

PERSPECTIVES FROM THE NAVIGATION CENTER

Report #1: Understanding the Navigation Center's Operations

This is the **first** in a series of five reports from the San Francisco Controller's Office on the Navigation Center. The first four reports are based on interviews with clients, service providers and stakeholders. The fifth report will summarize the Navigation Center's performance based on quantitative outcomes and interview findings.

What is the Navigation Center?

The Navigation Center, which began operations in March 2015, is 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 stable income, 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 Navigation Center courtyard at 1950 Mission St.

An Alternative to the Traditional Shelter System

Clients we interviewed cited a number of reasons for rarely or never using shelter, including lack of accommodation for pets, possessions, and romantic partners (the "three P's"); previous negative experiences with shelter staff or fellow shelter residents; unavailability of beds in the shelter system; and a general sense that shelters do not lead to housing.

Program Successes

Interviewees had overwhelmingly positive things to report about the Navigation Center. We found a number of areas of program success, including: operational staff and case management, who were almost uniformly praised by clients for their warmth and commitment to their jobs; accommodation of the "three P's" of pets, partners, and possessions (though, notably, on-site programming for couples was identified as an ongoing "learning area"); the lenient program rules and lack of a curfew, which allow clients to "come and go" as they please; and the widespread acknowledgement that housing can and will be achieved if clients simply engage with their case managers, appointments, and service plans.

"When you've been on the streets for so long, you get defeated. But when we walked in, and there were those bright smiles, and the hugs, and the 'Come on over here—you hungry?' and 'You can do this!' and, 'Here, come take a shower—is there anything else you need?' Just the warmth...the warmth."

Program Challenges

When asked about program challenges, clients mostly reported relatively minor complaints about dorm life (such as inter-client theft and conflict). However, program staff and stakeholders have broader concerns about program scope, repeatedly noting the difficulties of serving clients whose substance addiction precludes active engagement in case management, as well as clients who routinely miss appointments and "shop" for housing exits. City decision-makers may wish to re-align program goals and target populations by considering alternatives for clients whose current barriers interfere with their ability to participate in the Navigation Center's rapid case management model.

"There is an adjustment that comes [for clients] from being on the street to the Navigation Center, and then another adjustment from here to housing. Some people are ready to launch—they're motivated, and the Navigation Center is the last piece of the puzzle for them. And for others, it's really overwhelming."

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REPORT #1: UNDERSTANDING THE NAVIGATION CENTER'S OPERATIONS

Introduction

This report analyzes the programmatic performance of the Navigation Center to date—that is, whether (and for whom) the Navigation Center is meeting its goals. While nearly all interviewees were quick to praise the program, many also identified opportunities for future improvement—including the identification of populations who are perhaps inappropriate or unprepared for the Navigation Center's current expectations of rapid-paced case management. We identify improving the fit between program goals and target population as an important area of future consideration for stakeholders. Direct quotes from interview participants are in italics.

Research Methodology

Our qualitative research consisted of 20 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Navigation Center stakeholders and clients. We conducted six interviews with representatives from collaborating City Departments (Human Services Agency, San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team/Department of Public Health, Mayor's Office of Housing Opportunity, Partnerships, & Engagement, Department of Public Works, and SFPD), three interviews with on-site service providers, and eleven interviews with Navigation Center clients (6 active clients, 5 clients—including one couple—who exited to permanent housing, and 1 client who was asked to leave the program). We analyzed the interviews by reviewing interview recordings to identify major themes common to multiple interviews.

Motivation, Target Population, and Program Goals

Evaluating the Navigation Center's performance first requires a clear understanding of its goals and objectives. Interviewees described the planning and design components of the Navigation Center, including the impact they sought to have on San Francisco's unsheltered homelessness problem.

Early History and Motivation

The idea for a "central receiving area" and access point for San Francisco's homeless population, to which the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD), Department of Public Works (DPW), or the San Francisco Homeless Outreach Team (SFHOT) 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. Conceived partly as a place for city employees to bring homeless individuals during the brutal cold of Philadelphia's winters, the Philadelphia center also aimed to connect clients, ideally overnight, to housing and benefits. San Francisco policy makers understood that overnight connection to benefits and housing would not be feasible here given the complexities of the homeless services and public welfare systems (nor was this ambitious goal achieved in Philadelphia). Still, policy-makers viewed Philadelphia's underlying program goal (i.e., 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, rapidly serving homeless residents who are otherwise unable or unwilling to use shelters.

