

MORE THAN A SHELTER

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE NAVIGATION CENTER'S FIRST SIX MONTHS

CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

OFFICE OF THE CONTROLLER
CITY SERVICES AUDITOR (CSA)



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**CONTROLLER'S OFFICE
CITY SERVICES AUDITOR**

The City Services Auditor was created within the Controller's Office through an amendment to the City Charter that was approved by voters in November 2003. Under Appendix F to the City Charter, the City Services Auditor has broad authority for:

- Reporting on the level and effectiveness of San Francisco's public services and benchmarking the city to other public agencies and jurisdictions.
- Conducting financial and performance audits of city departments, contractors, and functions to assess efficiency and effectiveness of processes and services.
- Operating a whistleblower hotline and website and investigating reports of waste, fraud, and abuse of city resources.
- Ensuring the financial integrity and improving the overall performance and efficiency of city government.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

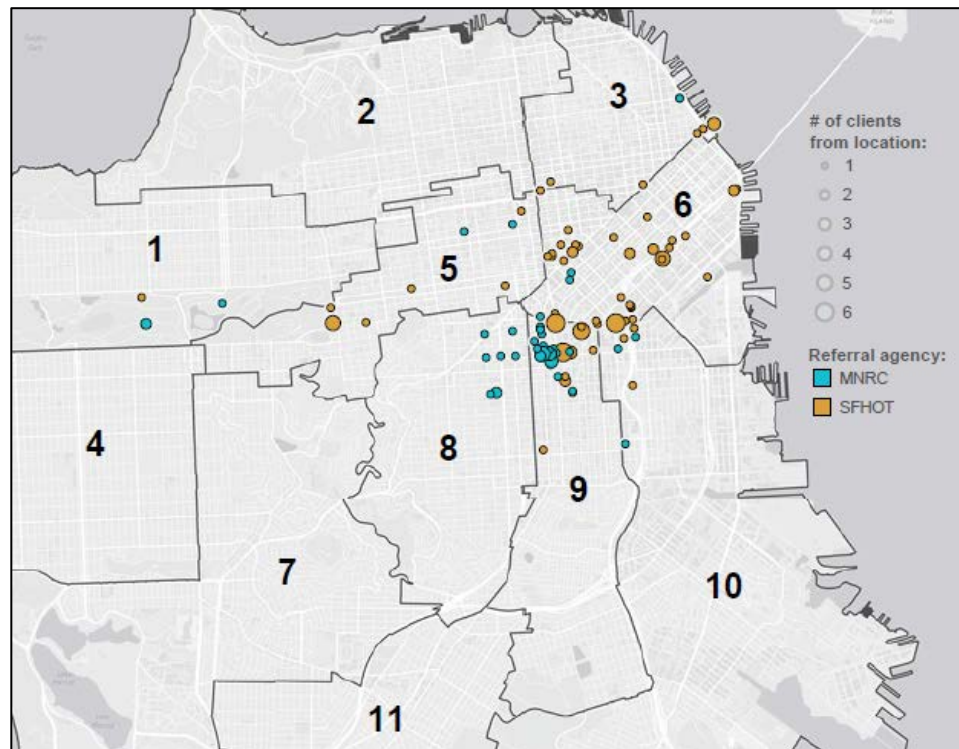
The San Francisco Navigation Center began operations in March 2015 as a pilot program designed to shelter and find housing for San Francisco's difficult-to-serve homeless population. The Navigation Center is a partnership of the Mayor's Office of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement (HOPE), the Human Services Agency (HSA), the Department of Public Health (DPH), lead service provider, Episcopal Community Services (ECS), and nonprofit partner Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC). The Navigation Center provides room and board to as many as 75 San Franciscans and their pets while case managers connect them to stable income, public benefits and permanent housing.

At the inception of the program, HOPE requested that the Controller's Office conduct an evaluation of the Navigation Center. In November 2015, the Controller's Office released a series of qualitative reports based on interviews with Navigation Center staff, clients, and stakeholders. This quantitative evaluation addresses several questions about the effectiveness of the Navigation Center program model in its first six months of operation.

REFERRALS TO THE NAVIGATION CENTER

The Navigation Center served 212 unique clients from its opening on March 30, 2015 through September 30, 2015. Most clients were referred to the Navigation Center either from the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team (SFHOT) or the Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC). SFHOT primarily refers clients living in encampments citywide, while MNRC refers individuals living in the Mission neighborhood (see map).

Sixty-one percent of clients entered the Navigation Center with at least one of three primary barriers to shelter use: a pet, a partner, or a significant number of possessions. A vast majority (94%) had been continuously homeless for more than a year prior to their Navigation Center stay, and 76% of Navigation Center clients have no recent shelter history – i.e., they did not stay in a San Francisco shelter during the 12 months prior to their intake at the Navigation Center. This

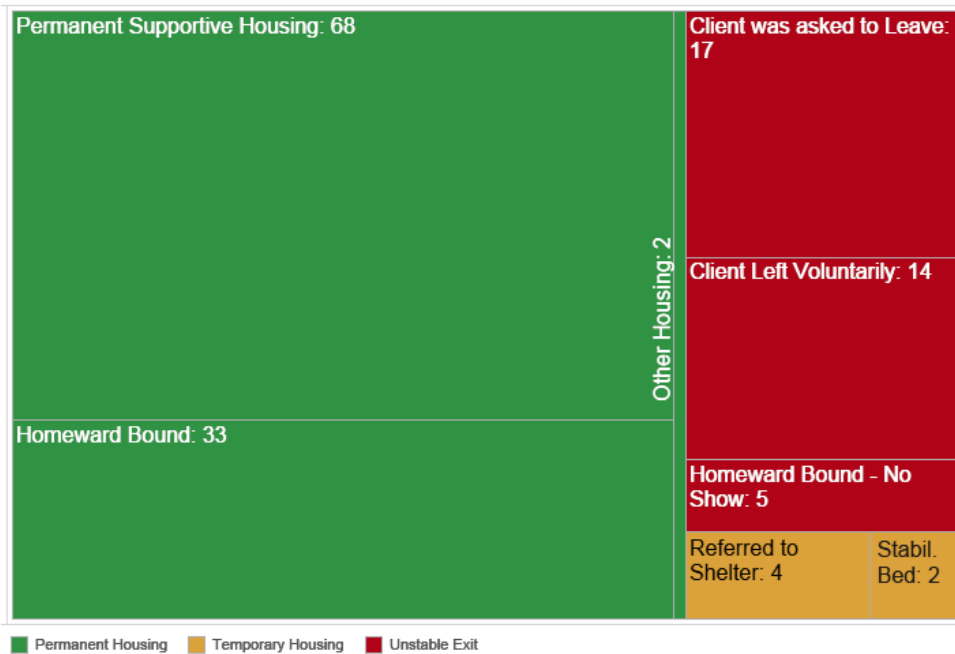


suggests that the referral process is largely targeting the intended clients – those not generally served (or served well) by the existing system of shelters.

EXITS FROM THE NAVIGATION CENTER

As of October 2015, 132 clients exited the Navigation Center, and most found stable housing or participated in Homeward Bound (see figure below). Of those exiting to permanent supportive housing, 88% went to HSA Master Lease units. The remainder went to Shelter Plus Care units (9%) or DPH's Direct Access to Housing (DAH) sites (3%). Of 59 clients that were permanently housed by September 1, 2015, all but one remained in housing through October 1, for a housing maintenance rate of 98%.

Just 17% of all clients served by the Navigation Center (or 27% of all exits) left without a connection to permanent or temporary housing. Clients either left voluntarily (including five who missed the bus arranged



by Homeward Bound) or were asked to leave by the Navigation Center. The Navigation Center generally asks clients to leave when they are violent with staff or other clients or when substance use or personal behaviors begin to pose a threat to community health and safety.

Exits from the Navigation Center to permanent supportive housing have taken two months, on average.

Controlling for other factors, clients who arrive with multiple bags tend to stay 19 days longer than other clients – such clients may be more likely to have been on the street longer or have mental health issues. Active clients have been at the Navigation Center for an average of 76 days.

According to an exit survey distributed to housed clients, 91% of clients reported being satisfied with their stay at the Navigation Center. In interviews, clients almost uniformly cited ECS operations and case management staff as the most positive aspect of the program, as well as the clear linkage between the program and housing.

CONNECTION TO BENEFITS

Most clients require steady income from public benefits to remain stably housed. The Navigation Center supported 74 of 174 total clients (43%) to apply for and receive cash benefits, and another 61 (35%) arrived at the Navigation Center with an existing connection to cash benefits (most commonly Supplemental Security Income). However, 33% of clients applying for cash benefits on-site were denied. Some denial reasons can be addressed with a case manager's support, making the client eligible for benefits, though issues like immigration or documentation support can take significant time and often requires legal support, delaying approval of benefits.

Long-term self-sufficiency requires that clients first be connected to benefits and then retain them over time. Over half of clients housed by September 1, 2015 had lost benefits by October 1; however, many of

these clients, with case management support, may have reinstated their benefits in a subsequent month. HSA reports that low levels of benefits retention are not unique to Navigation Center clients. Existing data systems do not allow HSA to effectively track “churn,” the process of clients coming onto and off of benefits, so benefits retention can only be reported for a single point in time.

THE COST OF THE NAVIGATION CENTER

As of September 2015, the Navigation Center expended \$1.7 million, not including the significant cost of City staff support. HSA funds a number of traditional homeless shelters throughout the City operated by community-based organizations (CBOs). The “per bed per day” cost of shelter services funded by HSA is approximately \$36 on average, but ranges between \$15 and \$63. In comparison, the “per bed per day” cost for the Navigation Center is \$69. While each shelter has its own program model, the Navigation Center model includes robust case management which contributes to the higher cost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the Controller’s Office makes the following recommendations to improve the Navigation Center program moving forward:

1. **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.
2. **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 possible performance measures, and emphasizes the need for measures that track client length of stay.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **Expand Homeward Bound data collection.** The Human Services Agency should institute broader data collection practices related to Homeward Bound – in particular, tracking successful versus unsuccessful referrals for all program participants.

The Controller’s Office will issue a final evaluation report in mid-2016, when the Navigation Center has been open for more than one year and longer-term outcomes can be assessed.

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WHAT IS THE NAVIGATION CENTER?

The San Francisco Navigation Center began operations in March 2015 as a pilot program designed to shelter and rapidly house San Francisco’s difficult-to-serve homeless population. These individuals typically have material or psychological barriers to using traditional shelters. The Navigation Center provides these otherwise unsheltered San Franciscans room and board while case managers work to connect them to public benefits and permanent housing. The Navigation Center campus includes a common courtyard, storage for belongings, meals, showers and laundry, and dormitory accommodations for 75 clients and their pets.

The idea for a “central receiving area” and access point for San Francisco’s homeless population to which front-line City agencies could bring unsheltered individuals for connection to shelters and housing had been circulating City Hall since San Francisco leaders first toured such a “navigation center” in Philadelphia roughly ten years ago. Policy-makers viewed the program model of rapid, case manager-assisted “navigation” from street to home as a way to address a critical gap in San Francisco’s existing shelter system—that is, serving homeless residents who are otherwise unable or unwilling to use shelters.

In 2014, the Mayor’s Office of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships and Engagement (HOPE) received an anonymous donation via the San Francisco Interfaith Council to find an innovative solution to homelessness. City and County of San Francisco (City) leaders used this opportunity to finally pilot the Philadelphia model and develop the City’s own Navigation Center.

