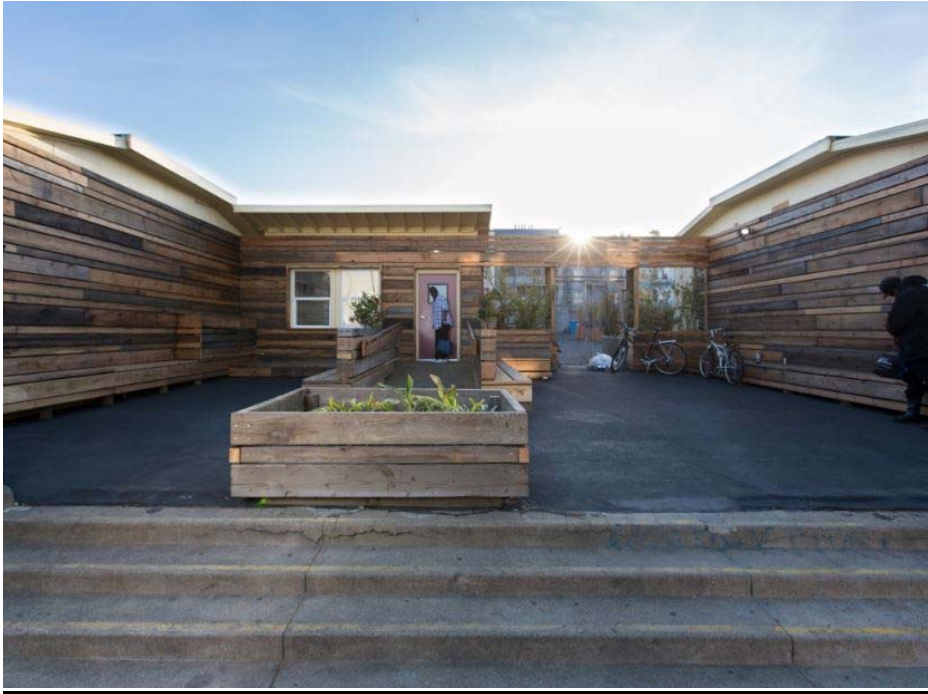


San Francisco Navigation Center



San Francisco's Navigation Center

Background

The Navigation Center began in March 2015 as a pilot program designed to shelter and rapidly house San Francisco's chronic homeless, integrating rehabilitation, employment, and related services onsite. The city's first Center involved adaptive reuse of an existing high school and through coordinated city/community service partnerships [Mayor's Office of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships & Engagement (HOPE); Human Services Agency (HSA); Department of Public Health (DPH); lead service provider, Episcopal Community Services (ECS); and non-profit Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC)], room and board, as well as storage and laundry facilities, meals, showers, and dormitory accommodations are provided for 75 clients and their pets, and 3 onsite case managers directly connect these clients to more permanent housing/shelter/treatment options. The Center's acceptance of pets, partners, and significant personal possessions aims to address typical reasons many clients avoid traditional shelters. Clients cannot check themselves into the Center; they must be directly referred by the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team (SFHOT), MNRC, or the HSA's Homeward Bound program.

The Center provides a degree of leniency from the standard structure and rules typical of most shelters, granting freedom from curfews, lights-out times, mandatory substance abstinence, meal schedules and the like. Unlike many other inter-departmental, collaborative homeless programs, however, the Mayor's Office has taken an executive role in daily operations and case management and City staff are highly engaged with one another. This collaboration has resulted in a number of positive outcomes, including more effective resource mobilization to serve clients, the tendency for partners to examine their own internal policy inefficiencies, and a stronger push towards broad policy change (e.g. reforming impediments to clients caused by the CAAP eligibility determination process; expanding the City's housing portfolio of SRO units; expanding the Navigation Center model to other districts).

Controller's Office Assessment-- 1st Year

At the outset of the program, HOPE requested the Controller's Office conduct an evaluation of the Center, aimed at assessing its effectiveness after the first 6 months of operation, and then after the first year. The data and conclusions were striking and below are some highlights:

The gender identities of the Navigation Center clients matched closely with those of the 2015 Point-in-Time County/Survey respondents (male: 66.7/ 61%; female: 29/ 33%; transgender: 3/5%). In terms of age, 50% of all clients were between 31 and 52, and the median age was 43. Twenty-five percent of all clients were younger than 31. The Navigation Center does not ask

clients about race and ethnicity in the same sense as the Point-in-Time Count/Survey, and therefore it is currently not possible to accurately compare clients' racial/ethnic profile with the general homeless population.

