

In order to design any effective “bridge building” intervention, it was vital to first understand the experiences, perspectives, and priorities of the stakeholders involved in the street engagement process. We therefore decided to create a series of facilitated listening sessions with a range of stakeholders to get a sense of the major concerns and conflicts that stakeholders are facing.

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\(^8\) [https://caufsociety.com/cities-solving-homelessness/](https://caufsociety.com/cities-solving-homelessness/)

\(^9\) [https://ofshsoupkitchen.org/best-cities-to-be-homeless](https://ofshsoupkitchen.org/best-cities-to-be-homeless)

\(^10\) Vienna is one of the most celebrated examples of successful responding to the homelessness crisis with its innovative ways of community building and city planning plus social programs that highlights bridge building principles ([https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_featd_article_011314.html](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_featd_article_011314.html)) and corresponding systems and policies in Europe ([https://borgenproject.org/homelessness-in-austria/](https://borgenproject.org/homelessness-in-austria/))


\(^11\) [https://austrianadaptation.com/blog/homeless-tour-of-vienna](https://austrianadaptation.com/blog/homeless-tour-of-vienna)
In January and February 2022 we held 11 listening sessions with 104 participants who belong to eight major stakeholder groups that are deeply involved with the street engagement process in some way, whether professionally or personally. Participants were intentionally recruited to reflect a range of opinions, geographic focuses (with an emphasis on Council District 10), and types of involvement. It is also worth noting that these groups are overlapping – some people who work in nonprofit agencies, for example, have personally experienced homelessness (likewise, many of those in the “lived experience” stakeholder group currently work in government or nonprofit, are neighbors themselves, etc.).

We worked closely with Dhakshike Wickrema, CD10 Senior Housing and Homelessness Deputy, at every stage of the outreach process. The chart below shares more details about the participants we included in the listening sessions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Organizations touched/represented (Note: more organizations were invited, though could not attend)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People with lived experience of homelessness</td>
<td>People who have experienced living in the street and being housed through street engagement processes</td>
<td>LAHSA Lived Experience Advisory Board, Residents United Network, Homeless Youth Forum LA, Department of Mental Health, In Between the Buildings, LaFayette Bridge Home Advisory Council, Skid Row</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith Leaders</td>
<td>Faith leaders from different traditions who have personal involvement or familiarity with homelessness. Some provide services to surrounding communities, some actively organize around policy issues, and some have homeless encampments outside their houses of worship.</td>
<td>Wilshire Boulevard Temple/ Karsh Center, St. James Episcopal Church, LA Voice, BASIC, McCarty Memorial Christian Church, 1st New Christian Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Field Staff</td>
<td>While we could not include staff from every council office, we made an effort to engage field staff from a diversity of council districts.</td>
<td>CDs 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, Mayor’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Providers</td>
<td>Leaders and staff members from nonprofit agencies and organizations who are heavily involved in street engagement across the region. They are active in engaging with clients and connecting them with rental assistance, services, and housing.</td>
<td>LA Family Housing, St Joseph Center, HOPICS, PATH, Exodus Recovery, Homeless Healthcare LA, The People Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government (on the ground outreach)</td>
<td>Key City and County individuals who deliver services to and interact with both people experiencing homelessness and their neighbors.</td>
<td>LA Police Department, LA Fire Department, LA County Department of Health Services, LA County Department of Mental Health, and the LA Homeless Services Authority</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shaphan and Maia facilitated all 11 listening sessions, and Dhakshike participated as an observer. We made a concerted effort to create a comfortable environment where participants could speak openly and honestly – in other words, to practice and model a “bridge building” approach within the experience of our listening sessions. The agenda for all sessions was as follows:

1) Framing & Guiding Question:
   a. Where, how, and when can bridge building tools and techniques be useful and additive to the street engagement process?

2) Group Agreements:
   a. Speak your truth
   b. Confidentiality
   c. Disagree with respect

3) Introductions:
   a. What is your stake in the issue of homelessness/why is this issue important to you?

4) Questions:
   a. When you think about street engagement, and the many stakeholders involved in this process, what are some of the major challenges you face and/or foresee? Can you give us specific examples from your experience? (Thinking about communication/bridge building as the technique/intervention we can offer)
      i. Why do you think those challenges exist? What are their root causes/what is happening that is creating these dynamics?

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<tr>
<td><strong>Government (policy level)</strong></td>
<td>Leaders from City offices who develop, research, and analyze policies related to street engagement</td>
<td>Mayor's Office, City Attorney's Office, LA Housing Department, Chief Legislative Analyst, Chief Administrative Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocates/Organizers</strong></td>
<td>Large and small organizations and grassroots leaders and activists who advocate for policies related to homelessness and in some cases provide services for people experiencing or on the brink of homelessness</td>
<td>LA Voice, KTown for All, Sanctuary of Hope, SPA 6 Homeless Coalition, Shower of Hope, CD15 Homeless Coalition, Change Reaction, Heart Forward LA, United Way, Inner City Law Center, SCANPH, Watts Labor Community Action Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Neighbors and business owners</strong></td>
<td>People (primarily based in Council District 10) who live near and around homeless encampments or have businesses that have been impacted by encampments, as well as active neighborhood council representatives and local volunteers</td>
<td>Koreatown Youth + Community Center (KYCC), Venice Boardwalk Action Committee, SORO Neighborhood Council, Hollywood 4WRD, Heart of LA, various neighborhood residents and neighborhood council members</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ii. How might you see these challenges being resolved? Can they be resolved? What is needed? (resources, capacity, communication, leadership, policy, etc.)

b. What works well in the current street engagement process? Success stories?
   i. What made these examples successful? What are the core resources, capacities, etc. that were at play?