HOPE created a collaborative team of City and nonprofit agencies to guide program development and support operations, including:

- Human Services Agency (HSA) Division of Housing and Homeless Services, Financial Assistance, and Medi-Cal units
- Department of Public Health Homeless Outreach Team (SFHOT) and Direct Access to Housing (DAH)
- San Francisco Police Department (SFPD)
- San Francisco Public Works
- Office of the Controller, City Performance Unit (Controller’s Office)
- Episcopal Community Services (ECS), the lead service provider and site manager
- Mission Neighborhood Resource Center (MNRC), providing bilingual staff and Mission district referrals



The Navigation Center courtyard provides space for clients to relax and socialize

Though an anonymous donation initially supported the Navigation Center, the City now supports it through the general fund. The Navigation Center currently operates at a former school site slated for development as affordable housing in 2016. HOPE and City stakeholders are exploring options for a more permanent home for the program as well as an expansion to multiple sites in new neighborhoods around San Francisco.

A UNIQUE INTERVENTION

The Navigation Center offers a unique alternative to traditional shelters. In order to reach the hardest-to-serve individuals, the City identified the barriers that keep these individuals from accessing a traditional shelter system and designed a program that mitigates or eliminates these barriers.

PETS

Most shelters do not accommodate pets, and many housing providers will only accommodate pets classified as service animals or companion animals. The Navigation Center accommodates animals and supports clients to apply for special classification when needed.

POSSESSIONS

Traditional shelters limit the number of personal items clients are able to bring with them. This can be particularly challenging for individuals who possess tents, baggage and other large items. The Navigation Center stores large and small items in securely to allow clients to feel that they can bring all of their possessions from their encampments and can leave them without worry when they are away from the site.

PARTNERS AND GROUPS

Traditional shelters separate men and women into gender-specific dorms. Additionally, while same-sex couples could remain together while in shelter, many feel uncomfortable doing so in that setting. The Navigation Center has mixed-gender dorms and accommodates couples of any gender. A goal of the Navigation Center is to bring in entire encampments to allow these clients to maintain their community bonds.

ACCESS TO HOUSING & SERVICES

According to clients, “shelters do not lead to housing.” In contrast, the Navigation Center’s primary case management goal is linkage to permanent housing, and clients must agree to this goal at intake. HSA has prioritized certain housing options for Navigation Center clients to ensure exits are available when clients have prepared the necessary documentation. The Navigation Center has office space for HSA eligibility workers on site to support benefits enrollment and has arranged standing appointments for clients with other agencies (e.g., DMV).

LOW THRESHOLD

Some shelters bar clients who are under the influence of any substance, and clients face many restrictions regarding when they have to arrive or leave, where they can sit or lie, and activities they can engage in while in the shelter. The Navigation Center has a low threshold for entry. Clients do not have to be sober or drug-free to enter the site (though they cannot use substances on campus). Additionally, once enrolled, clients can come and go at will and use common spaces at any time of day.

LIMITED REFERRAL SOURCES

Clients cannot self-refer to the Navigation Center. The City has identified three access points for this intervention: SFHOT, MNRC and Homeward Bound (see right). SFHOT refers clients from encampments citywide based on available beds at the site. MNRC refers individuals living in the Mission neighborhood that the agency has previously engaged in outreach.

HOMeward BOUND

Stakeholders proposed to use the Navigation Center to build capacity for Homeward Bound, an HSA program that provides homeless individuals with bus tickets to reunite with family or friends outside San Francisco. As originally designed, clients referred to Homeward Bound had to be ready to leave the same day, which discouraged some clients from using the program. At the Navigation Center, clients referred to Homeward Bound can reside for one to two nights prior to departure, allowing enough time to contact family in the destination city and make arrangements for belongings.

NAVIGATION CENTER EVALUATION

THE ROLE OF THE CONTROLLER'S OFFICE

HOPE requested that the Office of the Controller, City Performance Unit (Controller's Office) evaluate the effectiveness of the Navigation Center pilot program. The City Performance Unit ensures the effectiveness and efficiency of City government operations and regularly evaluates City services to provide recommendations for improving outcomes.

Many new programs consider evaluation only after program launch; however HOPE requested the involvement of the Controller's Office during the design of the pilot. As a result, the Controller's Office was able to ensure that the program included all the necessary components to conduct a thorough evaluation.

The Controller's Office carried out the following activities since the pilot project began:

- Collaborated with other agencies to develop intake, assessment, exit interview and client satisfaction tools to identify service needs and support analysis.
- With the support of the City's Department of Technology (DT), developed a robust case management database to allow real-time communication about clients among on-site service providers and capture structured data for analysis.
- Developed a weekly dashboard showing intakes and exits, connection to benefits, housing outcomes, referral locations, and length of stay.
- Produced a series of qualitative reports based on interviews with stakeholders and clients (see Appendix A for additional details).
- Provided HOPE and the collaborative with a series of "barriers reports" showing operational or structural issues that prevent certain clients from being rapidly housed.

EVALUATION SCOPE

This mid-period report reflects program outcomes after six months of operations, March 30, 2015 through September 30, 2015. Using the Navigation Center database, HSA benefits enrollment data, CHANGES shelter use data, Homeward Bound program statistics, client satisfaction surveys, and City budget data, this report will address the following evaluation questions:

- What does the Navigation Center cost?
- Who is the Navigation Center serving?
- How successful has the Navigation Center been at connecting clients to housing and benefits?
- Who does the Navigation Center serve best? E.g., what is distinctive about clients who are rapidly housed or clients who are unsuccessful at finding housing?

Given the short duration of the pilot to date, this evaluation will not include long-term outcome data. However, these preliminary evaluation results can inform operational decisions as the program continues. The Controller's Office will produce a year-end evaluation in the summer of 2016 with a broad and more comprehensive scope.

WHAT DOES THE NAVIGATION CENTER COST?

From February 2015 when renovations to the 1950 Mission Street site began, through September 30, 2015, Navigation Center expenses totaled \$1.7 million.¹ This report divides Navigation Center expenses into one-time and ongoing costs.

One-time costs include site renovation and furniture and fixtures like beds, mattresses, lockers and doors. Total one-time costs for the Navigation Center through September 2015 are \$710,371.

Figure 1: Navigation Center Expenditures through September 2015

One-time Costs	\$710,371
Operating Costs	
Salaries & Benefits	\$689,623
Non-personnel and Indirect	\$299,212
Subtotal	\$988,835
GRAND TOTAL	\$1,699,206
Cost per bed per day*	\$69
*based on operating costs only	

Operating costs through September 2015 totaled \$988,835. Seventy percent of all ongoing costs are for salaries and benefits for Navigation Center staff, and the remaining 30% are for non-personnel (e.g., materials) and indirect expenses.

Salaries and benefits, including all contracted Episcopal Community Services (ECS) staff and the Navigation Center Director, a City employee, totaled \$689,623. As of September 2015, the Navigation Center employed 22.6 full time equivalent staff (FTEs), including 6.4 managers and supervisors, 5.6 janitors and 10.6 case managers and service coordinators. ECS invoiced the City for \$83,087 in indirect expenses, including services such as administration, accounting and information

technology (IT). Finally, Navigation Center costs include \$216,125 in operating expenses, including \$132,080 for client meals and \$84,045 for items such as office supplies, building supplies, printing, insurance, training and internet.

City staff members have devoted significant time to preparing for and contributing to the operations of the Navigation Center. For example, HSA employees maintain a satellite office at the Navigation Center to streamline applications to City benefits. Stakeholders from multiple City departments meet weekly to coordinate entrances, exits, and operational issues. DPW and SFHOT coordinate moving encampments to the Navigation Center, including moving belongings and cleaning cleared areas. The cost of City staff time is not included above, significantly understating the total cost of the Navigation Center.

HSA funds a number of traditional homeless shelters throughout the City operated by community-based organizations (CBOs). The "per bed per day" cost for shelters funded by HSA is approximately \$36 on average, but ranges between \$15 and \$63.² In comparison, the "per bed per day" cost for the Navigation Center, based on its first six months of operation, is \$69. Key factors driving cost for traditional shelters are the size of the site (larger sites may have economies of scale), hours of operation (some operate 24 hours per day, while others operate for only a portion of the day), lease costs (some shelter buildings are leased by the CBO, while others are City-owned) and level of on-site services. The Navigation Center is a relatively

¹ The City does not have a single project code to capture all expenditures related to the Navigation Center. The Controller worked with departments to gather this expenditure data.

² HSA calculates the "per bed per day" cost for each shelter based on its contracted cost and shelter capacity. While CBOs may fundraise to pay for additional services at their shelters, these costs are not included in the calculation.



Public Works made renovations to the Navigation Center site prior to its opening

small facility (capacity of 75 individuals), operates 24 hours per day, and provides robust case management.³ All of these factors contribute to the Navigation Center's high cost compared to traditional shelters.

The Navigation Center is a pilot intervention, and as the program continues to develop, costs are likely to increase. For example, at the time this report was written, ECS was in the process of hiring two new case managers and had requested funding to hire an additional 2.5 FTEs for case management and other services. In addition, the Navigation Center can only stay at the 1950 Mission Street location until new construction for affordable housing begins at that site (currently expected for July 1, 2016). If the City continues to

operate the Navigation Center, it may require additional funding to procure a new site, perform any needed renovations, and move operations to that site.

³ Episcopal Community Services (ECS) operates the Navigation Center and at least two traditional shelters in San Francisco. According to ECS, the Navigation Center has a client to direct service staff ratio of 3.6 to 1, while the ratio for their traditional shelters is more than double that at 8.5 to 1.

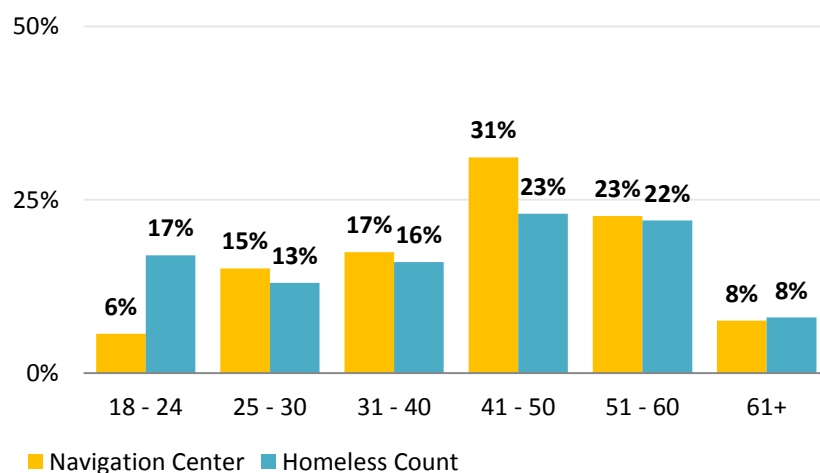
WHO ARE THE NAVIGATION CENTER CLIENTS?

The Navigation Center served 212 unique clients from its opening through September 30, 2015.⁴

CLIENT CHARACTERISTICS

The average Navigation Center client is 44 years old, and over half of clients are between the ages of 40 and 60. The Navigation Center serves a lower percentage of younger homeless individuals and a higher percentage of individuals in their 40s than are represented in the general homeless population.⁵

Figure 2: Client age varies from the Homeless Count



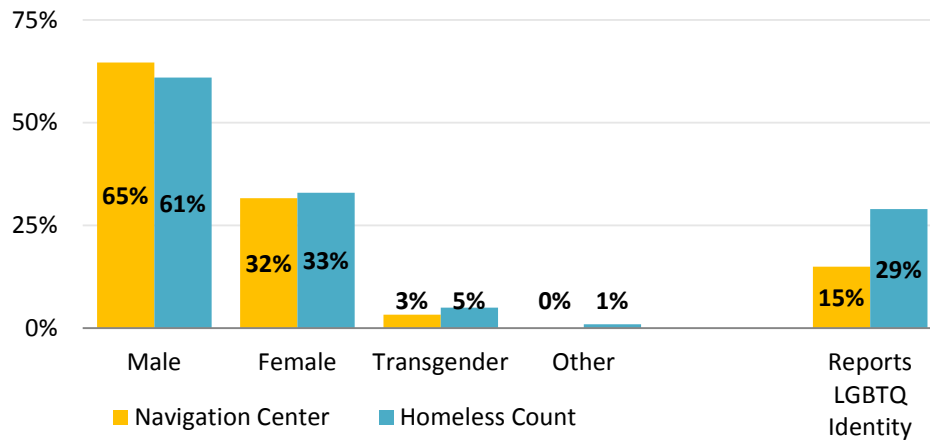
The gender identities of Navigation Center clients closely mirrors the homeless population overall (approximately two-thirds of clients are male), but far fewer individuals served by the Navigation Center report being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) than those participating in the 2015 Homeless Count survey. According to that survey, 29% of homeless San Franciscans report an LGBTQ identity, while 15% of Navigation Center clients report an LGBTQ identity.

