

Homelessness Assistance Audit Series: Coordination of the City's Homelessness Assistance Efforts



Objective

The objective of this audit was to determine if the City coordinates homelessness assistance efforts to achieve desired outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Due to the complex nature of the topic, we are evaluating the City's homelessness assistance efforts in a series of audits. This report is the second in the series. The first report, presented in November 2017, analyzed how City ordinances align with the City's homelessness assistance efforts. Future reports are planned to analyze how the City allocates resources to address homelessness, and the outcomes of these efforts.

Background

At least 20 City departments have programs, activities, or services that are affected by homelessness. Generally, department efforts can be classified as directly associating people experiencing homelessness, efforts that indirectly assist them, or are related to the impacts of homelessness.

What We Found

The City only recently started to coordinate its homelessness assistance efforts and does not have a dedicated position or group assigned to this task. This results in negative effects for the City and missed opportunities to provide homelessness assistance.

Need for Coordination

Many City departments are involved with the issue of homelessness. This includes departments with efforts directly or indirectly associated with homelessness assistance and efforts associated with the community impacts of homelessness. Exhibit 1 shows how department efforts frequently fall into more than one category.

Some Coordination Efforts

The City has made some effort to coordinate, but these efforts are limited in scope or lack resources. For example, the Homeless Outreach Street Team is mainly focused on public safety issues downtown. The City Manager recently created a team to develop a Homelessness Action Plan, but this team lacks dedicated resources.

Effects of Lack of Coordination

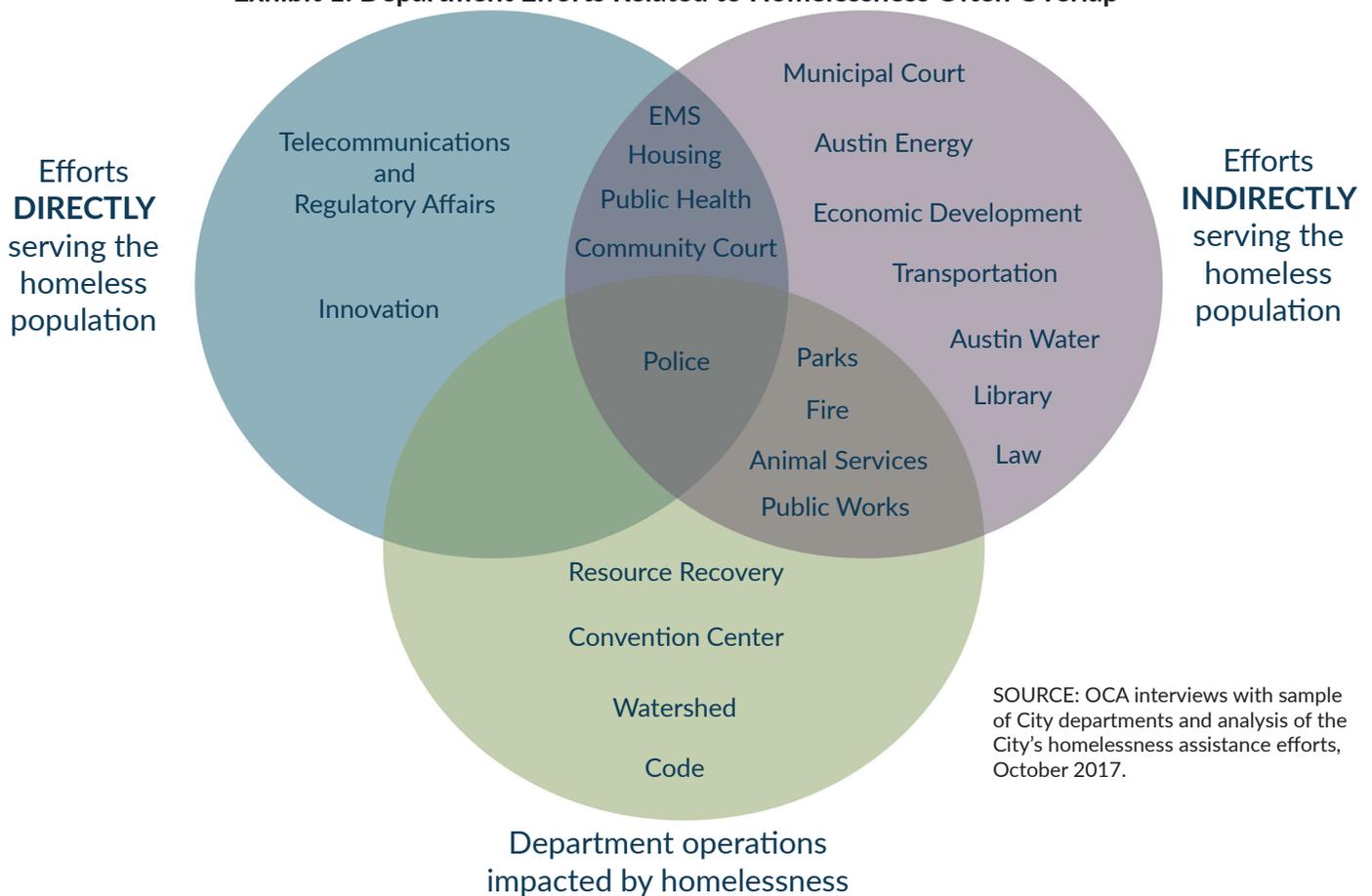
The lack of a coordinated effort to deal with homelessness results in inefficiencies, ineffectiveness, and the potential to miss opportunities to aid people experiencing homelessness. Examples include:

- Multiple departments that manage contracts for homelessness assistance,
- Alley cleaning efforts that result in water containing human waste entering downtown creeks,
- Missed opportunity to co-locate City social workers to better reach people experiencing homelessness, and
- Missed opportunities to identify and help people at risk of becoming homeless.

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Exhibit 1: Department Efforts Related to Homelessness Often Overlap



What We Recommend

The City Manager should designate a position within the City whose primary responsibility is coordinating the homelessness assistance efforts in Austin. This position should:

- Develop a strategic plan to address homelessness, and
- Coordinate City department's efforts related to homelessness.