



Downtown Business Partnerships and Homeless Outreach Initiatives

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Executive Summary

For those who experience homelessness, the decision to shelter in shopfront entryways is often a choice made under extremely difficult life circumstances. Downtown Madison should be a place where every person can thrive, and downtown shopfront owners can support that vision through partnerships with homeless outreach programs. Through these efforts, downtown business owners carry through on good neighbor policies to help those experiencing homelessness find alternative shelter, and paths to permanent housing.

This report reviews downtown organization strategies that seek fundamental solutions for homelessness through partnerships with various support services. Washington DC proves a useful demonstration of downtown organizations capable of initiatives to address homelessness because of their unique positions in policy advocacy, mediation, and service provision. Innovative downtown Washington BIDs like Downtown DC and the Golden Triangle, have successfully joined outreach efforts and formed a tightly integrated solution to transition those experiencing homelessness into permanent shelter. Addressing homelessness is a complex issue, but through partnerships between downtown organizations and homeless outreach organizations, cities can maintain their downtowns as a place where every person can thrive and the rights of all individuals and property owners are respected.

Part One: Guidance on Homelessness from the International Downtown Association

The International Downtown Association (IDA), stated in 2017 that there are only a handful of truly universal issues that permeate downtowns across the globe. One of those issues is homelessness, a challenge encountered in downtowns regardless of region, culture, or language.¹ The IDA advocates four homelessness principles that inspire engaged and active participation:

Housing First – Advocate for “Housing First” solutions with strong ties to wrap-around services. Housing First prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness in recognition that people need basic necessities like food and a place to live before attending to anything less critical, such as getting a job, budgeting properly, or attending to substance use issues.

Partnerships – Collaborate with high-quality social services providers, public agencies, and local organizations that have the capacity to evaluate social services needs of clients with the goal of moving the individual into solutions services, such as permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing.

Stakeholder Balance – Balance the needs of the individuals experiencing homelessness with the expectations of businesses, residents, property owners and visitors to downtown through regular communication.

Data, Programs and Policies – Invest in meaningful, data-driven and comprehensive policies, programs and services that assist the ultimate goal of meeting the social service and housing needs of those experiencing homelessness.

¹ International Downtown Association, “Homelessness in Urban Districts,” *2017 Top Issues Council Report*, 2017. https://downtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IDA_ExecutiveSummary_Homelessness_2017.2.pdf

Academic Literature: Business Improvement Districts and Homeless Outreach Programs

Granted, downtown associations and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) cannot all align precisely with the IDA's guidance on homelessness. Instead, Wonhyung Lee, in the 2017 article in the *Journal of Place Management and Development*, points out that downtown organization's approach toward homelessness falls along a cultural framing continuum where, at one end, the homeless are framed as the core problem and at the other end, homelessness is understood as the result of core systemic social failings.² Based on this spectrum, several implications for downtown organizations' approach to homelessness are revealed.

At the far end of the spectrum, the impacts of displacement on homeless people are outside the responsibility of downtown organizations. An example of this scenario could take place when a local municipal governing body legally adopts anti-camping, anti-loitering, and nighttime curfews ordinances, and the downtown organization would have limited ability to intercede in the impact that local regulations have on the displacement of homeless people. In this scenario, a downtown organization might employ private security guards to help enforce municipal policies.

At the other end of the spectrum, the impacts of displacement on homeless people fall largely within the responsibility of downtown organizations. In this scenario, downtown organizations work to solve the failings of economic, health care, and housing systems understood as core to the problem to address homelessness. However, a downtown organization may lack all the ability, resources, and buy-in from all stakeholders, to address these larger structural challenges.

² Wonhyung Lee, "Downtown Management and Homelessness: the Versatile Roles of Business Improvement Districts," *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol 11, No. 4, 2018.
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPM-D-06-2017-0052/full/html>

Nevertheless, these downtown organizations might pursue policies to support homeless outreach and provide services that address larger structural challenges. To do so, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) could integrate the IDA's four homelessness principles into their work and civic engagement. BIDs are oftentimes instrumental to ensure services so that the homeless may meet their basic needs without traveling far. For example, a Business Improvement District (BID), may provide the homeless with transitional employment and promotion opportunities, job training, and social services. A BID may provide direct services through on-site access to services to help people out of homelessness and toward steady employment and housing, and address hunger with on-site soup kitchens. BIDs have also formed successful partnerships with homeless outreach service providers as is the case in Washington, DC.