Navigation Center statistics may underestimate the number of clients who identify as LGBTQ. Initially, clients self-reported their sexual identity as part of a preliminary intake assessment at the Welcome Center (the public-facing front desk of the Navigation Center). Now clients self-report their sexual identity in private assessment meetings with case managers. Clients may have felt less comfortable accurately disclosing their sexual identity in the non-confidential setting of the Welcome Center.

⁴ Episcopal Community Services, lead service provider for the Navigation Center, has developed a website to showcase client photos and stories: www.navigationcenter.org.

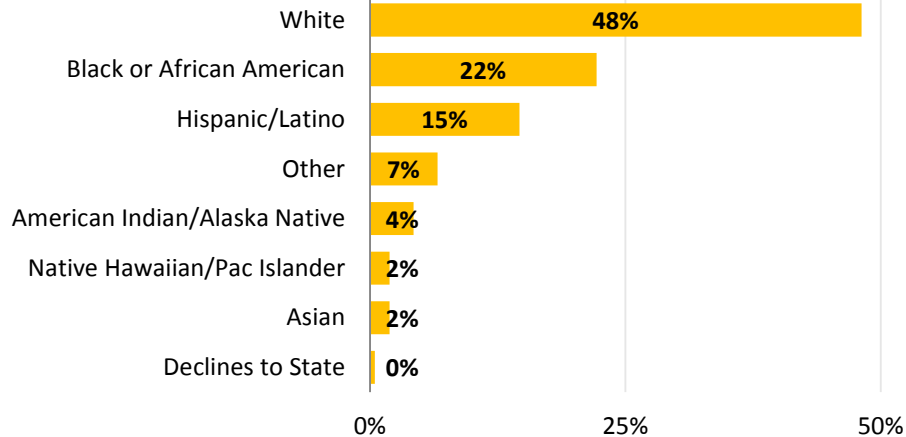
⁵ See the 2015 Point-in-Time Homeless Count and Survey Comprehensive Report here: <http://sfgov.org/lhcb/sites/sfgov.org.lhcb/files/2015%20San%20Francisco%20Homeless%20Count%20%20Report.pdf>

**Figure 3: Client gender matches Homeless Count;
fewer clients report LGBTQ identity**



Nearly half of the clients served by the Navigation Center are white. The Navigation Center does not ask clients about race and ethnicity in the same way that the Homeless Count does, so direct comparisons to the general homeless population are not possible.⁶

**Figure 4: Nearly half of Navigation Center clients are
white**



⁶ According to the Homeless Count, 19% of surveyed individuals report a Hispanic or Latino identity, a question asked independent of racial identity. In a follow-up question (where Hispanic/Latino ethnicity was not an option), the survey found that 39% of respondents are White, 36% are Black or African American, 19% are Multi-Ethnic, 5% are American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3% are Asian, and 2% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

REFERRALS TO THE NAVIGATION CENTER

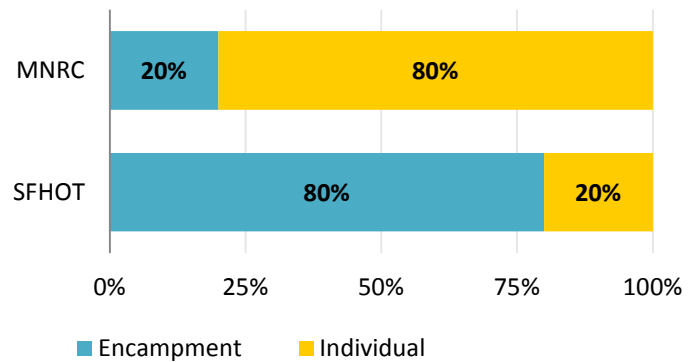
Referring Agencies

Clients cannot self-refer to the Navigation Center. All clients must be referred by SFHOT, MNRC or Homeward Bound. During the report period of March 30 through September 30, 2015, SFHOT made over half of Navigation Center referrals, while MNRC referred a quarter of the clients served by the Navigation Center. The remainder, 19%, came to the Navigation Center as participants in Homeward Bound.⁷

Figure 5: SFHOT is the primary referral source for the Navigation Center

Referral Source	#	%
SFHOT	114	54%
MNRC	56	26%
Homeward Bound	41	19%
Not Recorded	1	0%
Total	212	

Figure 6: SFHOT refers more clients from encampments than MNRC



Navigation Center staff and stakeholders have defined “encampments” inconsistently.⁸ Thus, some of the data on clients’ encampment membership prior to their Navigation Center referral may be inaccurate or inconsistent. These concerns notwithstanding, clients referred by SFHOT are significantly more likely to be considered part of an encampment than clients referred by MNRC. SFHOT specifically targets groupings of homeless individuals in its outreach, while MNRC is more likely to target individuals sleeping on the street in the Mission District.

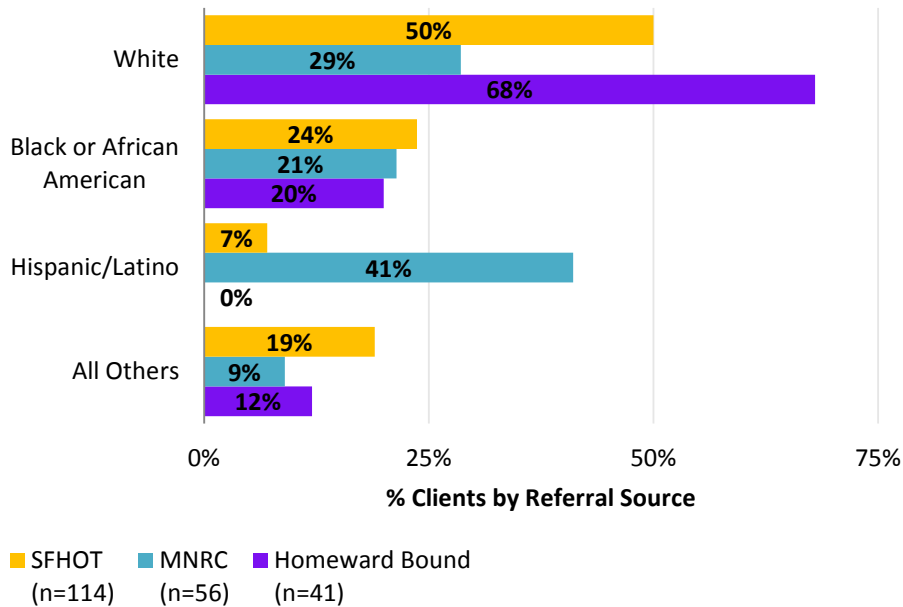
There are also demographic distinctions based on referral source. At least half of the clients referred by SFHOT are white, with just 7% identifying as Hispanic/Latino. Contrarily, 41% of MNRC referrals are Hispanic/Latino, and 29% are white. The two sources refer the Black or African American population at similar rates. Nearly 70% of the clients referred to Homeward Bound are white.

⁷ Clients referred by Homeward Bound may have been referred to that service by police officers on patrol, Public Works staff members or other outreach workers.

⁸ While SFHOT may refer several individuals sleeping near one another to the Navigation Center, the proximity of these individuals may or may not be intentional, and stakeholders vary in whether to consider these unintentional groupings as “encampments.” See qualitative report #2, *Encampment Homelessness in San Francisco*, for more details about how encampments have been characterized:

<http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6912>

Figure 7: SFHOT and Homeward Bound referrals tend to be White, while MNRC referrals tend to be Hispanic/Latino



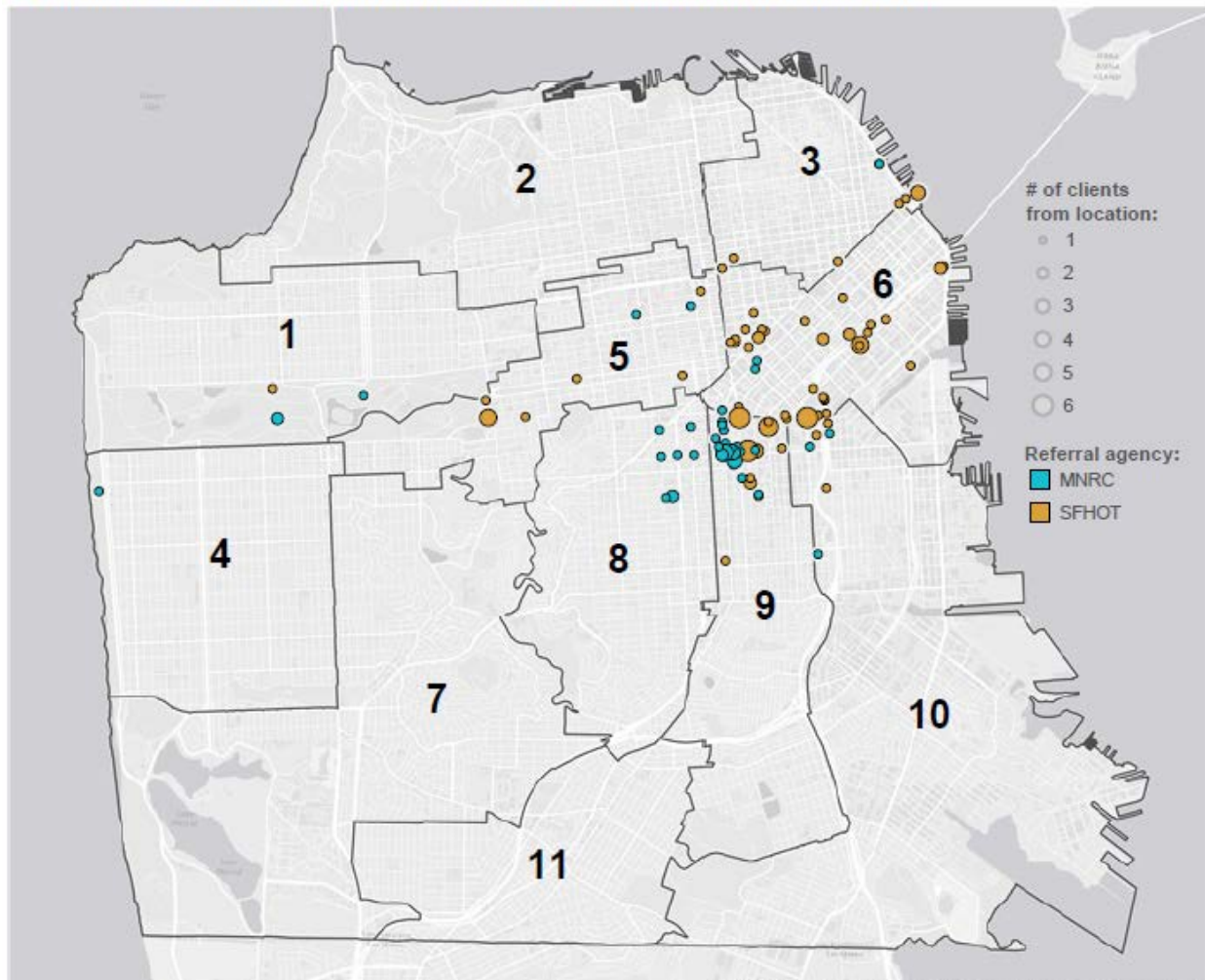
Referral Location

The majority of clients lived in the Mission Neighborhood (at the intersection of Supervisorial Districts 6, 9 and 10) at the time of their referral to the Navigation Center. The map shows the most recent sleeping location for clients referred to the Navigation Center. Interviews with clients indicate that many employ a cyclical pattern of movement around the city to avoid the City’s encampment removal efforts.⁹ Thus, some clients may have a predominant sleeping location that differs from that mapped here.¹⁰

⁹ See qualitative report #1, *Understanding the Navigation Center’s Operations*: <http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6887>

¹⁰ According to stakeholders, clients referred from further away have a difficult time adjusting to a new location, indicating that a neighborhood-based approach may be beneficial. The Controller’s Office tested this theory by mapping clients by recent sleeping location and type of exit (i.e., stable or unstable), but found no discernable correlation. Additional data may support further analysis in this area.