5) Closing
   a. Take a moment to dream about an ideal LA 10 years from now - what makes it a dream scenario? What are the elements (communication, dynamic, service, resource, etc.) that exist that do not exist today?

Notetakers were present at each conversation to capture participant comments. The “findings” section below captures the major themes and sub-themes that arose during the sessions. We then offer a few bridge building opportunities that we see in light of these themes.

We would like to thank Council District 10 for creating the space for these important conversations and this thoughtful approach. We would also like to thank everyone who participated in these listening sessions and shared deeply personal and often painful stories, experiences, and opinions.

Findings

The below themes reflect the major challenges and successes detailed by the participants in our listening sessions. Each theme reflects the comments of multiple stakeholder groups and listening sessions. Our open-ended questions and process gleaned a range of themes that touch on Los Angeles history, governance, policy, and more. Many of these themes corroborate and support existing research and commentary on homelessness in Los Angeles (e.g., the lingering impacts of a long history of homelessness, the challenging City-County governance structure of Los Angeles, the results of structural racial discrimination on homelessness, etc.).

We first list those themes that highlight relational and communication challenges and successes, because these are the topics bridge building interventions are uniquely situated to address. However, it is worth noting at the outset that many participants discussed how homelessness is an immensely complex and systemic challenge, and that street engagement is one piece of a sprawling ecosystem addressing that challenge. These themes are listed in Appendix A. We understand bridge building not as a fix-all for these structural challenges, but as one approach among many to ameliorate some of their adverse effects.

It is also worth noting that, despite their many differences, participants almost uniformly expressed immense personal passion and investment in addressing homelessness as one of the most pressing humanitarian challenges of our time. The issue

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is highly personal: 70% of 40 respondents to a pre-survey said that they or someone they know and care about has experienced homelessness. Frustration, emotion, and overwhelm was ubiquitous across the listening sessions. That said, all but three respondents said that they do “believe the homelessness situation can be changed significantly,” but almost all had different responses for how that should happen. Indeed, there were some differences between and amongst stakeholder groups, including where they believed the most urgent actions are needed, or who or what they thought was to blame for the status quo. Despite these differences, the themes listed below became prominent and repetitive across stakeholder groups and listening sessions. We include a list of survey responses related to communication and coordination in Appendix B.

Challenges related to bridge building

1. Jurisdictional Challenges

“This is no longer a regional problem with regional solutions.”

Almost all participants expressed frustration with the challenges that arise from the governing structure of Los Angeles that divides the City and County, and the different and sometimes divergent plans and approaches among the numerous City Council Districts.

1.1. Participants said that there is a lack of accountability for the state of homelessness in Los Angeles.

“There is a sense of fear about being held accountable for everything to do with homelessness. That creates a sense of defensiveness and puts us all on the edge.”

“I'm frustrated that this isn't viewed as a national crisis. It's not just a local crisis.”

- Some participants expressed frustration that state and federal officials do not intervene in a more concerted and decisive way.
- Many participants cited the difficult City-County rift in Los Angeles, and that it leads to a lack of accountability across both parties. They also noted that this divide causes the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) to “serve multiple masters.”
- Many participants also said that City Council Districts often approach homelessness hyper-locally, and do not take responsibility for encampments just outside their district borders.
- As a result of this jurisdictional divide and lack of accountability, participants shared that people fall through the cracks in the street engagement process.
  - For example, one participant shared about a 70 year old unhoused woman who lived for many years in one Council District. However, when she sought a shelter bed, the office required her to provide proof of her residence in the district (per a policy they instituted to stem the flow of people they believed were being sent to
them from other neighboring districts and cities). She could not provide this proof, and as a result was not placed in a shelter bed.

1.2. **Participants shared that leaders have divergent goals, motivations, and priorities when it comes to addressing homelessness.**

“For some leaders, the goal is reduced visibility (of homelessness) rather than adjusting the reality (of homelessness).”

“City Council tells us to deal with specific encampments or people because they have a higher profile or receive more (public) attention. But (outreach staff) sees other areas or people who are more in need of resources and support.”

“Multiple service providers with conflicting missions and messages creates distrust and lost time.”

- Participants from across the stakeholder groups cited the divergent – and what they described as potentially questionable – motivations and goals behind leaders' decisions.
- Many shared a perception that decisions and policies around homelessness are often reactive (rather than proactive and thoughtful), crisis-driven (e.g., after an encampment has already ballooned), and politically motivated (e.g., in reaction to constituent calls).
- As a result of this focus on politics, various participants shared that leaders are often less inclined to focus on proven long-term solutions (over short-term “clearances” of encampments).

1.3. **Participants cited a lack of alignment and lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities in the implementation of street engagement strategies.**

“Near Sunset and Vine, (a person experiencing homelessness) might be touched by eight different teams.”

“(Council) District policies vary and can be confusing to those that need help.”

“We want the police to do everything and at the same time we don’t want them to be involved with anything.”

“Everyone wants homelessness gone, but their means on how to get there is very different.”