Why Do the Unsheltered Avoid Shelters?

Navigation Center clients interviewed for this report supplied a wide range of reasons for why they never or no longer used shelters. These included (with quotes from clients in italics):

- Complaints about disrespectful or uninterested shelter staff who lacked compassion for clients and their circumstances (*“The staff didn’t give a f***...the staff and the clients did not mix”*).
- Complaints about inter-client theft and violence (*“As a single woman there, I did not feel safe”*).
- Shelter uncleanliness and pest infestations, especially bed bugs and lice (*“Sleeping on the sidewalk—it was cleaner. First time I ever caught lice, in my life, was in a shelter”*).
- Overcrowded and overbooked shelters, with nightly occupancy rates ranging from 94-100%¹ and upright chairs serving as the only overflow option (*“They always stay packed, always—even just for chairs”; “I’d rather be able to spread out on a sidewalk than be tortured in a chair all night”*).
- Inability to bring one’s pets (*“It’s hard to use shelters with three dogs”*).
- Inability to bring more than a few small personal belongings (*“It’s five shirts, five pair of pants, five pair of socks is all you can bring—and I’m sorry”*).
- Lack of accommodations for couples/partners (*“We did not want to be separated”*).
- A sense of embarrassment, stigma, and shame associated with shelter use (*“I was embarrassed to sleep there and go there for services, because then the workers would know I was homeless”*).
- Perhaps most notably, a recurring perception that shelters were a “dead-end road” with little or no hope of being connected to housing or more permanent accommodations (*“[Shelters] don’t do anything—you become complacent”; “I lost hope in the system”*).

“Never, never, never, never, never again—I’ll sleep on the street before I go back to a shelter.”

When asked if he used shelters, one client recapitulated this widespread disapproval in no uncertain terms: *“Never, never, never, never, never again—I’ll sleep on the street before I go back to a shelter.”*

Navigation Center Goals and Target Population

Over the course of our research, we found that stakeholders referred to program goals and objectives in often disparate ways.² Interviewees agreed that the underlying *vision* of rapid connection to benefits and housing for the otherwise-unserved was critical. However, uniformly operationalizing this vision into objective, measurable goals for defined target populations seemed not to have been accomplished yet. This section represents the Controller’s understanding of the goals and target populations as multiple stakeholders described them.

City leaders interviewed for this report understood and acknowledged these barriers to shelter use. They explained that the City designed the Navigation Center to fill an important gap in the City’s

¹ HSA Shelter Occupancy Report (29 Sept.); nine of 10 shelters in the report had occupancies above 94%, with only Providence (underutilized, stakeholders claimed, because of its distant location in the Bayview) offering 35 vacant beds for a 68% occupancy rate. Overall, the City’s shelter system had only 61 vacant beds for an average vacancy rate of 5.2%.

² We describe stakeholders’ differing goals, and the implications these goals have for operations, in the third report of this series.

homeless services system by lowering the entry threshold for clients facing housing and shelter use barriers:

- By accommodating clients with the “three P’s”—that is, pets, partners, and possessions—and by eliminating program curfews, the Navigation Center would eliminate the *material* barriers to shelter entry and service engagement.
- By working with clients still actively engaged in substance use, or lacking the basic “life skills” needed to succeed in housing, the Navigation Center would eliminate the *psychological* barriers to shelter entry and service engagement.
- Targeting entire homeless encampments for the Navigation Center was not an original program goal during the program’s design phase. Nevertheless, encampments seemed to provide important social ties for their residents, and stakeholders realized that these would need to be accommodated if psychological barriers to shelter use were to be fully addressed.

Once a partner agency referred an unsheltered individual to the Navigation Center, on-site case managers would begin assisting the client with rapid connections to housing, income, and benefits. One

Interviewees consistently identified stable exits from the Navigation Center as the most important outcome.

interviewee described the Navigation Center model as a blend of several existing City services: chiefly, Project Homeless Connect (regular events in which homeless service providers gather in one location to provide a one-stop shop for clients), stabilization placements (such as those offered by SFHOT), and Resource Centers (where clients can meet basic, daily needs like showers and laundry). Importantly, however, interviewees consistently identified stable exits from the Navigation Center as the most

important outcome. Precise definitions and understandings of “stable exits” seem to vary in important ways across program stakeholders, with critical implications for program operations.