Figure 8: Most clients have been referred from locations near the Navigation Center



Referral Reasons

The Navigation Center is designed to reduce barriers to shelter and housing, such as the “Three P’s” (pets, possessions, and partners) and to help the “hardest to serve,” such as long-term homeless clients who may live in encampments. However, the City does not have clear, documented criteria to determine who should be referred to the Navigation Center.

Barriers to Shelter

The Controller’s Office has tracked five potential barriers to shelter to assess whether the Navigation Center serves the intended client population: pets, partners, possessions (two or more bags), encampment membership, and LGBTQ status.¹¹

¹¹ Figures 9 and 10 include 171 clients, excluding Homeward Bound clients.

Figure 9: Nearly two-thirds of clients arrive with three or more bags

Barriers	#	%
Possessions	105	61%
Encampment	102	60%
Partner	60	35%
Pet	35	20%
LGBTQ	31	18%

Having more than two pieces of baggage is the most commonly identified barrier, with nearly two-thirds of clients arriving at the Navigation Center with a significant number of possessions. Sixty clients arrived with a partner (30 couples), and 20% of clients arrived with a pet.

While a large majority of clients entered the Navigation Center with one or more barriers, 19% had no barriers. More than half (19) of the clients with “no barriers” came to the Navigation Center through MNRC, and these clients represent 34% of all MNRC referrals. It is possible that many of the clients without a listed barrier have characteristics that the Navigation Center would like to target (e.g. chronically homeless, Mission resident), but because the Navigation Center does not have clear, documented criteria for referrals, this cannot be determined.

Length of Homelessness

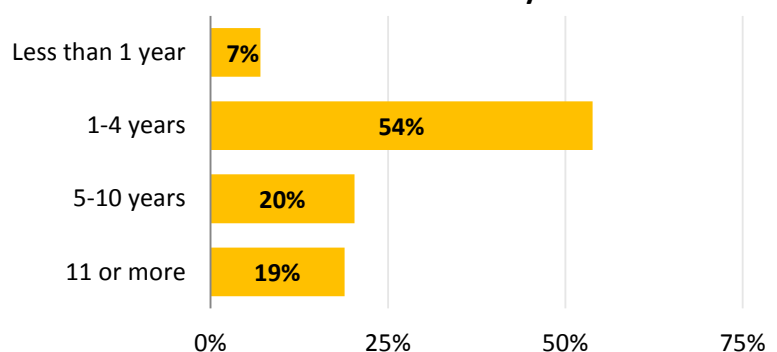
The Navigation Center tracks homeless history details from clients in order to make a determination about chronic homelessness using US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) guidelines.¹² Given the collection methods, the data does not show total number of months or years a client has been homeless.¹³

Excluding Homeward Bound clients, 94% of Navigation Center clients have been homeless for more than one year in their most recent episode. Nearly half of the Navigation Center clients (45%) have been homeless for one to four years, and the remaining half have been continuously homeless for five or more years. Fifteen clients (9%) have been continuously homeless for the past 20 years or more, with four clients (2%) living on the street continuously since 1979.

Figure 10: Most clients arrive with at least one barrier

	#	%
One or more barriers	138	81%
One or more "3 Ps" barriers	105	61%
No barriers	33	19%

Figure 11: Over a third of clients have been homeless for five or more years



* n=143; 28 clients had no homelessness history recorded

¹² HUD defines chronic homelessness as an individual with a disabling condition being continuously homeless for a year or more or having at least four episodes of homelessness in the past three years.

¹³ The database will be updated to begin tracking that information in 2016.

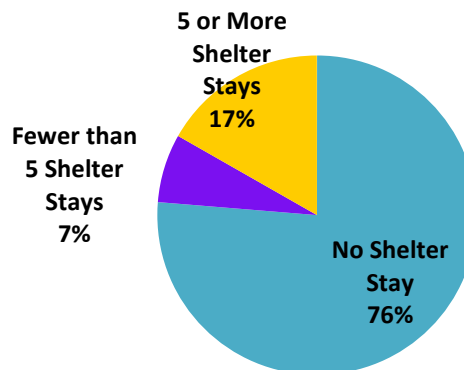
Shelter History

The Controller's Office tested whether the Navigation Center serves clients not otherwise connected with City's shelter systems (i.e., "hard-to-serve" population) by analyzing shelter use history.¹⁴

Excluding Homeward Bound clients, 76% of Navigation Center clients have no recent shelter history (i.e., they did not stay in a San Francisco shelter during the 12 months prior to their intake at the Navigation Center).¹⁵ This suggests that the referral process is largely targeting the intended clients – those not generally served by the existing system of shelters.¹⁶

The remaining 41 clients (24%) had at least one night of shelter, with an average of 75 nights of shelter within a year prior to intake at the Navigation Center. Some of these clients could be considered high-utilizers of shelter services: 16 clients had been at shelter within a week prior to entry at the Navigation Center (11 of them within two days), and these 16 clients averaged 124 nights at shelter in the year prior to intake at the Navigation Center.

Figure 12: Most clients had no recorded shelter stay in the prior year



The second installment of the Controller's Office's qualitative report series explores shelter use decisions among the Navigation Center population. Interviews with clients indicate that clients regularly weigh the risks of staying on the street against the perceived shortcomings of shelters (e.g., the limited availability of beds and the belief that shelters do not lead to housing), and make shelter use decisions based on current factors. Thus, shelter use (or avoidance) cannot serve as a sole factor for characterizing a client as "hard to serve," as there are clearly many clients being served but not housed by shelters.

During the Navigation Center assessment, case managers inquire about the reasons a client is not in shelter. Responses varied, and not all clients provided a response. However, the most common responses related to the number and types of people at shelters, and the restrictions clients face when they enter shelter. Clients rarely mention pets or possessions as barriers to shelter use, though having a partner is the third most common of the reasons for avoiding the traditional shelter system.¹⁷ No clients told case managers that social connections to encampments kept them from using shelter.

¹⁴ CHANGES does not track shelter stays accessed through the Men's Winter Shelter Program. The Navigation Center database does not collect shelter history from clients staying at the Navigation Center as part of Homeward Bound.

¹⁵ Forty (30%) of the clients who had no recent shelter stay do have at least one historical shelter stay listed in Changes within the last five years.

¹⁶ Case managers ask clients about their prior supportive housing use during the Navigation Center assessment, and 15% of clients indicated they had lived in a San Francisco permanent supportive housing site at some point.

¹⁷ Responses given to case managers are largely consistent with those provided in the course of interviews with clients. See qualitative report #1, *Understanding the Navigation Center's Operations*: <http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6887>.

Figure 13: People and restrictions top the list of reasons for avoiding traditional shelters

Reasons Clients Report not Using Shelter	Description	Number of Mentions
People	Too many people in general, as well as the "wrong types" of people	24
Restrictions	Curfew, kicked out in the morning, rules and regulations	23
Partners	Can't shelter with partner, or partner does not want to be in shelter	19
Not Connected	Did not know about shelter or could not get into shelter	16
Violence or Safety Concerns	Experienced violence, heard stories of violence, generally afraid of violence or assault	14
Poor Service	Had poor experiences with shelter staff	13
Stealing	Experienced theft or afraid of theft	12
Not Interested	<i>"Prefer the streets"</i>	11
General Environment	<i>"Don't like shelters"</i>	10
Pets		7
Cleanliness	Bed bugs, hygiene of others, afraid of illness	7
Other	Using drugs, PTSD	3
LGBTQ	Experienced homophobia	1
Possessions	Having large items not permitted at shelters	0

Defining the Target Population

While City stakeholders have identified three specific channels for referrals to the Navigation Center, they have not developed protocols or procedures for concretely defining the target population(s).

Navigation Center stakeholders hold a weekly operations meeting to discuss bed availability and to plan outreach and referrals.¹⁸ To date, decisions about which encampments to target for service have been largely complaint-driven (i.e., community members have called the City about an encampment). While SFHOT does conduct preliminary outreach to encampments to gauge the interest of its members in the Navigation Center, the outreach workers do not “pre-screen” for specific criteria, such as length of homelessness or other barriers to traditional service. In fact, luck may also be a factor in getting to the Navigation Center. In some cases, SFHOT will perform outreach to a particular person in advance, but when a Navigation Center vacancy occurs, that person cannot be found. Instead, SFHOT will refer another person sleeping nearby. In this case, vicinity led to placement at the Navigation Center.

In addition to the “complaint-driven” approach to targeting services, the MNRC partnership with the Navigation Center represents a neighborhood-based approach to referrals. MNRC has been working with Mission-area homeless individuals for years, and has a waiting list of referrals to the Navigation Center within its client rolls.

¹⁸ The Controller’s Office attends these meetings to present a weekly dashboard update and discuss elements of the evaluation.

Lack of a clear target population and referral criteria is problematic for several reasons. First, HSA has a limited supply of subsidized permanent supportive housing. Currently, supportive housing vacancies are prioritized for Navigation Center clients over other homeless individuals who are not clients. This is a reasonable policy decision if the City has an interest in rapidly housing a specific group of individuals who have a compelling need; however, no specific group has been defined. Second, choosing a target population has implications for program design. For example, if the Navigation Center is truly intended to target the hardest-to-serve homeless, then a goal of rapid housing may not be feasible because these individuals need significant time and robust services to fulfill housing requirements. Finally, it is challenging to set performance goals and evaluate who is best served by the Navigation Center when referral criteria are unclear.



First load of encampment belongings brought to the Navigation Center. Staff worked with clients to downsize and discard any unwanted items, then store the rest until they are housed.

When defining the target population, it is important to understand the variety of barriers the Navigation Center may be trying to address. Some barriers relate to the individual person (e.g., pets, partners, possessions, identity, etc.) and some relate to systemic barriers (e.g., complicated public benefit application procedures, long housing application processes, etc.). Both are important and should be defined and understood, as they may impact which target population the Navigation Center chooses to prioritize and the program design for the Navigation Center. This is also important when considering how to define a “hard-to-serve” population. The Navigation Center will encounter hard-to-serve clients with behavioral health issues, and also individuals who are hard to serve because the system is not designed to serve them, such as benefits programs structured for single adults rather than individuals in unmarried partnerships.

WHAT DO CLIENTS THINK ABOUT THE NAVIGATION CENTER?

The first of the Controller's Office's qualitative report series, "Understanding the Navigation Center's Operations," articulates successes and challenges as reported by clients, staff and stakeholders. Clients almost uniformly identified Navigation Center operations staff and case managers, all employees of Episcopal Community Services and MNRC, as the most positive and memorable aspect of the program. Clients commonly described the staff as "genuine," "dedicated" and "warm" and said they are central to the comfortable and safe campus atmosphere.

Every interviewee reported that lowering the material thresholds to shelter (e.g., baggage and pets) and allowing couples to remain together have been among the Navigation Center's most pioneering accomplishments. Similarly, freedom from the rigid rules of traditional shelters let many clients relax and release anxiety for the first time in years. Clients and stakeholders alike said that the Navigation Center has reignited hope for housing among the unsheltered homeless in San Francisco.