- Participants shared that despite the existence of some best practices and policies around street engagement, different stakeholders are unaligned in its implementation.
- For example, they shared that different Council offices have “15 different approaches” for addressing street engagement, approaching encampments, defining urgency, and allocating resources. These differences also exist across County district lines and Service Planning Areas.
They also cited a lack of clarity about which players are ultimately responsible for different outcomes (for example, who is ultimately responsible for tracking and reporting individual progress, what is the role of law enforcement, etc.).

Participants described how this lack of uniformity can lead to duplication (e.g., approaching the same encampments and individuals more than once), and service providers “stepping on each other’s toes.”

Some participants shared that new “nontraditional” entities (such as new nonprofits or independent volunteers) increasingly want to help, but because of a lack of alignment with existing efforts, they sometimes end up burdening rather than integrating into the existing system.

2. Communication and Coordination Challenges

“There is so much room for improving the coordination of outreach and engagement work.”

Participants consistently named that there is not enough robust coordination and collaboration between people working in street engagement, and that there is a need for increased communication and information sharing across the board.

2.1. Participants cited a lack of robust coordination between organizations and people working on housing and homelessness.

“There are a lot of obstacles that prevent us from working together effectively”

“I’ve found little progress is possible when any one department is working in a silo away from others, but when voices can come together in an effort to achieve tangible goals, success is possible!”

It is difficult to “translate goodwill toward good action.”

- In the same vein as theme 1.3, participants cited that there is a lack of overarching coordination (between organizations, teams, and individuals) in the implementation of street engagement strategies and the communication about homelessness issues.
- For example, participants cited that stakeholders operating in a particular geographic area or with a given encampment do not necessarily coordinate their outreach, leading to duplication of efforts and lost opportunities for resource sharing.
- Participants also cited how decisions made “in silos” by other stakeholders have impacted them negatively. In one example, a nonprofit service provider participant shared how a partner agency raised their salaries without coordinating with or telling them – the nonprofit provider lost staff to that agency as a result.
- Participants shared there are an array of volunteers who “want to help our homeless neighbors,” many of whom have different resources or areas of expertise to deploy. However, there is no centralized way to leverage that support or coordinate to send it where it is most needed.
2.2. Participants cited that there is a gap in information about homelessness: that it is both difficult to access important information, and that there is common misunderstanding of the information that does exist.

“Specific policy decisions are made, and then people on the ground are not told about it or given directions on how to implement these policies.”

“People don’t understand the law, even when they voted for it.”

“Providers have to often do extra work (which is not part of their job) and check in with local businesses and churches to make sure that people see the successes of getting people off the street, or to address their other concerns. This is additional PR work that takes up a lot of extra time, but is necessary.”

● First, some people with lived experience of homelessness shared that it was not always clear how to get services. In one case, a participant shared that she did not realize that she met the definition for homelessness, and in turn how to access support.

● Participants said there is a lack of information sharing between those working in street engagement.
  ○ They described how in some cases, elected officials and other leaders may not always know or have access to details about encampments in their districts (sometimes due to privacy concerns and sometimes due to lack of communication). Likewise, outreach workers do not always have details about the implementation of new policies.
  ○ Some service providers themselves shared that they sometimes do not know where existing housing options are, what resources are available to them, or who else is working on a given encampment.

● Many participants shared that there is also a lack of information for those who are interested in helping the street engagement or housing process, but are not already integrated into existing organizations or systems.
  ○ For example, several neighbors and advocates said they had personal connections with unhoused neighbors who they wanted to help, but cited difficulties understanding where to go to access information about how to connect them with housing.
  ○ In another example, a faith leader shared that an unhoused individual had a mental health episode outside his house of worship, and he did not know what to do or who to call aside from the police (which he did not want to do).
  ○ Sometimes, participants said information sharing is not possible because of HIPAA concerns (see theme 4.2).

● Finally, participants shared that there is widespread misunderstanding from the public about how the street engagement and housing process works (and about the state of homelessness efforts in general).


○ For example, participants shared that there is misunderstanding from the general public (and in some cases from other stakeholders) about how long the process takes to place people in housing (despite news stories that elevate their sense of urgency), the status of Measure H and Proposition HHH, and existing policy challenges and limitations – this misunderstanding leads to widespread frustration and public pressure.

○ There is also public misperception about – and frustration with – the role of the Los Angeles Police Department and Fire Departments, particularly as it pertains to individuals with mental health needs. One officer expressed frustration that he is often in a no-win situation: he gets called to homeless encampments by community members who have concerns with drugs or mental health issues, is legally limited in his ability to engage with individuals with mental health needs (see Theme 7.2), but then gets backlash and resistance from community members who see him speaking with unhoused individuals.

3. Relational and Trust-Building Challenges

Participants expressed a desire for improved relationships between all stakeholders involved in or affected by street engagement, and a need to rebuild trust and human-centered relationships.

3.1. Participants expressed that there is a lack of empathy, humanity, and urgency in the current approach to homelessness.

“(Homelessness) is not dignified or ethical.”

“Resources are being allocated to the needs of the politics, not the needs of the humans.”