One HSA representative described the Navigation Center program goals in the following, broad terms: “Being able to bring people in who have formed some sort of bond when on the street—that’s the critical factor.” This bond might be with a pet, or with important possessions, or with a partner, or with friends from an encampment—but regardless, if it prevented an individual from using shelters in San Francisco, it would be accommodated at the Navigation Center. Rather than a radical innovation in service provision, this stakeholder instead framed the Navigation Center as a “missing puzzle piece” in the City’s existing portfolio.

Program Successes: What’s Working at the Navigation Center?

Stakeholders and clients we interviewed report that the Navigation Center has become immensely popular among the City’s unsheltered population. Positive word-of-mouth on the street has placed the program in high demand. We found that the reasons for the Navigation Center’s popularity represent programmatic responses to the very reasons clients reported disliking traditional shelter.

Dedicated Staff and Case Management Motivate Clients

Clients almost uniformly identified Navigation Center operations staff and case managers as the most positive and memorable aspect of the program. When asked about her first impression of the Navigation Center, one interviewee, a longtime encampment resident now housed through the HSA master-lease program, replied without hesitation that it was “*the staff—the warm welcome we received. The non-judgment—you could really see it in their eyes. They were eager and ready to help us.*” Clients

commonly used adjectives such as “genuine,” “dedicated,” and “warm” to describe Navigation Center workers at all levels, a positivity that many identified as central to a generally comfortable and safe campus atmosphere.

Even clients who had been previously disillusioned by homeless services recognized that Navigation Center workers were different. Explained one client,

“When you’ve been on the streets for so long, you get defeated. But when we walked in, and there were those bright smiles, and the hugs, and the ‘Come on over here—you hungry?’ and ‘You can do this!’ and, ‘Here, come take a shower—is there anything else you need?’ Just the warmth...the warmth.”

Said another in response to his initial skepticism that Navigation Center workers would be able to help him, *“I’ll cop to it—I was wrong.”*

Unsurprisingly, clients did raise some complaints about individual staff members, but because of the general positivity they felt towards the program, they were quick to forgive and cast aside specific negative interactions. Fostering a culture of positivity, encouragement, and support among program workers seems critical for the successful engagement of hard-to-serve clients at the Navigation Center. To accomplish this, Navigation Center interviewees suggested hiring seasoned staff who have experience working together in homeless services.

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Accommodating the “Three P’s” Enables Pursuit of Housing Goals

Every interviewee reported that lowering the material thresholds to shelter has been arguably the Navigation Center’s most pioneering accomplishment. Clients with dogs were especially cognizant of this accommodation, with one stating outright, *“If I hadn’t been able to bring [my dog], I wouldn’t be here.”* Though other shelters in the city allow licensed service or companion animals, none allow unlicensed animals; faced with the choice, many choose the streets over surrendering their pets. Similarly, clients with numerous belongings spoke appreciatively of the Department of Public Works’ (DPW) services in safely transporting them to campus; they readily contrasted the Navigation Center to their experiences in encampments, in which at least one person would always need to stay behind to

safeguard everyone’s possessions. Knowing that their pets and possessions were safe and accounted for afford clients relief from anxiety and an ability to focus on case plans and housing goals, a nearly impossible task while on the streets.

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Working with couples has been another pioneering area for the Navigation Center. Typical homeless services do not accommodate couples, so there was little in the way of “best practices” for staff to draw upon. To balance the need for individual confidentiality and privacy with the couples’ desire to navigate a common program exit, partners are

each assigned a separate case manager but allowed to sleep together in the dorms. Each person receives individual support regarding housing options, and then case managers encourage the client to talk with his/her partner about the choices.