The Controller's Office developed a nine-question client satisfaction survey to ask exiting clients about the positive and negative aspects of their experiences at the Navigation Center, services received and not received, and about how the Navigation Center may differ from previous experiences with homeless shelters in San Francisco. As of October 1, 45 of the 145 clients who had exited the Navigation Center had completed client satisfaction surveys (a 31% completion rate).



The first client to be housed by the Navigation Center holds the key to her new unit.

According to this survey, 91% of clients reported being very or somewhat satisfied with their Navigation Center experience.¹⁹

CLIENT FEEDBACK

The survey gave clients the opportunity to provide open-ended comments and feedback about Navigation Center services, negative program experiences, and differences from the traditional shelter system.²⁰

¹⁹ There may be some positive response bias in these survey results. All but three of the survey respondents exited to permanent housing, and none of the respondents had unstable exits. Since clients who experience unstable program exits usually do not have the opportunity or desire to complete an exit survey before leaving, this positive skew is unsurprising. Nonetheless, collecting data from clients who exit unstably is an important means of improving services in the future.

²⁰ See Appendix C for a full tabulation of survey responses and representative quotes.

Most Helpful Services

Unsurprisingly given that most respondents were exiting to housing, seventeen clients (38% of responses) listed “receiving housing” as the most helpful aspect of the program. An equal number of clients listed the Navigation Center’s case management and staff as the most helpful aspect, corroborating interview findings presented in the Controller’s Office’s qualitative report series.²¹ Interviewed clients explained how they appreciated the dignity and respect with which staff treated them. Satisfaction survey results were similar: when asked how the Navigation Center was different from other homeless services, eight clients (or 18% of respondents) noted the lack of respect they experienced from other homeless shelter staff workers. Both quantitative and qualitative data confirm that clients perceive Navigation Center staff, with very few exceptions, to be a positive improvement over those in the traditional shelter system.

Other Navigation Center aspects that survey respondents listed as most helpful included connection to



Clients proudly display keys to their new unit.

benefits and other resources (16% of respondents), a feeling of personal safety (11%), and the speed with which services were rendered (9% of respondents). Six respondents (16%) did not provide any specifics, instead choosing to praise the entire program experience as helpful (e.g., “Completely different. They addressed all components for life, housing, and income”). Overall, accommodation of the three P’s, such as services for partners/couples (7%) and accommodations for belongings (9%), were less frequently mentioned than outcome-based responses (such as connections to benefits and housing) or experience-based responses (such as positive interactions with staff).

Opportunities for Improvement

Negative experiences were mostly the result of inter-client conflicts rather than program deficiencies, again corroborating interview findings. Respondents most commonly mentioned theft (11%) and negative peer-to-peer interactions (18%), with only two clients listing negative experiences with Navigation Center programming. One of these respondents complained about the slow housing process and another complained about general amenities on campus. Perhaps most telling, 53% of respondents indicated that they had no negative experiences at all at the Navigation Center, while 78% stated that there were no services they wanted but did not receive while at the program. Again, clients who completed the survey generally found the Navigation Center to be a positive, beneficial program, but decision makers should consider the response bias from clients exiting to housing before drawing further conclusions.

²¹ See qualitative report #1, *Understanding the Navigation Center’s Operations*: <http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6887>.

ARE CLIENTS RECEIVING AND RETAINING BENEFITS?

The Navigation Center seeks to provide clients with not just housing, but also stable sources of income and any public benefits for which they may qualify. HSA eligibility workers staff an office at the Navigation Center, and seek out all new clients within the week of their intake to conduct initial eligibility screenings. Eligibility workers, in conjunction with case managers, then support clients in applying for and maintaining benefits.

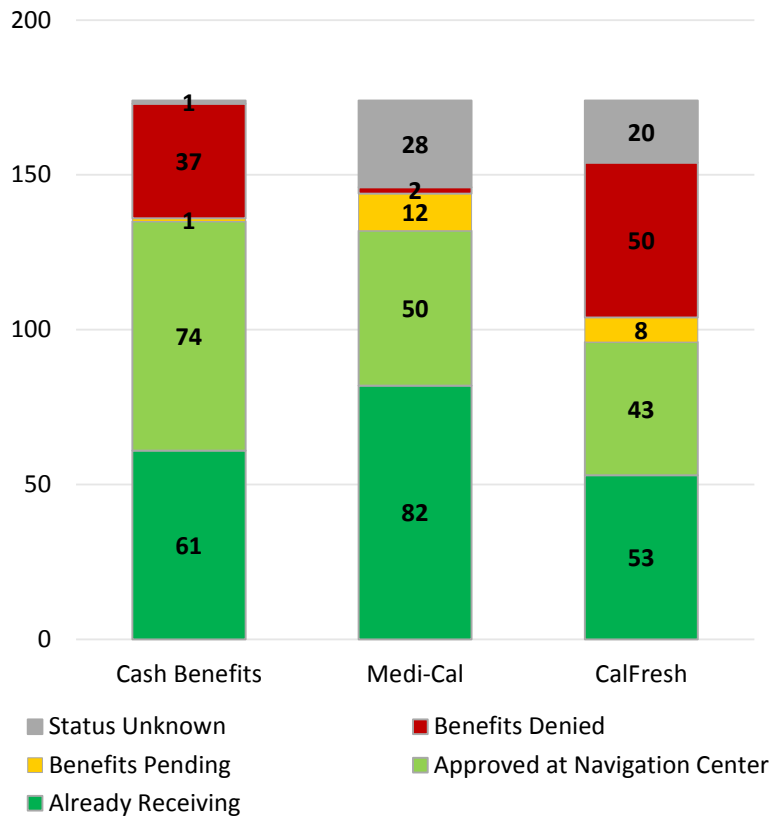
CONNECTION TO PUBLIC BENEFITS

Cash benefits include the County Adult Assistance Program (CAAP, a locally-funded benefit for single adults), Supplemental Security Income (SSI, a federally-funded program for disabled adults), or Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI, a state-funded program for lawful non-citizens who do not qualify for SSI solely due to their immigration status).²² There are several types of CAAP benefits, but the majority of Navigation Center clients who apply for CAAP receive General Assistance (GA).²³

Figure 14 provides an overview of the benefits application and connection status for all Navigation Center clients, excluding those who entered through the Homeward Bound program. In all cases, the majority of clients were either already receiving the benefit at program intake, or were connected to the benefit through the Navigation Center.

The Navigation Center supported 74 of 174 total clients (43%) to apply for and receive CAAP benefits. Of the 61 clients already receiving benefits at intake, 49 of them (80%) had been previously approved for SSI. Similarly, 30 (37%) of the 82 clients were receiving Medi-Cal at intake along with their SSI, as SSI

Figure 14: Many clients arrive already qualified for benefits



²² Other types of cash benefits include Temporary Disability and Unemployment. These benefits can cause difficulty in finding housing placements due to their temporary nature.

²³ CAAP includes Personal Assisted Employment Services (PAES), which provides a stipend to clients interested in employment; Cash Assistance Linked to Medi-Cal (CALM), which is intended for clients receiving Medi-Cal benefits due to age or disability, but not currently qualified for SSI or CAPI; and Supplemental Security Income Pending (SSIP), which supports clients with a disability that has lasted or is likely to last 12 or more consecutive months while HSA helps the client to apply for SSI.

recipients are automatically enrolled in an SSI Medicaid plan. Thirty percent of clients arrived at the Navigation Center previously approved for CalFresh (California's food stamps program).

HSA denied 37 (33%) of the 113 individuals applying for CAAP at the Navigation Center. Reasons for denial included not yet having established San Francisco residency (13), immigration status (10), no-show to appointments (8), fleeing a criminal charge in another jurisdiction (3), and leaving the Navigation Center before benefits could be approved (2). Some of these types of issues can be addressed with a case manager's support, making the client eligible for benefits. For example, a client can close benefits in another county to become an official San Francisco resident. Addressing immigration issues can take significant time and often requires legal support, delaying approval of benefits.

Clients received fewer denials for non-cash benefits: CAAP is intended to be a benefit of last resort with stricter eligibility rules than the other listed benefits. Just two clients received a Medi-Cal denial, though twelve clients had a pending application at the time of this report. Though 50 clients (29%) were not eligible for CalFresh, the vast majority of denials were due to California's rule barring SSI recipients from the nutrition benefit.²⁴ The twelve remaining denials occurred because of immigration status, open criminal warrants in another jurisdiction, and other unreported reasons.

CAAP Denials

Stakeholders interviewed reported that clients' missed appointments are the biggest operational challenge facing Navigation Center case managers from achieving faster and more positive outcomes. Eight of the 37 CAAP denials (22%) were a result of the client missing CAAP appointments. Follow-up questions to Navigation Center staff and on-site HSA benefits workers confirmed that HSA has been regularly rescheduling appointments for Navigation Center clients, providing Navigation Center clients with multiple chances to enroll in benefits when their cases would have otherwise been denied. The Navigation Center and HSA do not track data on the number of rescheduled appointments, but anecdotal reports suggest that the eight clients denied for no-shows had likely missed a number of rescheduled appointments before termination of their application.

BENEFITS RETENTION RATES

Long-term self-sufficiency requires that clients first be connected to benefits and then retain them over time. The Controller's Office assessed whether clients who had been connected to benefits on or before September 1, 2015 were still connected to benefits at any point during September.

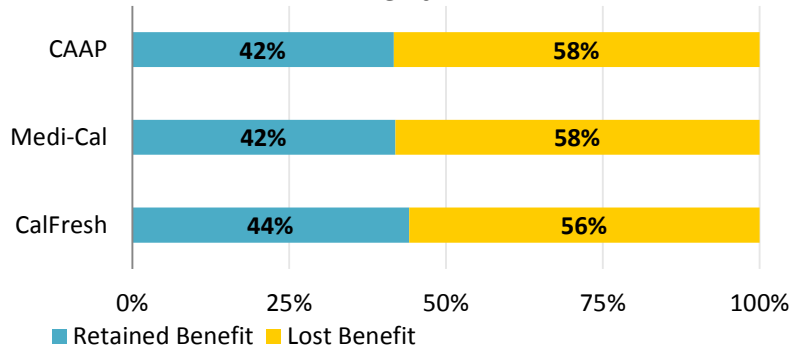
Thirty-five (42%) of the 84 CAAP recipients exiting the Navigation Center maintained their CAAP benefits, while 58% of clients no longer had CAAP benefits in September. Retention rates for Medi-Cal and CalFresh were similar: 42% of Medi-Cal recipients and 44% of CalFresh recipients maintained benefits after exit. Clients who received their benefits at the Navigation Center were just as likely to retain them as those who entered the program with those benefits already in place.²⁵ The low rate of benefits retention is concerning because it could put these clients at risk of losing their housing in the future.

²⁴ California is the only state in which SSI recipients are categorically ineligible to receive Federal food stamps.

²⁵ For CAAP recipients, 30 of 72 clients who had benefits approved at the Navigation Center had retained them at follow-up, while five of 12 already receiving benefits before entering the Navigation Center had retained them ($X^2 = 0$, $p = 1$). For CalFresh recipients, 18 of 42 clients who had benefits approved at the Navigation Center had retained them at follow-up, while 19 of 52 already receiving them had retained them ($X^2 = .17$, $p = .68$). Finally, for MediCal

CAAP recipients who are determined eligible to work typically must fulfill a work or job search requirement in order to maintain benefits. Anecdotally, Navigation Center stakeholders believed these “workfare” requirements may explain some clients’ loss of CAAP benefits. HSA waives the workfare requirement for Navigation Center clients while they are active at the Navigation Center, regardless of whether they had previously participated in workfare, but reinstates it upon exit. Exiting clients who do not fulfill the requirements risk having their benefits discontinued.²⁶ The Controller’s Office could not analyze this hypothesis with the available data.