● Participants repeatedly stated that the homelessness crisis is inhumane and urgent – and should be met with a deeply empathetic and human-centered approach.
● Some participants, including people with lived experience of homelessness, expressed the urgent need to tell individual stories of homelessness and its difficulties and nuances, in order to increase public understanding of and empathy for this experience.
● Some people with lived experience of homelessness shared that they felt a lack of understanding and empathy from the system itself. A few participants shared that they were repeatedly judged by their clothing, stating that they were told they didn’t “look homeless” when seeking services.
● Some local residents shared that they no longer feel safe walking around their neighborhoods due to growing encampments, and after having experienced significant violence (one participant shared that her husband was almost killed by someone living in a neighboring encampment). They shared that they are often met with ridicule or criticism rather than empathy by other neighbors when sharing this experience.
3.2. Participants shared numerous examples of broken trust with people experiencing homelessness, which is particularly difficult to rebuild.

“I was offered hope so many times, and just got disappointed.”

“A lot of clients don’t trust the City anymore because (they keep) changing case managers and social workers and restarting from the beginning.”

“When you have a failed hospitalization, you make the situation for an already traumatized client even worse. The system has failed them so many times, and when it happens again it makes it so much harder.”

“Clients sometimes feel that their story has not been told the right way by advocacy groups and that they are being used.”

● Across stakeholder groups, participants spoke about dashed hopes and broken trust among people experiencing homelessness, which happens as a result of a lack of follow through – or an inability to follow through – on promises of help, support, and housing.
● Participants shared that it is particularly difficult to build relationships and trust with people in the street engagement process when they do not already have an adequate housing resource readily available. One participant stated that if he has an adequate housing resource readily available, street engagement and trust-building is rarely needed at all (see Theme 6.1).
● Participants also shared the difficulties of building relationships when people move around – on the one hand, outreach worker teams experience high staff turnover. On the other hand, people living on the street may move around often, making it hard to stay in touch with them.
● It is also difficult to maintain people’s trust in a system that has repeatedly failed or harmed them – participants named the criminal justice system, the mental health system, and the foster care system as some examples.

3.3. Participants described pervasive distrust between leaders and stakeholders working in the homelessness system, as well as public distrust of the homelessness system.

“You do all this good work, but advocates still talk s*** about you.”

“Even after we do great work with an encampment, the community does not seem to appreciate it.”

“People (neighbors, etc.) don’t trust the social workers.”

“If the public trusted that there was leadership (on this issue), there may be more patience from the public.”
“LAHSA is reactive and not proactive. They are looking at most issues from the lens of being blamed.”

“There’s a lot of District infighting. City Council Districts aren’t working together.”

“Council offices are saying F.U. to LAHSA and F.U. to the County.”

“Whenever the police show up, the conflict is amped up.”

• As the above quotes illustrate, there is pervasive mistrust and finger-pointing across all levels and parties involved in homelessness and street engagement. This mistrust includes – though is not limited to – conflict between LAHSA and government leaders, between service providers and activists, between council districts, and between City and County leaders. The causes of this mistrust range widely, and include jurisdictional and communication/coordination challenges listed above.

• There was also common acknowledgement among participants that the general public in Los Angeles has lost trust in the leadership and organizations who are tasked with addressing homelessness.

Bridge Building Successes

Despite the array of challenges noted above, participants also had plenty of examples of positive trends and success stories related to bridge building. Bridge building interventions should try to emulate and expand upon these examples of success.

4. Coordination and communication successes

“The tighter the collaboration the better.”

Participants described examples of successful coordination between multiple stakeholders, as well as the elements or “ingredients” that make coordination successful.

4.1. Participants shared that successful collaboration includes the delineation of clear roles and responsibilities, as well as constant and ongoing communication between parties.

“We need to have a planned and focused effort when clearing an encampment.”

“There should be the same training and same tracking systems across all entities and people involved.”

“In our district alone, we successfully created a network of comprehensive shelter, long term housing, and services to solve 40% of street homelessness (according to the 2020 count). We did
Participants shared that an important first step in building a successful collaboration involves the articulation of a shared goal, identifying clear and time-bound outcomes, roles for all players involved, and geographic specificity.

- One participant from a government session shared an example of this kind of efficient and clearly delineated coordination taking place in response to a wildfire emergency. He described: “This worked because the City had already created a system of how to respond to an emergency and there was a clear delineation of responsibilities, and everyone played their role without questions. Also, the County made resources available during this emergency time and all the barriers melted away.”

- Participants described that when everyone involved with a given encampment is in regular communication (such as weekly meetings), it can lead to more efficiency and more humane results. For example, they shared that when service providers can anticipate a cleanup by Sanitation, they can help people to move their belongings in advance. They described how active involvement by a given City Council office is very helpful (for example, service providers share a need with a field staff member, and they in turn help identify that resource).

- One park was cited as a successful example in which, despite heavy gang activity, close coordination between a LAHSA team, encampment leadership, and City Council staff led to successful housing without any police activity.

- There was an emphasis that coordination and collaboration should be prioritized at all levels, including outreach workers, policymakers and resource allocators, crisis responders, elected leaders, and advocates. Some participants from the government group suggested incorporating clearer roles and responsibilities into contracting processes and MOUs.

- Participants discussed the need to delineate and limit areas of responsibility (and accountability) to avoid duplication and burnout. For example, one participant suggested that a given outreach team should be responsible for a 3 square mile geographic area. Another suggested that an outreach worker should be limited to communication with 10 clients at a time.

- Participants also acknowledged that there are many “phenomenal outreach coordinators” at service agencies who communicate, work together, hold meetings, and make sure all teams are involved.

4.2. Participants stated the importance of alignment and strong relationships between leaders.

“Leadership that believes in collaboration and leaves their egos at the door (is more successful).”