Interviewees suggested that the success of this programmatic arrangement for couples has been somewhat mixed. From a case management perspective, the National Association of Social Workers mandates individual confidentiality, yet couples often have conflicting ideas about ideal placements, leaving case managers struggling to arrange exits.³ Interviewees also note that placement options for couples are generally limited in San Francisco. Operationally, while clients in relationships noted how small accommodations (such as allowing them to push their beds together at night) were memorable and meaningful to them, their dorm mates frequently complained that their conversations regularly kept them awake at night. And while couples do often insist on staying together at program intake, case managers and program stakeholders noted instances of potentially serious relationship violence that they felt they could do little to formally address. Therefore, while accommodating couples seems to be critical for the initial engagement of San Francisco's unsheltered population, best practices in serving couples are still being developed and tested.

Lenient Program Structure and Environment Provides the “Comforts of Home”

Interview participants at all levels commended the unique physical layout and aesthetic of the Navigation Center campus. The common courtyard, art on the walls, and the planter boxes with trees and flowers and vegetables all contribute to an atmosphere that is distinctly different from traditional shelters. More importantly, freedom from the rigid rules and structure of traditional shelters, such as curfews, lights-out times, and meal schedules, afford a feeling of relaxation and relief from anxiety—in short, enjoyment of the basic *“comforts of home”*—that many clients hadn't experienced for years. Indeed, *“being able to come and go as you please”* was offered, verbatim, by several clients as an example of what they like most about the program.

This lack of formal program structure comes with a trade-off—an ongoing problem with clients' missing their appointments—but it has been important for retaining clients who are otherwise disengaged from homeless services. One stakeholder tied the lenient program structure to positive effects for the surrounding Mission neighborhood, which does not experience the typical negative spillovers of homeless services operations (for example, forcing all clients out to the street early in the morning, or forcing them to line up on the sidewalk for beds or meals in the evening).

The Navigation Center Reignites a Hope for Housing

Perhaps the most important factor underlying the Navigation Center's popularity, cited by clients and stakeholders alike, is that it has reignited hope for housing among the unsheltered homeless in San Francisco. Interviewees from SFHOT and SFPD explained that individuals who have been unsheltered for years often feel so overwhelmed by their perceived obstacles to housing that they give up trying to access it. Many clients remain on the streets simply because they see no connection between shelters and housing.

The Navigation Center has begun to change this conversation. SFHOT interviewees confirmed that, in the months since the program's opening, encampment residents have come to associate the Navigation Center with housing, and that they want to be referred to the program for this exact reason. For many clients, this growing, positive reputation has contributed to an implicit expectation for success upon

³ *The Controller's Office will examine quantitative program exit data in the fifth and final installment of this report series.*

program entry. One former client, an encampment resident for many years, stated, *“If you lose your housing opportunity, that’s on you. Because these people set it up to where it’s a real simple program.”*

Because of the perceived efficacy of the program among unsheltered San Franciscans, the Navigation Center has created unintended consequences (for example, encampments relocating from one area to another, and/or swelling in size, in anticipation of SFHOT outreach and referrals. We address these unintended consequences in greater detail in the second report of this series.

Program Challenges: What Needs Work at the Navigation Center?

The Navigation Center’s popularity notwithstanding, clients and stakeholders alike readily identified several areas for future program improvement. This section highlights the major, recurring areas of complaint about program-level operations, with a specific focus on client sub-populations that pose recurring challenges.

Serving Heavily Addicted Clients Poses Major Challenges

The most apparent program challenge identified during our interviews is how to serve clients whose substance addictions preclude active engagement in case management. Generally, clients are not excluded from Navigation Center admission because of known substance addictions, and so long as their continuing use remains safe and discreet, it is unofficially tolerated on site. This policy creates at least two important trade-offs for program operations and case management.

Engagement versus Exits

If one of the Navigation Center’s goals is to lower the threshold for service engagement among unsheltered individuals, then tolerating substance addiction is necessary. Heavy drug use is often a reason individuals avoid shelters to begin with, so formally excluding these individuals from the Navigation Center would continue to marginalize a large segment of the homeless community. However, clients and stakeholders alike expressed frustration with individuals whose severe addictions interfere with navigating the housing process. They argued that limited Navigation Center beds should be reserved only for those clients who are ready to focus on quick and stable exits to housing. One former substance-using client asked, *“Do you want to continue to let them drain you of energy that could be better placed with someone that actually wants move forward with their life?”*

Individual versus Community Rights

One client, an active injection drug user, argued that seriously addicted individuals should be treated with compassion and tolerance: *“As much as you don’t want to do it, you do it...if someone’s using*

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because they’re gonna be sick [i.e., go through withdrawal] if they don’t, then they’re not trying to get high--they’re trying to get well.” Program policies that formally or informally tolerate these behaviors, however, may come at the direct expense of other community members who are actively trying to remain drug-free. To this point, other clients we interviewed asserted their preference for an entirely substance-free program. This tension has already surfaced in the form of client-initiated, substance-free dorm policies, as described below. Accommodating the unique needs of heavy drug users while also respecting the polarizing emotions

drug use elicits in others is a serious challenge.