Figure 15: Over half of clients lost benefits after exit



HSA reports that low levels of benefits retention are not unique to Navigation Center clients. Existing data systems do not allow HSA to effectively track “churn,” the process of clients coming onto and off of benefits, so benefits retention can only be reported for a single point in time. While over half of Navigation Center clients who were enrolled in CAAP at exit were not enrolled as of October 2015, many of these clients may, through the work of case management staff and CAAP eligibility workers, have reinstated their benefits in a subsequent month. Also, what may look like a failure to retain CAAP benefits may instead be a success of a client transitioning on to SSI (which is a higher benefit payment) or paid employment. HSA is in the process of exploring methods to better track churn and to address the drivers of churn.

recipients, 22 of 49 clients who had benefits approved at the Navigation Center had retained them at follow-up, while 17 of 51 already receiving benefits had retained them ($\chi^2 = .96, p = .3$).

²⁶ Closer connection between service providers at the Navigation Center and supportive housing sites after placement and the various CAAP sections, particularly PAES and SSIP, could help improve determination of work eligibility for clients who may have undisclosed mental illness or disability. For example, disabled clients on SSIP may receive a sanction or lose benefits for failure to show up for appointments, despite a disability that prevents them from adequately managing their own affairs.

DOES THE NAVIGATION CENTER SUCCESSFULLY CONNECT CLIENTS TO HOUSING?

Most clients who exited the Navigation Center found stable housing or participated in Homeward Bound. Of those exiting to permanent supportive housing, 88% went to HSA Master Lease units. The remainder went to Shelter Plus Care units (9%) or DPH's Direct Access to Housing (DAH) sites (3%). Two clients left the Navigation Center for "Other Housing" in a very short time frame, one to a senior housing facility out of county and the other to a skilled nursing facility.

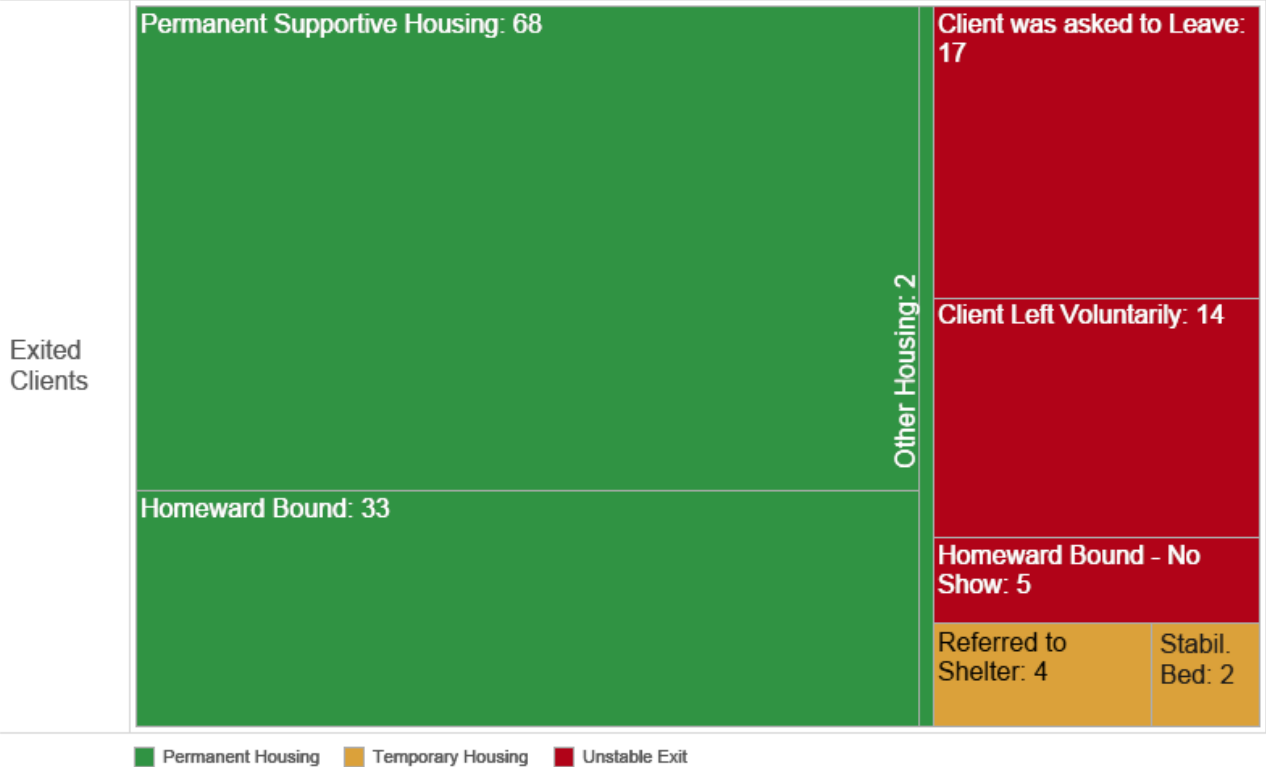
Figure 16: Permanent Supportive Housing Defined

HSA and DPH provide rental subsidies to clients, and fund case management and other services at housing sites in San Francisco using a variety of funding models:

- **HSA Master Lease Units:** HSA leases Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings and contracts with nonprofits to provide property management and supportive services. Some buildings are funded through Care Not Cash, the 2004 initiative that transfers some of the city's cash assistance for homeless single adults to investments in supportive housing for this population.
- **HSA Shelter Plus Care:** Shelter Plus Care is a federal program that provides rental assistance to chronically homeless single adults and families with disabilities related to severe mental health, substance abuse, and disabling HIV/AIDS. The city's General Fund pays for support services.
- **DPH Direct Access to Housing (DAH):** DAH targets low-income residents with special needs, particularly co-occurring medical and behavioral health conditions. DAH units include master lease units, new capital development, scattered-site units, and residential care facilities.

During the first seven months of operation, a quarter of all exits were unstable, with the client either leaving voluntarily (including five who missed the bus arranged by Homeward Bound) or being asked to leave by the Navigation Center. The Navigation Center generally asks clients to leave when they are violent with staff or other clients or when substance use or personal behaviors begin to pose a threat to community health and safety.

Figure 17: Most stable exits are to permanent supportive housing



A key driver for exits is availability of housing. HSA has prioritized housing exits for Navigation Center clients.²⁷ A portion of the anonymous donation that initially funded the Navigation Center was earmarked for the development of new housing opportunities. HSA worked with HOPE to identify buildings with the potential to expand HSA’s portfolio of master lease units. In October, HSA brought the Baldwin Hotel online, which offers newly-renovated space for Shelter Plus Care-eligible clients. This housing may help increase the number of positive exits in the coming months.²⁸

LENGTH OF STAY

From its inception, the City planned to use the Navigation Center to “rapidly” house clients by providing on-site services, intensive case management, and other supports. Though initial concepts hypothesized that individuals could be housed in less than two weeks, in practice, the process takes approximately two months, and much longer for many clients with more significant individual or systemic barriers.

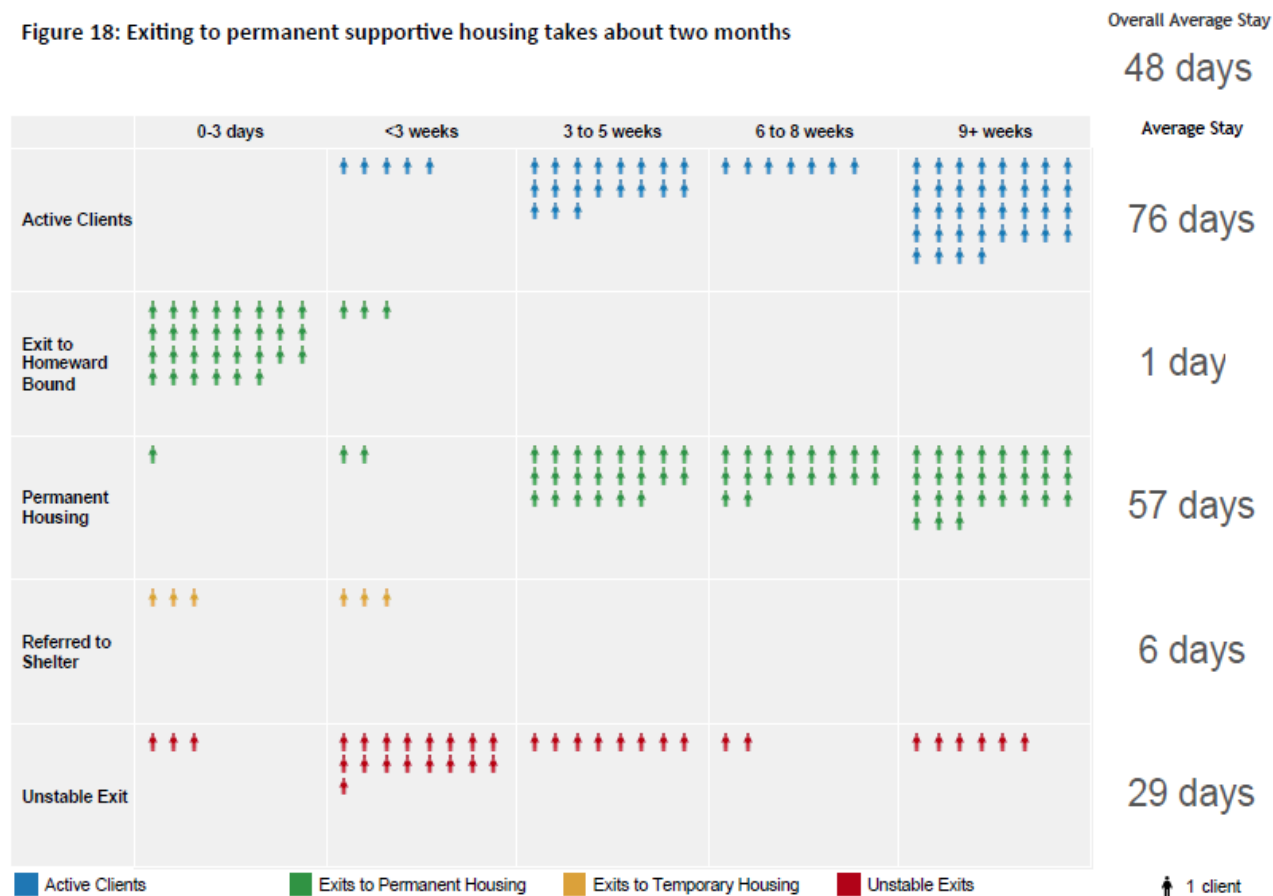
²⁷ When housing units within HSA’s portfolio become available, HSA identifies whether any Navigation Center client is ready for housing and eligible for the unit. If no Navigation Center clients are ready or able to be housed at that time, the unit will be offered to other clients on the HSA housing waitlist. HSA does not hold available units for Navigation Center clients who are not ready to be housed.

²⁸ HSA uses a new “Coordinated Assessment” process to prioritize clients for Shelter Plus Care units. Only those Navigation Center clients who qualify will be eligible for these new units.

The average length of stay for all 212 current and past clients in the data set is 48 days. The 67 active clients in the data set have the longest length of stay, at 76 days.²⁹ Homeward Bound clients have the shortest length of stay, at two days. All other clients exited in 47 days, on average.

Of exited clients, those who entered permanent supportive housing have the longest length of stay, at 58 days. As active clients with long lengths of stay exit to this type of housing, stakeholders can expect the average length of stay for this category to increase.³⁰

Figure 18: Exiting to permanent supportive housing takes about two months



Understanding the factors that contribute to longer client stays could help the Navigation Center and the City identify and address these barriers to housing or understand what populations are best served by the Navigation Center model.

Through interviews with program staff, the Controller’s Office’s previous qualitative reports identified possible drivers of longer client stays:

- **Client engagement.** Case managers – and sometimes clients themselves – cited unwillingness or inability to engage in the housing process as a major obstacle. Some clients lack the ability to

²⁹ As of October 1, 2015. By November 22, 2015 the average length of stay for active clients had increased to 90 days.