Granted, a BID may have limited access to resources to support the homeless and may face difficulty developing a long-term approach to reduce homelessness. However, several effective homeless outreach programs have taken shape in Washington, DC, and highlight strategies that BIDs can pursue over the long-term to address local homelessness.

Wonhyung Lee's 2017 article in the *Journal of Place Management and Development*, traced the historical arc in Washington, DC where business community stakeholders, social service providers, and legal advocates helped downtown BIDs form long-term solutions to homelessness. Through interviews with these stakeholders, Lee highlighted three themes that underscored the versatile role BIDs play in homelessness solutions: 1) advocacy, 2) mediation, and 3) service provision:

Advocacy: Lee found that because BIDs represent the interests of property and business owners, they add unique support and political leverage to local homeless service providers and community stakeholders. Lee revealed that after local property and business owners advocated

for greater homeless service provision, local political leaders increased their support to secure local homeless support services.

For example, Lee found that when BID members added their voices to support a housing-first approach, local political leaders increased their advocacy efforts around implementing permanent supportive housing. In practice, these BIDs advocated for homeless service providers and community stakeholders through position papers, public statements, and coalition building among members to advocate for homeless solutions. In sum, Lee found that public positions by BID leaders in Washington, DC developed long-term homeless solutions strategies between BID members and local nonprofit, services, and advocacy organizations to provide greater homelessness solutions.

Mediation: BIDs are an essential partner organization to mediate interests between business, public, government, and non-profits. BIDs take on the role of a mediator to develop policies that satisfy members' requests and partnerships with other downtown organizations. For example, take situations that involve a homeless person's belongings or encampments, which challenge the property interests of business owners, the rights of homeless persons, and the interests of the public. In complex situations like these, Lee found that Washington, DC BIDs entered collaborative discussions around the central issue of homeless and developed solutions through consultations between downtown entities like government, legal advocates, and social service agencies.

In addition, Lee found that BIDs can serve in an important role to help educate business owners on the rights of the homeless and form a collaborative approach among the business owner's to pursue best-practice actions when it comes to responding to the homeless who may occupy space, or sleep, in storefront entryways. For example, one downtown Washington, DC BID, hosted a monthly meeting between their homeless outreach team and local officers to share

information about the neighborhood condition and update each other on how their unit had made progress along a coordinated homeless outreach strategy. Not only did these meetings serve an important role to coordinate the efforts between local law enforcement and BID outreach teams, but they provided BID members a way to assess how well individuals who currently were experiencing homelessness were transitioning into permanent housing was progressing.

Service provision: BIDs can provide direct services to the homeless. BIDs like Downtown DC provide the support for a drop-in center where the homeless can visit. In addition, Downtown DC, and the Golden Triangle BID in downtown Washington, DC, provide direct services to the homeless through their partnership with Pathways to Housing DC. This homeless outreach program employs clinically trained outreach workers who work to get to know the homeless population in the neighborhood and connect them with needed services.

In addition, downtown Washington, DC BIDs employ safety/hospitality and maintenance employees (SAMs), and a Homeless Outreach Service Team (HOST) who are personnel specially trained to address human services and are trained by Pathways to Housing DC, law enforcement, and other social workers from the city to work closely with homeless individuals.³ The BID's homeless outreach teams also build relationships with people in need of various health and social services to provide assessments, direct resources, intervention, or referrals.⁴ Often, the outreach team helps homeless people obtain social security cards, benefits, or certain kinds of mental health services.