“The glue (in street engagement) is the relationship. We have to make sure they trust who they’re working with.”
“Building good working relationships (in the long-term) is key.”

“Conversation (between stakeholders) is the solution; we don't need more bureaucracy.”

- Participants emphasized the importance of collaboration and alignment at the leadership level as key to successful collaboration on the ground.
- They described the need for leaders to understand the experience of and communicate regularly with people working on the ground, and the need for respect and strong relationships and trust among leaders.

4.3. Participants cited the importance of engaging the surrounding community (including volunteers and people with lived experience of homelessness), and providing better access to information as part of this engagement.

“My solution is to engage the people locally.”

“We are engaging community members to be advocates. We leverage the community to do something and help (people experiencing homelessness) to get to the next step.”

“I find that neighborhood based groups have had the best ability to develop meaningful and lasting relationships with unhoused folks, although those groups are often not the ones plugged into a lot of resources.”

- Participants described the importance of providing access to information (either about the status of a given encampment or about the street engagement process in general) to the surrounding community in order to avoid disinformation and conflict.
  - In one case, a staff person at a nonprofit described the importance of disseminating accurate information on behalf of service providers on the ground, so they can focus on their outreach work: “My most valuable role is to be a ‘buffer’ between advocacy groups and our staff. I build open lines of communication with advocacy groups so our staff does not have to deal with (being responsible for PR).”
- Participants also shared the importance of utilizing the “cumulative expertise” of community members who want to help, and providing accurate information to facilitate that process.
  - One faith leader shared that she has dozens of new volunteers regularly show up each month to provide programming and resources to their unhoused neighbors. She said that faith groups have a “competitive advantage” in rallying community, and suggested further leveraging this position.

5. Providing a human-centered approach

5.1. Participants encouraged the use of community-centered and trusted messengers in the street engagement process.
“Multidisciplinary teams that have lived experts at the forefront of the engagement effort are very effective, but only if they have time to foster relationships and have short and long term housing resources in hand. Agencies need to be empowered to use all resources available in the most efficient and creative way. Our efforts on Venice Beach were a reflection of this model and it worked.”

“(Let’s) think about how churches can be involved.”

“People respond better to seeing a regular person on an ongoing basis.”

“Are you still with the agency six months after starting the paperwork for me? We need more people from the community (providing support).”

“More community policing vs policing the community.”

● Participants said that it is fundamental to “work with people who are directly impacted” by programs and policies, to ensure they are “part of the advocacy solutions.” Indeed, programs are consistently more successful when people who have lived experience are central in their design.
  o There are also numerous successful volunteer programs for formerly unhoused people (such as one program that provides computer access for formerly unhoused individuals to support others in filling out housing forms).

● Participants spoke about the need to better utilize community-based organizations and individuals whose focus is building trust and serving the surrounding geographic area.
  o Faith leaders shared numerous successes where they opened their doors to unhoused neighbors and encouraged them to get vaccinated. They suggested that providing microgrants to these community-driven efforts would present success.
  o One participant with lived experience of homelessness described the need for a 24 hour community center similar to a YMCA in South LA where unhoused veterans had the opportunity to eat, swim, and play basketball. He shared that a central location like this could also be a source for unhoused individuals to seek housing and voice grievances.

● Many participants said that human-centered approaches should always preempt police officers and law enforcement.

5.2. Participants named the importance of empathy, humanity, care, and love as a central part of street engagement.

“Be engaged, genuinely and lovingly.”

“I have to look at the process as if I was homeless.”

“Bringing in the individual stories of homelessness speaks to larger humanity issues.”
“When people call the hotline to complain about encampments in front of their homes, workers have seen that when the homeowner is told the story of the (unhoused) person, it humanizes them, and then (the neighbor is) more understanding.”

- A sense of love and empathy is not superfluous or supplemental, according to participants, but rather essential to engaging in the homelessness space. Just like a negative experience can break trust, a positive human interaction can be transformative.
- Participants discussed a desire to foster an “economy of care,” (e.g., “we need ‘care managers,’ not case managers”) and lauded the individuals and groups (including some “phenomenal street outreach workers” already engaged in this way).
- There is tremendous power in individual relationships, encounters, and stories to foster this kind of empathy.

**Challenges and Successes Related to Resources, Systems, and Structures**

Although the focus of our conversations was the relational aspects of the street engagement process, participants raised many examples of the structural and resource-related challenges that undergird and exacerbate the homelessness crisis. In many cases they noted that while bridge building strategies can be very helpful to the street engagement process, the systemic nature of the crisis requires much more attention.

These themes included the lack of resources that meet people's individual needs, the overall stress and trauma caused by homelessness, the challenges of a sprawling bureaucracy, and overarching income inequality and systemic racism. A full listing of these themes can be found in Appendix A.

**Bridge Building Pilot Recommendations**

The following section includes a range of potential next steps for how to utilize bridge building to address some of the major challenges delineated above. It is important to note that these interventions are not a panacea, in that they do not “fix” many of the systemic aspects of homelessness. However, infusing City culture with bridge building skills and approaches may facilitate leaders’ capacities to discuss and address these systemic challenges, increase efficiency, and create meaningful change. We suggest that these recommendations be considered for implementation by bodies that oversee street engagement efforts, and have convening or policymaking power and/or influence.