³⁰ Length of stay differs based on the type of permanent supportive housing, though the current sample size is too small to detect significant differences. Generally, HSA Master Lease placements can be processed in two to three weeks once the client has all required documentation and is ready to begin the process. DAH, Shelter Plus Care units and Veterans Administration housing generally take longer to process and for units to become available.

properly care for themselves or repeatedly miss appointments, leading to loss of benefits while at the Navigation Center (“benefits churn”). Substance abuse may be a cause of many of these types of behaviors. In the words of one client, *“As long as you do what you gotta do, these people are here to help you...You have to be ready to change your life, because they will make that happen for you here. But you gotta be ready for it. And a lot of people aren’t ready.”*

- **Immigration status.** Undocumented clients have fewer housing and benefit options open to them.
- **Criminal justice system involvement.** Clients who have an open warrant for their arrest in another jurisdiction (“fleeing felons”) are restricted from receiving certain benefits, including CAAP, until the warrant is cleared. Similarly, clients in violation of probation in another jurisdiction must have their case transferred to the San Francisco Adult Probation Department. Criminal histories also preclude housing with providers that require a background check as part of the rental application, limiting available exits.
- **Shopping for housing.** Some clients have repeatedly turned down housing options (for example, because the housing location is known to have drug activity, and the client has a history of addiction).

These factors are based on anecdotal evidence, and they often overlap (e.g., co-occurring substance abuse and criminal justice involvement). Looking at several client indicators present at intake, the Controller’s Office attempted to isolate the effects that each indicator had on client length of stay. The analysis was restricted to information available in the Navigation Center database and therefore does not include certain downstream factors such as benefits churn or housing shopping. The analysis focuses on active clients in the housing process and clients who exited to permanent housing (excluding Homeward Bound).

The Controller’s Office employed a linear regression model to examine the relationship between length of stay and other client characteristics including referral source, immigration status, having a pet, having a partner, having more than two bags, possession of a photo ID, existing enrollment in CAAP, and client self-reports of either substance abuse or criminal justice involvement.³¹

Likely due to the small number of clients served to date, only one indicator, client possessions, showed a statistically significant effect on length of stay; other effects may be random variations.³² The results of the regression are preliminary due to the small sample size, and stakeholders should not base program decisions on them.

³¹ See Appendix B for details of the regression methodology.

³² The p-value shown in the table is the probability that each factor’s effect is due to random variation. For example, if criminal justice involvement had no effect on length of stay, you would still see a difference as big as this one (11 days) about 23% of the time. P-values are driven by the number of observations (clients) and the size of the effect.

Figure 19: Possessions and lack of benefits seems to lengthen client stays

Factor	Effect on length of stay (days)	p-value
Arrived with more than two bags*	+19	.01
Not yet enrolled in CAAP	+11	.41
Self-reported criminal justice involvement	+11	.23
Undocumented	+11	.47
No photo ID	+10	.19
Arrived with a partner	-1	.89
Self-reported substance abuse	-7	.43
Referred by SFHOT (vs MNRC)	-7	.41
Arrived with a pet	-8	.38

* statistically significant at $p < .05$

Though the sample size is too small to draw firm conclusions, the Controller's Office can offer the following preliminary observations based on this analysis:

- Having a large number of possessions appears to delay housing by nearly three weeks. Having possessions *in itself* seems unlikely to be a major barrier; possessions are likely a signal of some other factor not captured in the analysis. For example, clients who have more possessions may be more likely to have been living on the street longer with less connection to services.
- Case managers have suggested that the complexity of the CAAP benefits process significantly delays housing; this analysis provides some corroboration of that claim, as clients who arrived without CAAP benefits took 11 days longer to house, controlling for other factors. Again, the effect is not statistically significant and should be re-tested in the future.
- Interestingly, clients arriving with pets appear to be housed more than a week sooner than other clients. While firm conclusions are not possible at this time, one hypothesis might be that, for some clients, pets were the main barrier to becoming housed, and that barrier is relatively easy for Navigation Center staff to overcome.³³ If the finding holds in a more robust future analysis, it might suggest that clients with pets are especially well served by the Navigation Center.

Any discussion of length of stay must also take into account referral criteria. If the Navigation Center prioritizes serving a high-needs population, the average length of stay may increase. These preliminary findings suggest which barriers may increase length of stay more than others. More analysis may still be needed to identify how systemic barriers, such as the approval process for specific types of exits, impact length of stay. Stakeholders should take these factors into account when setting program goals such as a target length of stay. Homeless



A newly-housed pet wears his key.

³³ Case managers regularly support clients to apply for service animal designation for their pets. Pets often serve as a primary emotional support for clients with significant trauma histories. Housing sites are required to accept service animals into their units.

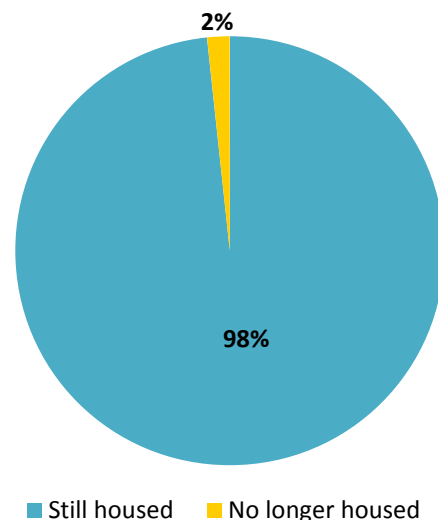
clients often face many barriers that reinforce one another; isolating the effect of each is difficult. Nevertheless, a larger client population may enable the Controller’s Office to draw stronger conclusions in the final report.

HOUSING RETENTION

While long-term housing stability is largely out of the control of Navigation Center staff, the Navigation Center plays a role in stabilizing clients, acclimating long-term homeless individuals to the City system, making preliminary linkages to support services, and preparing clients for their moves into permanent housing. For these reasons, the Controller’s Office examined housing retention for Navigation Center clients by inquiring with housing providers whether or not clients initially housed on or before September 1, 2015 were still housed as of October 1, 2015 (i.e., they retained housing for at least one month).

As of September 1, 59 Navigation Center clients had been permanently housed in an HSA or DPH program.³⁴ By October 1, 58 of the 59 clients were still permanently housed at their original placement, a housing maintenance rate of 98%. As a comparison, the Human Services Agency reports a system-wide housing retention rate of 96%, and sets its annual target for this measure at 90%.³⁵ The HSA measure is based on stability one year following placement, while the Navigation Center clients in this analysis have only been housed for between 30 days and 6 months.

Figure 20: All but one client was still housed on October 1.



Some Navigation Center case managers expressed concern that rapidly housing clients who were psychologically unprepared for housing might compromise their ability to maintain housing long-term.³⁶ Given the small sample size and short length of time since clients were housed, the Controller’s Office cannot draw definitive conclusions about housing stability at this point. Clients had only been housed for an average of 121 days, or just over 4 months, at the time of this report. While this is a promising start, it will be important to follow up with these individuals again in the future to determine whether this very high housing maintenance rate can be maintained for longer periods.

³⁴ Homeward Bound clients are discussed below.

³⁵ Actual measure: “Percent of formerly homeless households (includes single adults and families) still in supportive housing or other appropriate placements after one year,” meaning if the person was housed at the start of the year, they are still housed at the same site or another stable placement at the close of the year.

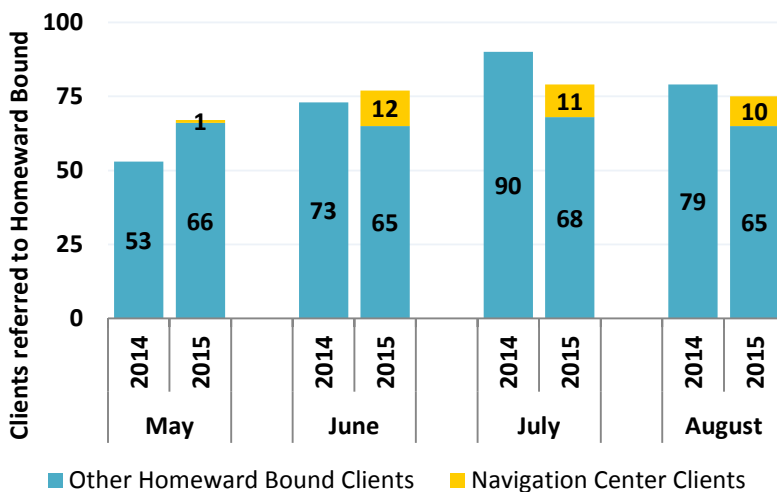
³⁶ See qualitative report #3, *Navigating a Cross-Sector, Multi-Agency Collaboration*: <http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6942>

HOMEWARD BOUND

The Homeward Bound program began making referrals through the Navigation Center in late May. Over the summer, an average of 11 Homeward Bound clients per month used the Navigation Center as an interim housing solution while preparing to return to family in other jurisdictions.

As of September 1, 2015, Homeward Bound had referred 35 clients to the Navigation Center. Twenty-nine of those referrals (83%) were successful, meaning the client showed up for transport on the bus. Stabilizing clients in a known location overnight should help Homeward Bound staff locate clients for transport; however, because Homeward Bound does not keep statistics on attempted versus successful referrals outside the Navigation Center, the Controller's Office cannot determine whether the Navigation Center's involvement improves the success of Homeward Bound.

Figure 21: Navigation Center has not increased overall use of Homeward Bound



Overall participation in Homeward Bound has not increased due to Navigation Center referrals. From May to August 2015, Homeward Bound served 298 clients, essentially unchanged from the same period in 2014 (295 clients) despite an increase in Homeward Bound staffing to support Navigation Center referrals.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Controller's Office recommends that Navigation Center stakeholders take the following steps to improve client outcomes, ensure adherence to the program model, and bolster the Navigation Center's long-term performance.

The Navigation Center provides a testing ground for new means of delivering City services to the homeless population, such as staffing eligibility workers on site to speed up the benefit enrollment process. The pilot has also helped to identify certain systemic issues beyond just Navigation Center operations, and some of the recommendations below apply to City departments and not to the Navigation Center.

1. CREATE CLEAR POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR REFERRAL DECISIONS.

Referrals to the Navigation Center have sometimes come from encampments identified by SFHOT or individuals referred from partner agency MNRC but also originate from neighborhood complaints that have provoked action from the Mayor's Office and Board of Supervisors. Further, Navigation Center stakeholders have differing opinions about the appropriate target population and how to serve clients falling outside of those varying target populations. Without clear referral criteria, stakeholders cannot assess whether the Navigation Center is meeting its goals, or serving those it is best designed to assist.

City stakeholders should agree upon clear criteria to determine which clients are referred to the Navigation Center. For example, the City might create a vulnerability index that weights several factors important to various stakeholders. Performance measures should align to these criteria, to help the Navigation Center assess its success at serving a target.

The Controller's Office recognizes that establishing referral criteria is not a simple process. High-need clients may require longer stays to be successful, forcing the Navigation Center to balance the goal of "rapid housing" against serving the "hardest to serve." As discussed in the fourth report in the Controller's Office's series, stakeholders may wish to either (i) determine the Navigation Center's target population and design program goals to serve that population, or (ii) establish program goals and determine a target population accordingly. Either way, a more intentional matching of goals and target population is important for efficient service provision.

2. 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 has begun conversations about appropriate measures with stakeholders, and has proposed the following framework for measurement, which remains under discussion. Establishing goals and measures relies upon having a clear target population (or vice-versa), as recommended above. Stakeholders must first address Recommendation 1, and then confirm measures related to the population served. The table below contains examples of potential measures.

