



**TO:** Elaine Hart, interim Deputy City Manager  
**FROM:** Kerry O'Connor, Chief Innovation Officer  
**DATE:** August 27, 2019  
**SUBJECT:** **Response to Resolution 20190620-184, Homelessness Strategy**

The purpose of this memorandum is to respond to Resolution 20190620-184, which directs the City Manager to assess opportunities and make recommendations for immediate and short-term actions to engage and assist individuals experiencing homelessness.

The Innovation Office Support supports city teams addressing pressing challenges that affect our community through human-centered innovation, looking at future outcomes of what could be. Related to Resolution 20190620-184, the Innovation Office has three responsive categories of information:

1. research into root causes of homelessness and what causes homeless individuals in Austin to take a path that relapses or deteriorates
2. incubate three innovative solutions to sustainable programs
3. how to prevent the flow of people entering the condition of homelessness.

### **1. Research into Root Causes**

In 2017, the Innovation Office secured a three-year \$1.25m grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies to focus on the city's goal of ending homelessness. The i-team completed its phase of work related to homelessness in December 2018, and has moved to phase two, homelessness and displacement mitigation. Part of the i-team moved to the Service Design Lab in the Office of Design and Delivery, where they continue to prototype and test interventions and new service design. The i-team's research into **root causes of homelessness and what causes homeless individuals in Austin to take a path that relapses or deteriorates** is documented here:

- [History](#)
- [Insights](#) (deteriorating, relapsing, resilient path)
- [Root causes](#)

### **2. Incubation of three innovative solutions to sustainable programs**

**A. Digital literacy:** the office initiated a pilot working with the Community Tech Network to develop a volunteer-led [digital literacy pilot program](#) that resulted from the iTeam's homelessness research and testing. The i-team hypothesized that by teaching people experiencing homelessness (PEH) to use Google Voice--which provides a digital phone number not associated with any single physical device--they could maintain connections with service and social networks even when their phones are lost, broken, or stolen (which happens many times per year). The goal of the pilot generate evidence on the viability and feasibility of using cloud-based communications services to help people experiencing homelessness stay connected with services, even when their personal devices are lost, unavailable, or otherwise compromised. This effort provides a foundational element to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant we received to prototype and test a digital identity platform for people experiencing homelessness to hold onto their documents. By understanding how to put together a digital literacy program, we can understand the implications of enrolling those experiencing homelessness on a digital identity platform.

**B. Digital identity:** The office won a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) Pioneering Ideas in Health Technology, Infrastructure, and Data to test the use of blockchain for those experiencing homelessness to hold onto documents that prove various facets of their identity to get access to services. The grant funds explorations of a digital identity platform, MyPass, that will yield a better understanding of:

- how digital identity can be implemented ethically and securely,
- how digital identity might create efficiencies in service delivery,
- how clients might gain a sense of agency,
- how the city might provide digital copies of documents to a platform (Vital Records, Court), and
- how such a platform might scale to other uses.

In a future state, the MyPass platform will enable service providers, such as Integral Care, to extend their reach to clients that may not have yet entered their system. A digital identity solution can enable new interoperability to platforms such as Cloud9 - which enables telepsychiatry as an intervention instead of policing - or in housing application software, such as with the start-up Haven Connect, attending the Impact Hu Accelerator program. A shared set of data, eligibility, and inter-operatibility standards on a MyPass platform will enable the client to have a seamless connection to service providers. More broadly, the MyPass project will advance understanding of how health and social services are accessed, and specifically how relationships between clients and providers can evolve. Efficiency, access, awareness, and understandability are all significant barriers to services. This project will also test the efficiency of providers accessing a single source of data (the client), rather than the client providing multiple copies of data to different providers.

**C. Social innovation grant:** The Austin Impact Hub has held an Accelerator program since 2017 to advance new social enterprises working to alleviate challenges of

affordability and contributing to workforce development. This year, the Innovation Office has partnered with them to uncover new social enterprises that have ideas that will help the city move the needle on key SD23 measures. Two of the grantees are working to solve for homelessness, and have received a \$15,000 grant to participate in the capacity-building Accelerator program.