Despite the frustrations, however, our interviews suggest that, operationally, the Navigation Center is handling this issue appropriately. Clients receive multiple chances to address problem behaviors, but as soon as their use poses any threat to the community, they are asked to leave. Moreover, if and when this occurs, the Program Director, Operations Director, and case manager meet to offer the client an exit strategy that is as stable as possible (such as formal residential treatment). The management team makes decisions on a case-by-case basis rather than by following formulaic rules about substance use. Even so, program staff stated that, if the Navigation Center is to continue working with this population, they should be better equipped to do so with training and expert support, including:

- Harm-reduction-oriented, substance abuse psycho-education and support groups.
- An on-site clinician or physician who is licensed and trained to provide treatment.

Rapidly Housing Disengaged Clients Raises Program Questions

Individuals facing personal problems and barriers vary in terms of their readiness and willingness to change, and expecting rapid, lasting change from individuals who are unprepared to embrace it may be an ineffective service strategy.⁴ The issue of whether and how to engage clients who are unprepared for the housing process was a common, recurring interview theme. One member of a couple who had exited to housing stated:

“As long as you do what you gotta do, these people are here to help you. We weren’t here a month, and we got our housing like that [snaps]... But now, if you’re out there lollygagging, if you’re out there smoking crack, if you ain’t trying to save no money, if you ain’t trying to do something different—then you’re just wasting your time, and you’re wasting their time. 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.”

On the one hand, case managers and SFHOT representatives understand that certain clients are simply not prepared for the fast-paced case management expected at the Navigation Center, and that serving the hardest-to-serve requires patience and multiple chances.

On the other hand, program staff consistently cited missed appointments and general lack of engagement as the biggest programmatic challenge to achieving more and quicker stable exits. Interviewees questioned the policy of indefinitely accommodating clients who are disengaged from case management, and though lack of engagement was not a formal reason for terminating case management at the time of these interviews, the Navigation Center team was seriously contemplating a move in that direction.

Two potential improvements merit discussion. First, stakeholders discussed, with some disagreement, whether discontinuing clients for lack of engagement would be inconsistent with a “Housing First” philosophy. “Housing First” has historically meant that that the provision of permanent housing should not be contingent upon prior successful completion of substance abuse, mental health, or other treatment. However, in San Francisco, different funding sources (City, State, and/or Federal) mandate a variety of different pre-requisites before clients can move in. For

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⁴ Norcross, J. C., Krebs, P. M. and Prochaska, J. O. (2011), *Stages of change*. *J. Clin. Psychol.*, 67: 143-154.

example, clients must frequently obtain a photo ID, obtain a steady source of income, provide service animal or domestic partnership documentation, etc., before they can be housed. Many clients are unprepared to engage with case management to complete these necessary prerequisites, meaning they are unprepared to access “Housing First” as the system currently defines it. City policy makers may wish to consider whether it is possible to allocate housing units with the least demanding pre-requisites to those clients who have the most difficulty engaging at the Navigation Center.

Second, at a program level, one client and multiple Navigation Center staff members suggested that the program begin offering a “life skills” refresher course, or some other program, aimed at teaching severely unprepared clients the basics of living inside again (basic hygienic standards, respect for one’s neighbors, etc.). This will be an important issue for the program to address moving forward. Explained one case manager:

“Not everybody is ready for housing, even if they really want housing. Everyone will say they want housing—it seems bizarre to say you don’t want to be housed when you’re homeless, and you’re suffering...Even though housing is stabilizing, I also feel like there is an adjustment that comes [for clients] from being on the street to the Navigation Center, and then another adjustment from here to housing. Some people are ready to launch—they’re motivated, and the [Navigation Center] is the last piece of the puzzle for them. And for others, it’s really overwhelming.”