Figure 22: Stakeholders should identify goals and metrics for the Navigation Center

	Goal	#	Measure
1	The Navigation Center targets homeless individuals not served by traditional interventions	A	% of clients with no recorded use of San Francisco homeless shelters in the year prior to intake
		B	% of clients arriving with one or more of the “3 Ps”: pets, partners and/or possessions
		C	% of clients classified as “long-term homeless” (definition to be determined)
2	The Navigation Center rapidly connects clients with stable housing outcomes	D	% of exited clients linked to stable housing within 90 days of intake
		E	Average length of stay for active clients
3	Clients using the Navigation Center achieve long-term stability	F	% of housed clients still housed after 1 year ³⁷
		G	% of clients linked to cash benefits at exit
4	The Navigation Center supports Homeward Bound participants to complete referrals	H	% of clients that arrived with an interest in Homeward Bound who exited to Homeward Bound within 3 days of intake

Of particular importance, and after clear referral criteria have been established, stakeholders should establish a target length of stay for all clients and measure the Navigation Center’s ability to stabilize and find housing for its clients within that time frame. As shown in the sections above, a variety of factors may impact a client’s length of stay. Further study can illuminate how these factors may lengthen or shorten a stay at the Navigation Center, and can inform the target length of stay that stakeholders establish.

3. IMPROVE BENEFITS RETENTION.

The Controller’s Office’s analysis shows that more than half of clients who exited the Navigation Center lost connections to one or more benefits as of October, putting them at risk of eviction. Further analysis is needed to understand why some clients lose benefit connections, despite being housed in sites with City-funded case management services aimed at preventing this churn. Stakeholders should explore the drivers of this low retention rate and develop action steps to address those drivers.

4. SPREAD LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE NAVIGATION CENTER THROUGHOUT THE SHELTER SYSTEM.

The Navigation Center is a unique intervention and differs significantly from San Francisco’s traditional shelter system. Despite these differences, opportunities exist to spread the lessons that Navigation Center operations staff and stakeholders have learned in the course of developing and implementing the pilot.

³⁷ Stakeholders have expressed the opinion that housing stability should not be an explicit goal of the Navigation Center, as responsibility for service provision transfers to the new housing site upon placement: while the Navigation Center helps the client find housing, they cannot help them keep it. The Controller disagrees, and continues to propose this as a program goal. The Navigation Center determines its target population and on-site programming, and prepares clients for housing. If Navigation Center clients are unable to maintain their housing at the same rate as the supportive population overall, this is an indicator that the Navigation Center referral criteria and on-site programming should be re-examined.

In particular, client satisfaction surveys and interviews indicate that many clients avoid shelters because of negative experiences with shelter staff and atmosphere. On the other hand, clients and stakeholders alike widely praised the Navigation Center for its “genuine” and “warm” staff and peaceful, welcoming campus environment. In short, the Navigation Center’s experience provided “the comforts of home.” The staff-to-client ratio at the Navigation Center is higher than at traditional shelters, which may account for some of this difference in experience.

The welcoming environment is also enhanced by having a clear connection to housing and benefits. Navigation Center case managers work closely with HSA eligibility workers to streamline the benefits connection process, and with the HSA Housing and Homelessness division to coordinate housing placements.

The Controller’s Office recommends that, wherever possible, 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.

5. EXPAND HOMEWARD BOUND DATA COLLECTION.

The Human Services Agency should institute broader data collection practices related to Homeward Bound – in particular, tracking successful versus unsuccessful referrals for all program participants. Homeward Bound’s involvement with the Navigation Center is premised upon the assumption that clients will be more successful at “getting on the bus” when stabilized overnight and given additional time to prepare or contact family members. However because Homeward Bound does not track successful versus incomplete referrals, the Controller’s Office cannot determine whether the Navigation Center contributes to Homeward Bound’s effectiveness. Counting non-Navigation Center clients who receive an initial Homeward Bound intake but do not get on the bus would allow Homeward Bound to calculate its overall “success rate.”

APPENDIX A: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NAVIGATION CENTER QUALITATIVE REPORT SERIES

In November 2015, the Controller's Office released a series of reports based on interviews with clients, service providers and stakeholders. Each report addresses specific programmatic areas, and lends context to the quantitative analysis provided in the mid-period report. This report has referred to qualitative findings throughout. Readers can find additional detail in the Perspectives series.

REPORT #1: UNDERSTANDING THE NAVIGATION CENTER'S OPERATIONS

Client interviews illustrated reasons for rarely or never using shelter, and shared overwhelmingly positive feedback about the Navigation Center. Operational staff and case management were almost uniformly praised for their warmth and commitment to their jobs. Clients also praised the lenient program rules and lack of a curfew, and the widespread acknowledgement that housing can and will be achieved if clients engage with their case managers. Regarding program challenges, staff and stakeholders have broad concerns about program scope, repeatedly noting the difficulties of serving clients whose substance addiction precludes active engagement in case management.

<http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6887>

REPORT #2: ENCAMPMENT HOMELESSNESS IN SAN FRANCISCO

On any given night in San Francisco, an estimated 4,358 individuals are unsheltered. Though encampments can be found in every City district, resident characteristics and personal histories often vary by neighborhood. Interviews revealed that homeless encampments vary based on geographic location, shelter use decisions of members, and encampment communities. The Navigation Center has made certain operational decisions about how to treat encampments that may need to be tested further.

<http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6912>

REPORT #3: NAVIGATING A CROSS-SECTOR, MULTI-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Though inter-departmental collaboration on homeless programs is nothing new in San Francisco, two unusual program features make the Navigation Center unique and have contributed to its success. First, non-profit operational staff and case managers have been closely involved in planning meetings with City executive staff, a role not typically extended them. Second, the Mayor's Office has been unusually involved in the day-to-day operations of the program. The multi-agency collaboration has distinct benefits in program development and implementation, but also presents several challenges, such as when the priorities of partners do not align.

<http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6942>

REPORT #4: THE FUTURE OF THE NAVIGATION CENTER - LOCATION, SCALE, AND SCOPE

The Navigation Center was originally designed (and funded) as a time-limited pilot, at a physical location already slated for affordable housing development. The Controller's Office analyzed three important considerations regarding the program's future: program location, program scale, and program scope.

<http://sfcontroller.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=6978>

APPENDIX B: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

LENGTH OF STAY REGRESSION METHODOLOGY

The Controller's Office ran a linear regression to determine client characteristics known at intake that might have an effect on a client's length of stay in the Navigation center. The regression included only clients who either exited to permanent housing or were active at the Navigation Center. Homeward Bound clients were excluded.

The Controller's Office regressed length of stay on the following variables:

- *SFHOT_dummy*, which is 1 if the client was listed as referred by SFHOT and 0 otherwise
- *Undocumented*, which is 1 if the client was denied CAAP, CalFresh, or Medi-cal due to immigration status and 0 otherwise
- *With_pet*, which is 1 if the client arrived with a pet and 0 otherwise
- *With_partner*, which is 1 if the client arrived with a partner and 0 otherwise
- *Gt_2_bags_dummy*, which is 1 if the client arrived with more than two bags and 0 otherwise
- *photo_id_missing_dummy*, which is 1 if the client arrived with no photo ID (or if the database field was left blank) and 0 otherwise
Photo_id is either no or blank
- *History_of_su_treatment_dummy*, which is 1 if the client disclosed a history of substance abuse to the case manager at intake and 0 otherwise
- *Ch_reported*, which is 1 if the client disclosed a background with the criminal justice system to the case manager at intake and 0 otherwise
- *No_CAAP*, which is 0 if the client was receiving CAAP at intake and 1 otherwise (including clients that were receiving SSI or were otherwise ineligible for CAAP).

In other words, the regression's intercept reflects average length of stay for a client who was not referred by SFHOT, has legal immigration or citizenship status, has no pet, has no partner, has no bags, possesses a photo ID, reported no history of substance abuse treatment or criminal justice involvement, and was not enrolled in CAAP upon intake.

Regression results

Variable	β	Std. Error(β)	t	p-value
Referred by SFHOT	-6.86	8.29	-0.83	0.41
Undocumented	10.80	14.84	0.73	0.47
Arrived with Pet	-7.89	8.97	-0.88	0.38
Arrived with Partner	-1.15	8.07	-0.14	0.89
Arrived with Possessions	19.30	7.50	2.57	0.01
Arrived without Photo ID	9.90	7.56	1.31	0.19
Self-Reported Substance Use History	-6.70	8.46	-0.79	0.43
Self-Reported Criminal History	10.96	8.99	1.22	0.23
Not enrolled in CAAP	11.27	13.62	0.83	0.41
(Intercept)	40.72	15.52	2.62	0.01

$$R^2 = 0.1135, F(9, 128) = 1.82$$

LIMITATIONS

Data quality concerns are an issue in many evaluations, and the Navigation Center is no exception. The Controller's Office helped develop a web-based database to capture structured information supporting analysis, but completeness and validity of the data remain a concern. The Controller's Office conducted an audit for completeness of client records in the database and found that only about 75% of applicable fields are completed by case managers and operations staff members, with none of the client charts audited being 100% complete.

Relatedly, case managers interpret responses to questions differently, and many questions rely on client self-reports, which can also vary and be subject to interpretation. The Controller's Office has worked closely with Navigation Center management to attempt to improve consistency of record-keeping and will continue to do so.

APPENDIX C: CLIENT SATISFACTION SURVEY RESPONSES

<i>What was most helpful about the Navigation Center?</i>			
Issue	Number of Responses	Percent	Sample Response
Staff/case management	17	38%	"The people who work here, they care!"
Housing	17	38%	"Housing, they put me on a list and I got a place"
Connection to benefits/resources	7	16%	"Getting through the hoops of GA"
Totality of the experience	6	13%	"The total program!"
Personal safety and a place to sleep	5	11%	"Housing, staying in a warm place, staying off the streets"
Speed of Services	4	9%	"Speed of housing process"
Safe storage of belongings	4	9%	"Being able to leave property in a safe place"
Showers/laundry/other amenities	3	7%	"Housing, food, showers, laundry, and restrooms"
No curfew/lenient rules	2	4%	"No curfew, come and go as you please"
<i>How was this different from other homeless services you've accessed, if applicable?</i>			
Issue	Number of Responses	Percent	Sample Response
Totality of experience	12	27%	"Completely different. They addressed all components for life, housing, and income."
Never Been in Another Shelter or N/A	10	22%	"Never accessed other shelter"
Being treated with dignity/respect	8	18%	"More kind, treat as a human, feel like at home"
Showers/laundry/other amenities	5	11%	"Showers, free laundry, food, TV room, animal runs, flowers and trees"
Curfew/Lenient rules	4	9%	"There's no curfew, & no requirement to sleep on campus"
Following through on services	4	9%	"they actually did what they said they would"
Services for Couples	3	7%	"Don't offer services to couples"
Atmosphere/campus feel	3	7%	"Very different. Homely, very comforting, no worries, very well kept (clean)"
Connection to housing	3	7%	"Actually got a place to live"
Speed of Services	2	4%	"y'all were faster"
Illegible	2	4%	n/a

<i>Did you have any negative experiences while here?</i>			
Issue	Number of Responses	Percent	Sample Response
No	24	53%	n/a
Issues with other clients	8	18%	"With clients not with staff"
blank/no comment/unexplained	6	13%	n/a
Theft/missing belongings	5	11%	"had some stuff stolen"
Negative staff interactions	2	4%	"[Certain staff] were very very rude. Having an attitude"
Lack of housing speed	1	2%	"Took a little too long to get housed but it taught me patience."
Lack of amenities	1	2%	"Frozen juice 75% of time. No mirrors in bathroom."
<i>Were there services you wanted that you didn't get?</i>			
Issue	Number of Responses	Percent	Sample Response
No	35	78%	"everything was included"
Accessing vision/medical/dental services	2	4%	"Yes, I didn't access the vision and medical, my fault"
Facetious responses	2	4%	(i.e., massage services)
Psychological services	1	2%	"psychological services"
ID	1	2%	
Furniture and move-in amenities	1	2%	"Ordering housing stuff"
Homeward Bound	1	2%	
Positive interactions with staff	1	2%	"Consistence with the night staff. They're not as compassionate/understanding"
Maybe	1	2%	