**Recommendation 1: Foster a culture shift among leaders by building relationships, trust, and opportunities to troubleshoot**

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14 There are 3 levers that are influential in creating change: the system, symbols, and behavior (Systems Leadership, 2018, MacDonald, Burk & Stewart). These include the processes by which work is accomplished, symbols include tangible, external expressions of purpose, mission, or values, and behavior involves the performance of the work being done. As such, the following recommendations are focused at the system level with the intention of introducing new behavior while simultaneously influencing existing behavior.
Recommendation 1.1

What: Create a series of closed door, curated, facilitated conversations between leaders, practitioners, and other stakeholders to build trust and relationships (while mindful of legal restrictions for public meetings such as the Brown Act).

Why: Constructing spaces for open and transparent communication promotes better problem solving among groups.\(^\text{15}\) In addition, holding these conversations proactively and unrelated to a specific crisis may lead to more receptivity, innovative thinking, and stronger relationships. Creating an intentional container for this kind of relationship-building (rather than the informal and social spaces in which this kind of relationship-building usually occurs) may create new opportunities for leaders and stakeholders to be honest and vulnerable with each other.

How: A cohort of decision makers at different levels would be invited to participate in a series of conversations whose stated goals are to a) build relationships with other leaders and b) actively work through disagreements and challenges in the street engagement process. We recommend selecting specific “pain points” from the above themes (e.g., CES, HIPAA, lack of empathy, etc.) and curating conversations and relevant audiences around them. A skilled facilitator would convene and facilitate these conversations.

Recommendation 1.2

What: Provide ongoing opportunities to have facilitated conversations between stakeholders that cross Council boundaries and allow issue-specific troubleshooting.

Why: While proactive relationship-building and problem solving is important, stakeholders are often reacting to ongoing challenges and crisis management that demand on-the-spot troubleshooting. Oftentimes the underlying challenges delineated above (e.g., mistrust, lack of alignment, etc.) get in the way of troubleshooting and addressing active crises effectively. Facilitators would support stakeholders in conducting their daily business with a unique eye for identifying, addressing, and working through these differences.\(^\text{16}\)

How: This kind of ongoing facilitation support could take numerous forms. For example, it might look like an ongoing facilitated working group to address a particular encampment. It might look like mini-conferences or workshops around new policies related to street

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\(^{15}\) Many organizational studies cite “lack of collaboration and poor communication,” along with missing alignment, as one of the main failures in the workplace: [https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/10/03/4-steps-for-building-a-culture-of-open-communication/?sh=50888ef361d7](https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2014/10/03/4-steps-for-building-a-culture-of-open-communication/?sh=50888ef361d7)

\(^{16}\) Promoting problem-solving among teams from the “top down” is often more successful in creating lasting culture change. Facilitators can provide this kind of structured guidance and support (rather than leaning on parties themselves to solve problems on their own). [https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/operations/our%20insights/the%20lean%20management%20enterprise/building%20a%20problem%20solving%20culture%20that%20lasts.pdf](https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/mckinsey/business%20functions/operations/our%20insights/the%20lean%20management%20enterprise/building%20a%20problem%20solving%20culture%20that%20lasts.pdf)
engagement. It also might look like roundtables or mediations to work through specific conflicts between stakeholders (e.g., one agency stepping on another’s toes, etc.).

**Recommendation 1.3**

**What:** Establish collaboration, relationship-building, and communication as core values and a central part of homelessness planning.

**Why:** Research suggests that leaders who are more collaborative are more successful in achieving their goals and objectives, and that leaders with relationships are more effective at working through and navigating ineffective systems. Fostering this culture shift would better enable teams to make bold and realistic goals, have honest conversations about limitations, and work actively through stalemate and conflict.

**How:** This might involve developing a scorecard for “collaboration” that elected officials can incorporate into their engagement strategies and utilize in races for office. It might involve more public conversations, campaigns, and op-eds about the centrality of collaboration to effective homelessness strategy.

**Recommendation 2: Build the City’s capacity and “muscle” for bridge building**

**What:** Provide an ongoing “bridge building” training for stakeholders involved in street engagement to help them communicate more effectively across strong differences, build empathy, and/or foster deeper relationships with colleagues.

**Why:** Training serves the dual purpose of deepening understanding and building a skillset. “Bridge building” skills, as noted in the introduction, include capacities to communicate effectively, build human-to-human connection, and collaborate through differences. Offering this set of perspective and tools to the practitioners doing the work will empower them to work together more effectively and to create deeper relationships with the community.

**How:** Each stakeholder group involved in the bridge building process should go through basic communications training that underpins the work of bridge building. Periodic and ongoing refreshers should be available as well as topic-specific training for those who would like to delve deeper and further develop the capacity of bridge building. Training cohorts can include representatives from different departments, agencies, and groups that may not always have the chance to build relationships outside their day to day work. Thus the act of learning together will begin the process of breaking down silos and building better working relationships. Topics may include: navigating resistance, conflict resolution

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17 There are numerous studies supporting the advantages of collaborative leadership in a variety of organizational settings. One highlights the increased productivity of collaborative workplaces, more innovation and increased problem-solving capacity, and generally more happiness of teams/employees, which helps with retention and motivation (https://torch.io/blog/how-why-collaborative-leadership-works/).
in teams, building the muscle for difficult conversations, de-escalation, intergroup and culturally competent communication, active listening, and compassionate communication.