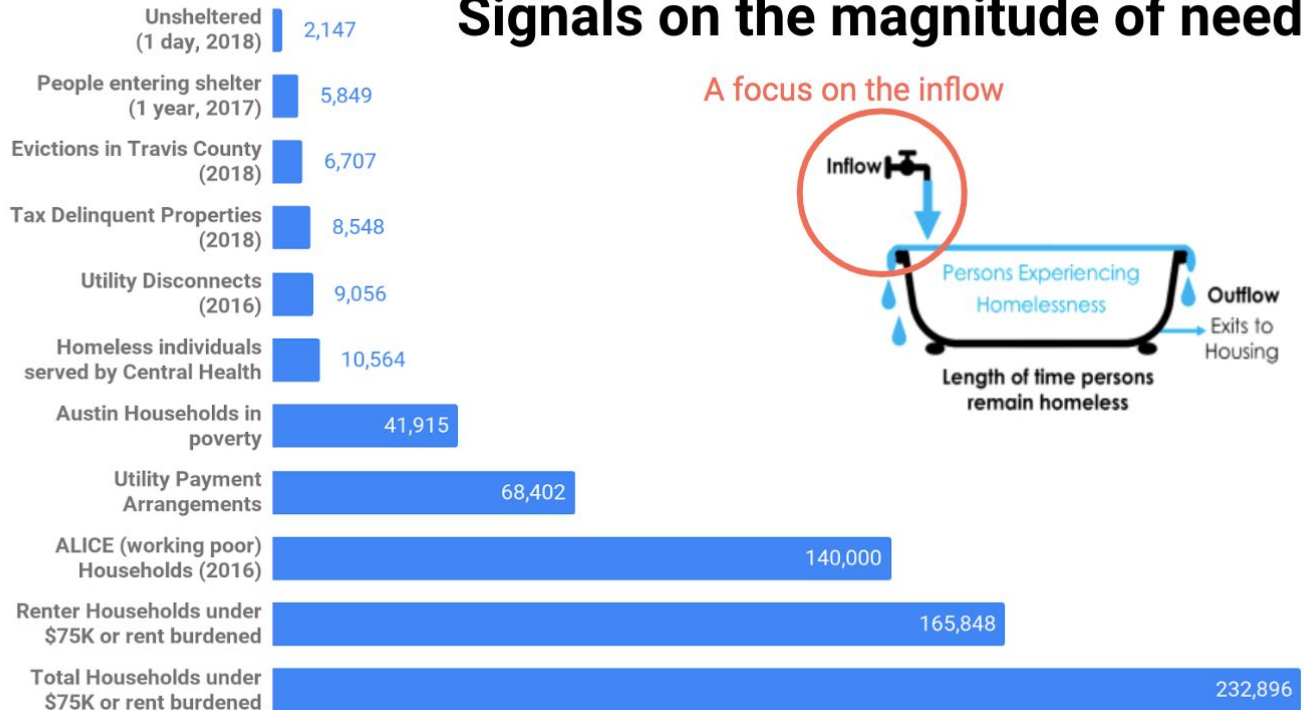
- **Survive2Thrive:** The SANCTUARY web application and mobile app will provide immediate access to available safe spaces, vital life resources, and 24/7 advocate support to the growing displaced and homeless community. Survive2Thrive focuses on victims of domestic violence and sex trafficking. The app has the potential to better connect individuals to safe sanctuary identified through partnership with secure hotels and HomeAway, which could help make the city's approach to shelter more resilient and adaptive for specific subpopulations.
- **The Other Ones Foundation:** This organization is well known for its work with Parks and Recreation Department and Animal Service Center to offer zero barrier employment opportunities to individuals experiencing homelessness. Given the rapid growth of this new organization, access to the Accelerator program will ensure appropriate support and capacity building for the Foundation while it expands to new employers and more capacity.

### **3. Research to prevent the flow of people entering the condition of homelessness**

Since January 2019, the i-team has been researching situations upstream from homelessness, specifically displacement mitigation strategies in collaboration with the Department of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development (NHCD). We anticipate releasing our research summary in the next two weeks. We have contracted with a local equity-focused design research firm, Build with Humanity, to research the lived experience of those living on the edge. Research from Seattle indicates that 88% of evictions led to homelessness (37.5% completely unsheltered, 25.0% living in a shelter or transitional housing, 25.0% staying with family or friends. 43.5% of evicted respondents had to leave the city as a result). We have documented research about evictions in Austin-Travis County, as well as informal evictions based on lived experience research. We have been supporting NHCD and Austin Public Health on an evidence-based contracting effort to combine eviction prevention with rental assistance, since 95% of formal evictions in Travis County are due to non-payment, with a median amount owed of \$1400. We have also been developing a Neighborhood Stabilization Tool that will help answer the question - which mix of services will help stabilize neighbors in which neighborhoods that are in various stages of gentrification (based upon the UT UpRooted report).

Attached below are sample data related to the magnitude of need, based upon vulnerability due to low income, cost burdenedness, utility payment arrangements.

## Signals on the magnitude of need



## Looking upstream from homelessness and crisis