Excluding Homeward Bound clients, of 234 clients served by the Navigation Center it was found that 9% had been homeless for less than a year; 61% for 1-5 years; 14% for 6-10 years; 6% for 11-15 years; and 10% for over 16 years.

Around 67% of clients had at least one of the 3 typical barriers to shelter/housing (having pets, partners, or significant personal possessions), and 56% were members of a homeless encampment prior to entering the Center. Over 43% resided in the 1-square mile area around the Center prior to entry, indicating that attempts to target the entrenched homeless population in the immediate vicinity have been fruitful.

During the first 6 months of operation, over 50% of clients were referred by SFHOT. After a year, referrals evened out somewhat with 39% from SFHOT, 21% from MNRC, and 39% from Homeward Bound.

The evaluation examined the nature of exits from the Center, noting that 18% of clients left without connection to stable or temporary housing. On average, securing a permanent supportive housing slot for a client took 88 days, which was skewed due to several outliers staying in excess of 200 days. Exit surveys pointed to 91% of clients being satisfied with their stay at the Center, with almost full concurrence that having onsite case management staff and integrated services were the most beneficial aspects. Possible drivers of longer-than expected client stays included client engagement (e.g. behavioral issues affecting ability to maintain appointments), immigration status, criminal justice system involvement, and shopping for housing (inability of some housing options to meet a client's specific needs).

Furthermore, of the 65% of clients who did not arrive to the Center with existing connections to cash benefits, staff supported close to half in applying for and receiving these benefits. It was noted that the existence of an onsite case manager to deal with issues resulting in clients' denial of eligibility was a key factor in success. However, existing data systems need to do a better job of tracking 'churn' rather than simply reporting benefits retention at a single point in time, as it was pointed out that though low benefits retention is common across shelters in general, the data failed to capture the prevalent process of clients coming onto and off of benefits.

As of the first 6 months, the Navigation Center had spent \$1.7 million, not including the cost of City staff support. This figure translated into a 'cost per bed per day' of \$69, which even though is significantly more than the average of \$36 for shelter services funded by HSA, reflects the integration of supportive services and detailed case management costs.

Finally, the Controller's Office recommends the following to improve the Navigation Center as a model for other integrated one-stop homeless services centers:

- **Create clear policies and procedures for referral decisions.** City stakeholders should agree upon clear criteria to determine which clients are referred to the Navigation Center.
- **Establish performance measures related to housing outcomes and appropriate service population.** To better understand and manage the performance of the Navigation Center model over the long term, the City must establish performance metrics, set targets, and then regularly assess whether the model meets those targets. The Controller's Office proposes a set of performance measures, and emphasizes the need for measures that track client length of stay.
- **Improve benefits retention.** Further analysis is needed to understand why some clients lose benefit connections (i.e. income supports, food stamps, etc.) despite being housed in sites with City-funded case management services aimed at preventing this churn.
- **Spread lessons learned from the Navigation Center throughout the shelter system.** In particular, interviews indicate that many clients avoid shelters because of negative experiences with shelter staff and a rigid, unwelcoming atmosphere. Clients and stakeholders widely praised the Navigation Center for its supportive staff and welcoming campus, as well as its clear connection to housing. The Controller's Office recommends that City leaders and service providers explore policy changes that will help make traditional shelters similarly welcoming for clients, and foster a sense of working together toward tangible goals.
- **Expand Homeward Bound data collection.** The HSA should institute broader data collection practices related to Homeward Bound—in particular, tracking successful versus unsuccessful referrals for all program participants.

Footnote

Since the Controller's Assessment, two more Navigation Centers have been added to the city's portfolio, the most recent opened in March 2017 (Central Waterfront). As of January 2017, the City's Navigation Centers have decided to limit stays to 30 days and no longer guarantee permanent housing placement thereafter. This stems from criticism from service providers that resources were being targeted toward tent encampment-dwellers at the expense of the chronically homeless living in other arrangements. For the time being, after 30 days if a client cannot secure permanent housing they are able to transfer to a 90-day city shelter.

SF Navigation Centers

- **Mission Navigation Center**, 1950 Mission St., 75 beds
- **Civic Center Navigation Center**, 20 12th St., 93 beds
- **Central Waterfront Navigation Center**, 25th & Michigan., 70 beds.
- **Hummingbird Navigation Center**, Zuckerberg SF General Hospital, 15 beds. Opening June 2017.
- **SoMa Navigation Center**, 520 Jessie St., beds to be determined. Opening end of 2017.