**Recommendation 3: Create a hub for centralized coordination, problem solving, and conflict resolution**

**Recommendation 3.1**

**What:** Create on-call mediators, facilitators, or other “bridgers” for leadership in the street engagement process.

**Why:** Often, conflicts deepen with time. The more time that passes, the more deeply entrenched parties become. Having a bench of highly trained, highly skilled bridgebuilders readily accessible to those involved in street engagement will increase the likelihood that they will be utilized in a timely fashion. The immediacy of the intervention will lessen the impact of the conflict and hopefully return the relationship to a level of normalcy. It is suggested that these practitioners are well versed in the street engagement process and the various programs the city and other community organizations may have to offer. Additionally, it could be beneficial if the practitioner is local to the community themselves.

**How:** This would involve the training of a bench of mediators or facilitators who are specialized in street engagement and the homelessness landscape. Their services would be provided as a resource to stakeholders for mediations or group conversations/problem solving.

**Recommendation 3.2**

**What:** Develop a centralized office for communication, coordination, conflict resolution, and facilitation that can be utilized by City leaders and other stakeholders.

**Why:** Government offices, advocates, service providers, and others are already stretched thin by the myriad and extensive demands of addressing the homelessness crisis. A separate entity made up of communication and conflict resolution experts that is accessible to these stakeholders would avoid adding additional responsibilities to their plates, while also providing a useful service that facilitates their work.

**How:** Create a trusted and “neutral” office or “hub” composed of people who are both well versed in the homelessness ecosystem and experts in facilitation and communication. These experts might be available to stakeholders to: solve conflicts as they arise, point people in the right direction for different services, ensure communications from service providers and City leaders are clear and accessible to all, etc. These hubs may be neighborhood based or centralized. This would be a much more extensive investment than the prior recommendations.

**Conclusion**
We believe in the power of intentionally designed bridge building strategies to help people involved in street engagement move through impasse, resolve conflict, and work together more effectively to connect unhoused Angelenos with housing, services, and other resources. We hope this report can be utilized as a resource for Los Angeles leaders and stakeholders interested in pursuing some of these opportunities, and we welcome opportunities to implement these recommendations in the future.
Appendix A: Themes Related to Resources, Systems, and Structures

6. Resources

Participants said that the need for adequate resources (including housing, funding, staffing, etc.) is essential and core to their success.

6.1. Participants named the need for more housing units (particularly permanent supportive housing units), and some commented on the need for more funding.

“There needs to be more state and federal funding to make this all really work.”

“Interim housing is a major challenge...we need to go through to many hoops and there is not enough permanent housing.”

“Trust and relationships do not need to be worked on if there are (housing) resources.”

● Participants stated that there is not enough affordable permanent housing, and that the wait times for interim housing units are too long. They explained how this lack of adequate housing resources makes trust and relationship-building with unhoused individuals difficult.

6.2. Participants stated that there is a lack of responsive resources that match the specific individual needs of people experiencing homelessness.

“Assistance is delivered to a group rather than the specific, individual stories.”

“I was helping 15 women with their forms and housing, but (where they were placed) was not appropriate for families. There was no room for children to play.”

“Just connecting clients to interim housing has been very difficult. The rules of the shelters have been detrimental to placing clients.”

● Firstly, participants shared that existing resources and service delivery does not always meet people’s particular needs. This includes the lack of 24/7 and expedient service and responsiveness, as well as the lack of culturally competent, gender-specific, or language-specific services (e.g., non-congregate housing options for women).

● They also shared that unhoused individuals often form communities in their encampments, and their inability to be placed alongside their community can often be a barrier. In addition, sometimes individuals receive a housing option in another part of the city that is too far for them.
● Participants shared that there is a need for more detox beds, viable drug treatment centers, and robust mental health support for unhoused individuals in need of these resources.
● Many participants shared that stringent rules imposed in shelters and interim housing options are often counterproductive and dissuade people from seeking shelter. This includes strict curfews or rules that do not allow people to bring their pets or their belongings into shelters.
● There was a general consensus among participants that providing individually responsive resources is key to providing people experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect.
● Due to a combination of these factors (combined with the onerous process for matching people with housing), participants stated that there are often empty, unused beds scattered throughout the city.

6.3. Participants shared that the best successes took place when they were able to connect people expediently to personalized, accessible housing and services.

“When someone says they are willing to come indoors and they have somewhere to go that night, it is a real gift.”

“Having more centralized centers with wrap-around services is essential.”

“True ‘housing first’ has to include services and community.”

● Participants stated that their ability to provide housing options “quickly and expediently” was key to their success. They shared numerous models and examples of this kind of responsiveness (e.g., a Skid Row-based shelter that got rid of numerous rules and housed more people as a result; master leases of rental units to expedite permanent housing placements for entire encampments at a time).
● They also provided examples of and suggestions for personalized, easily accessible, and trauma-informed services to fill people’s needs (e.g., provision of ‘street medicine’, Uber vouchers to help transport people, virtual enrollment processes for housing, a 24/7 community wellness center providing food and services, the LAFD’s pilot “Sober Unit“ vehicle that transports intoxicated individuals to the County's Sobering Center for addiction services instead of the emergency room, translating documents to Korean, etc.)

6.4. Participants shared that many organizations addressing homelessness have low morale and retention among outreach staff in particular.

“(The status quo) requires people to be martyrs to be able to do the required work. That’s not sustainable.”
“There is a need for support groups for volunteers, especially for volunteers dealing with unhoused people dying.”