³ "51 Homeless Individuals Secured Housing through BID and Pathways to Housing DC," *DowntownDC*. <https://www.downtowndc.org/news/51-homeless-individuals-secured-housing-through-bid-and-pathways-to-housing-dc/>

⁴ DowntownDC, "Pathways to Housing DC," *Community Service Providers*, <https://www.downtowndc.org/go/pathways-to-housing-dc/>

Part Two: Case Studies on Homeless Outreach

Case Study: Indianapolis

The 2017 International Downtown Association (IDA) case studies highlight partnerships developed between downtown business advocacy organizations and homeless outreach programs. Downtown Indy, Inc. (DII) pursued a “Total Civic Response” in 2016 to coordinate efforts between the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department, local service providers, and leaders from the Coalition of Homelessness Intervention and Prevention (CHIP).⁵ Through this coalition, DII partnered with CHIP to create “Street Reach Indy,” an initiative to raise awareness around homelessness and provide an alternative to panhandling through direct contributions that fund professional outreach efforts.

Case Study: San Luis Obispo

The second IDA case study highlighted how downtown organizations introduce solutions to address issues of homelessness, like panhandling, through coalition building. The IDA highlighted the San Luis Obispo downtown business district, Downtown San Luis Obispo, which partnered with local government, service providers, and the public, to place “Giving Station” donation meters throughout downtown to encourage the public to donate at the meters as an alternative to panhandling.⁶ The IDA highlighted how downtown stakeholders developed this alternative as a direct contribution to fund professional outreach efforts. More broadly, these

⁵ International Downtown Association, “Homelessness in Urban Districts,” *2017 Top Issues Council Report*, pp. 26 2017. https://downtown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/IDA_ExecutiveSummary_Homelessness_2017.2.pdf

⁶ “Make Change Count,” *City of San Luis Obispo*, <https://www.slocity.org/living/neighborhood/homelessness/make-change-count>

campaigns allow downtown associations to communicate realistic expectations of complex homelessness issues with stakeholders to build long-term support for directed giving campaigns.

Case Study: Golden Triangle BID Homeless Outreach

The Golden Triangle BID Outreach program began in 1999 to provide meaningful, supportive services to individuals experiencing homelessness through a housing first model.⁷ The Golden Triangle BID follows best practices to meet people where they are to help them into permanent housing. Since 1999, the Golden Triangle BID has helped place more than 200 individuals into permanent housing.

The Golden Triangle BID works with Pathways to Housing DC to provide outreach and build relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness and link them to social services and permanent supportive housing.⁸ The Golden Triangle BID Homeless Outreach team meets with those experiencing homelessness and connects these individuals with medical services, psychiatric services, and other assistance. In addition, the outreach team connects these homeless individuals to agencies like the Department of Motor Vehicles to ensure that individuals have licenses to apply for services, or to other state agencies that provide birth certificates, social security benefits, and Medicare.

Outreach workers balance the needs of the community through respect for both personal and property rights. Golden Triangle BID provides property owners, business owners, and the public an informational guide on best practices to interact with a person experiencing homelessness in different scenarios. For example, the Golden Triangle BID provides recommendations on when to call their homeless outreach team compared to events requiring

⁷ “Homeless Services in the Golden Triangle,” *Golden Triangle Business Improvement District*, <https://goldentriangledc.com/what-we-do/homeless-outreach/>

⁸ “What We Do,” *Pathways to Housing DC*, <https://pathwaystohousingdc.org/what-we-do/homeless-street-outreach/>

police intervention. The informational guide provides recommendations to the public on how best to respond to a person experiencing homelessness in cases such as severe weather, or if someone is panhandling, blocking a private space, establishing shelter encampments, or accumulating unattended belongings, or even if a member of the public observes public urination and defecation.⁹ In all these scenarios, the Golden Triangle BID spells out best practices to respect human dignity for all and assists their outreach team whenever possible. These guides are collected in Appendix One.

Conclusion

For those who experience homelessness, the decision to shelter on private property is often a choice made under extremely difficult life circumstances. Downtown Madison should be a place where every person can thrive, and this report reviewed downtown organization strategies that seek fundamental solutions for homelessness through partnerships with various support services.

Washington BIDs like Downtown DC and the Golden Triangle, have successfully joined outreach efforts and formed a tightly integrated solution to transition those experiencing homelessness into permanent shelter. Addressing homelessness is a complex issue, but through partnerships between downtown organizations and homeless outreach organizations, cities can foster downtowns that are a place where every person can thrive and the rights of all individuals and property owners are respected.