Clients who “Shop for Housing” Slow Program Exits

One unexpected source of frustration for case managers has been an emerging “housing shopping” problem, in which clients decline offers for a particular exit to wait for something better. Often, when the second choice is then perceived to be less desirable than the first after all, clients will decline that as well, only to find that their first option is no longer available.

Reasons for this behavior vary by client, but a common theme has to do with clients’ concerns about their sobriety. Most of the housing exits available to clients are in the Tenderloin and other areas of San Francisco that struggle with pervasive drug-use problems; clients trying to avoid drugs may feel compelled to decline the offer:

“Who cares if there’s a roof! You’re gonna be living among people that are dangerous, and you’re gonna be pushed into using...if I feel it’s an unsafe place, I’ll tell these people, ‘You can keep it--I’d rather go live in a tent.’”

However, other interviewees feel strongly that any “housing shopping” contradicts program goals of rapid, efficient housing and should not be tolerated at all. Moving forward, stakeholders could improve operations by developing a comprehensive policy that minimizes the inefficient behavior of “shopping for housing” while also honoring legitimate concerns about client personal safety and well-being. As an example, one case manager reported having informally adopted a policy whereby clients are allowed to decline one housing offer before losing access to housing exits altogether.

Campus Safety is an Isolated, Periodic Concern

Currently, Operations staff asks clients to check all weapons in at the front desk, on an honor-system basis, when they are admitted to the program. Operations staff reported that, on a few occasions, this system failed to uncover potentially dangerous weapons, such as large knives. Though it appears the issue has been isolated in occurrence and has not endangered clients’ safety, more stringent security measures (like periodic bag searches) might become necessary if the problem resurfaces. However, security measures of this sort could impact clients’ engagement with the program if they feel that they are losing the benefit of more lenient program rules.

Congregate Dorm Living Creates Conflict

Finally, client interviewees offered a number of minor complaints about isolated episodes, as occur in most programs. However, certain complaints surfaced several times and may merit additional consideration by program staff to improve ongoing operations at the Navigation Center.

Dorm theft

Five of the twelve clients interviewed for this report stated that they had been the victim of theft in the dorms. While they recognized that living in close quarters with strangers would expose them to this risk, they did feel that the program lacked consequences for stealing.

Dorm life

Though Operations staff typically accommodates dorm-switching requests, dorm culture and inter-client friction remain ongoing challenges for residents.

- A few clients noted an “*unfair sense of ownership*” that certain long-standing clients of the program tend to assume. Thanks to the decision of individual residents, for example, several clients noted that entire dorms had been declared “substance free,” with little input from other residents.
- More than half of clients who did not have a partner at the Navigation Center (six of ten interviewees) complained about couples being housed in the same dorm as single clients. They recommended a “couples’ dorm” be set aside for clients who have partners.
- Two male-to-female transgender women were interviewed for this report, and both alluded to exclusion and discrimination by other clients on the basis of their gender identity. Though they did not register any formal complaints and complemented staff for honoring their dorm-switching requests, they did suggest the creation of an LGBTQ dorm.

Conclusion

The City designed the Navigation Center to fill a gap in San Francisco’s homeless services portfolio by lowering the material and psychological engagement thresholds for shelter. Interviewees consistently identified the Navigation Center’s unique atmosphere, lenient program rules, and dedicated, talented staff as critical components to meeting that goal, and positive reviews of the Navigation Center were far more common in our interviews than negative comments.

Nevertheless, while the Navigation Center appears to be meeting its stated goals, key questions about appropriate populations for participation in the Navigation Center are emerging. Stakeholders should continue to monitor the program’s unstable exits, and should be prepared to think critically about policy alternatives should the behavioral patterns among unstably exited clients suggest the need for a systematically different approach. We discuss this issue in greater detail in the fourth report in this series.

At the same time, stakeholders at all levels should remember that the Navigation Center serves a population of individuals who can be highly disorganized and unpredictable. Adopting rigid, rules-based policies for program exclusion or termination would undermine the flexibility and patience required to encourage lasting behavioral change in this population, and thus alienate a potentially large segment of San Francisco’s unsheltered residents. Absent an additional strategy to accommodate these individuals, the San Francisco encampment problem would persist.