“How do we make sure that the people doing street engagement do self-care and not bring the trauma home?”

“Self-care of staff for many service providers is a major challenge”

“There are toothpicks holding up the elephant. Over time half the toothpicks break, so the remaining toothpicks are now holding double the weight, and eventually they all fall...We don’t have the incentives to encourage people to stay in the workforce.”

“People are leaving this industry because they want the win.”

- Participants shared that caseworkers are often burnt out, and staff retention is challenging as a result. They shared that low pay, high caseloads, emotionally difficult work, and few opportunities for self-care contribute to this burnout.

7. Systems and Structures

“There is a conflict with the people but rather a design element that is failing”

There was broad recognition that at the root of many of the above themes are structural and systemic challenges. These challenges require coordinated, sweeping, and holistic attention.

7.1. Participants cited a bureaucratic, inefficient, and complicated system for housing individuals.

“It is frustrating to do the hard work and then hit the red-tape.”

“We expect the system to function under this [sense of urgency], but it doesn’t.”

“We understand the boxes we have to operate in, and are trying to get the help, but continue to run into roadblocks.”

- Participants described many ways in which people get lost in the cracks of a sprawling and impersonal bureaucracy.
- Various participants cited the challenges and inefficiencies in the Coordinated Entry System. While this system tracks and prioritizes individuals for housing, in practice it can cause exceedingly long wait times and needed beds to go empty.
- Participants shared that there are few, if any, direct and easily accessible pipelines to get help. One participant describes this process:
7.2. Participants cited various legal realities and boundaries to mobilizing fully.

- Participants named numerous existing laws and policies that exacerbate other challenges they face. Often these policies are in place to protect people’s rights, but in practice are morally complex and lead to unintended consequences.
  - For example, many named the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA), which protects patient privacy, as a consistent barrier to tracking people in the system, to sharing information between service providers, and to sharing success stories with the public.
  - Participants named the legal boundaries stemming from California’s 1967 Lanterman-Petris-Short Act that stop them from placing 5150 holds on or forming legal conservatorships for unhoused people with severe mental health challenges or from transporting them to hospitals.¹⁸

7.3. Participants identified widespread stress and trauma as a result of the homelessness crisis.

“My heart is broken because the system is broken.”

“It feels like this crisis is untangle-able.”

“I will do whatever I have to do to survive and to protect my child.”

“Some people have significant trauma that have not been treated for a long time.”

“My heart still stops when I hear a diesel engine and fear that someone is coming to remove my stuff.”

“We’ve built up a tolerance of observing others’ suffering.”

- Participants shared the deep and multi-layered trauma experienced by people who are experiencing or have experienced homelessness.

¹⁸ This challenge has been the subject of recent conversations at the state level about the lingering impacts of the 1967 Lanterman-Petris-Short Act and Governor Newsom’s new plan to address mental health among people experiencing homelessness: https://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article259008913.html
Participants described the stress placed on the street engagement process – and outreach workers – to “fix” homelessness (see Theme 6.4).

Participants also described the stress of the crisis on neighbors and surrounding communities.

7.4. Participants regularly stated the need to understand and address economic and social inequality, as well as systemic racism, as key factors underlying the crisis.

“Homelessness is not just about the people sleeping on the ground…it's about all the people falling through the cracks.”

“What's missing (is that) the conversations start in the middle of the problem.”

“Street engagement is taking place at the end (of a long process). There are so many people living paycheck to paycheck.”

“We need to figure out who's throwing the babies into the river, not just how to fish them out of the river.”

“Every camp we have worked on has had people return...This should be directed to the systemic root causes, rather than putting the pressure on street engagement (to solve the problem).”

“People talk about reforms to law enforcement and health services, but this system has already penalized us as Black Americans.”

Many participants named that street engagement is simply reacting to the homelessness crisis, and does not address the root causes of homelessness (nor prevent more people from falling into homelessness).

Participants referenced that historic and modern systemic racism, particularly against Black people, has led to disproportionate representation of Black people and People of Color among the homeless population. They named the ways systemic racism imbues multiple social systems (e.g., foster care, poverty, law enforcement) that all increase homelessness among People of Color.

They also named the roots and impacts of vast income inequality as core to homelessness. They named decades of housing policy that criminalizes low income individuals, the difficulties of both securing and utilizing Section 8 housing vouchers, and the cycles that prevent people from moving out of poverty (e.g., people losing Section 8 vouchers because of taking jobs that raised their household income just above the Section 8 income limits, yet not high enough to lift them out of poverty).

Appendix B: Survey Responses

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither agree or disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly agree

The communication and coordination between the various service agencies (government and nonprofit) working with the unhoused population in... is sufficient to address the needs on the ground.

40 responses

The work performed by the major service agencies working with the unhoused population in Los Angeles is efficient enough to deal with challenges at hand.

40 responses

The communication and coordination between service providers and the unhoused population itself is sufficient to provide the necessary services.

39 responses
The communication and coordination between law enforcement agencies with service providers in regards to the unhoused population is sufficient.
40 responses

The law and order agencies’ current engagement with the unhoused population in Los Angeles is appropriate.
40 responses

The unhoused population is given enough information, spaces to voice their opinion, and opportunities to participate in civic processes.
39 responses
Advocacy groups for the unhoused community are given appropriate space by the City to give their input.

37 responses

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Neighborhood groups are given appropriate space by the city to give their input.

38 responses

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