⁹ “What To Do When: Guide to Homeless Outreach in the Golden Triangle,” *Golden Triangle Business Improvement District*, https://goldentriangledc.com/_files/docs/goldentriangle_homelessnessguide.pdf

Appendix One

A) Homeless Services in the Golden Triangle

HOMELESSNESS SERVICES IN THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE.

The Golden Triangle BID operates a Homeless Outreach Program through [Pathways to Housing DC](#), which supports a housing first model to end homelessness.

Over the last decade, through its partnership with Pathways to Housing DC, the Golden Triangle BID has invested more than \$2 million to support persons experiencing homelessness. More than 200 individuals have been placed in permanent supportive housing because of these efforts.

The program's Homeless Outreach Team works with individuals experiencing homelessness in the Golden Triangle to connect them to critical social services. The team helps people find housing, seek treatment, and obtain vital government issued documents needed to secure social security, Medicaid, and other services. By building individual relationships and establishing creative community partnerships, the program eliminates barriers to services and serves as a model for effectively breaking the cycle of homelessness. On average, the Golden Triangle's Homeless Outreach Program ends homelessness for at least one person per month.

In 2018, Golden Triangle BID and DowntownDC BID were honored by Pathways to Housing for helping to end chronic homelessness for 125 people in one year.

Read Nicolas' story [here](#) and Randall's story [here](#).

TRI-TALK: SAM LAVINE TALKS ABOUT ENDING HOMELESSNESS AS A BID OUTREACH WORKER

Since 2014, the Golden Triangle BID has partnered with Pathways to Housing DC to bring life-changing resources to individuals experiencing homelessness. Sam Lavine is a member of the Golden Triangle's Homeless Outreach team, working face-to-face with those in need of service. We talked to Sam about his work helping to end homelessness.

1. What does Homeless Outreach entail on a day-to-day basis?

Typically, I begin checking in on clients and introducing myself to potential new clients in the Golden Triangle area. This may include distributing water and clothing. I also do case management with clients, ensuring they have their vital documents, benefits, and connecting them to core service agencies that offer healthcare services, mental health support, and housing case management under one roof. Every day presents its own breakthroughs, disappointments, and sometimes slow progress. Much of the day is spent traveling around the Golden Triangle area finding and hoping to find those that are in need of services. It is important to be patient when building rapport with clients, keeping in mind that it may take many months for them to be receptive to services, and possibly even more time to be able to take advantage of a housing opportunity. For some, it may take years between their first engagement with an outreach specialist and getting those keys to their own apartment.

2. Tell us a little about the "Housing First" model.

Housing First means there are no conditions that have to be met before the person moves in. Housing is provided in apartments that are spread throughout the District, with each client holding their own lease. Using "scattered sites," we are able to give each client choice in where they would like to live, helping to foster a sense of home and self-determination. Stable, supportive housing is merely the first step towards reintegrating into their community, rebuilding family relationships, reconnecting with their faith fellowships, and experiencing an improvement in overall physical health and psychological well-being. So, while the model is simple, the Housing First program is very complex and requires dedicated staff to coordinate all aspects — including outreach, housing, healthcare, treatment, and case management — of the program in order for the people we serve to be successful in their recoveries.

3. Why is this type of service so important in cities?

This work is important because it involves serving those who may not otherwise be open to seeking out assistance without some support. It means a lot to me because it provides an opportunity to build meaningful relationships. Through getting to know my clients, a sense of familiarity and trust is established, and from that point, my clients and I work together to achieve attainable goals. It is incredibly challenging, but also more rewarding than any work I've done before. I work to build trust with those experiencing homelessness first by helping to meet some of their basic needs — such as food, clothing, showers, laundry, transportation and identification. Then, I partner with each individual to access housing, employment, medical care, mental health care, substance abuse treatment and other services. The approach is important because it is not about maintaining homelessness; it is about ending homelessness for those living on the streets of DC. The goal of our outreach program is to connect people living on the street with housing and the life-saving services they need as quickly as possible.



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**This TriTalk article was originally published in the August 2019 issue of the Golden Triangle Newsletter.*