

Department of Homeless Services and Housing
Summary Report for Phase I – Discovery and Community Engagement

Background

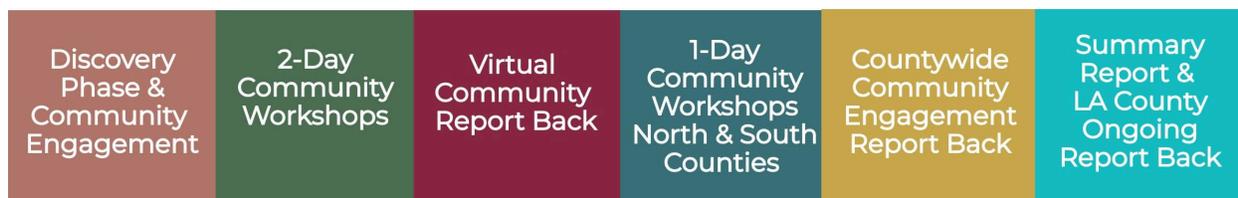
Change Well Project (CWP) was contracted to support the new County Department of Homeless Services & Housing’s (HSH) commitment to community members, providers, and ensure public accountability.

CWP designed a community engagement process that is inclusive, accessible, and grounded in the real-world expertise of those who interact with the homeless system of care every day—whether they're providing services or seeking them.

CWP’s role is to facilitate processes where community members and providers alike can problem-solve and design solutions for HSH to consider for implementation. CWP is focused on ensuring that input can be shared honestly, insight can rise to the surface, and consensus can be built at every level of engagement.

This is a countywide effort to bring people together—across unincorporated areas and cities, various sectors, and lived experiences—to help design a department reflective of the actual needs of people who need services and housing, as well as the people working to assist unhoused members of our community. We know the knowledge to build a responsive and effective department already exists in our communities. This process involves surfacing existing knowledge, identifying where barriers still exist, shaping clear and practical solutions, and building consensus to ensure a shared understanding and agreement on what emerges.

The engagement plan is structured in phases, starting with discovery and alignment, then moving into community-led design, and concluding with opportunities to refine and strengthen the recommendations before they are finalized.



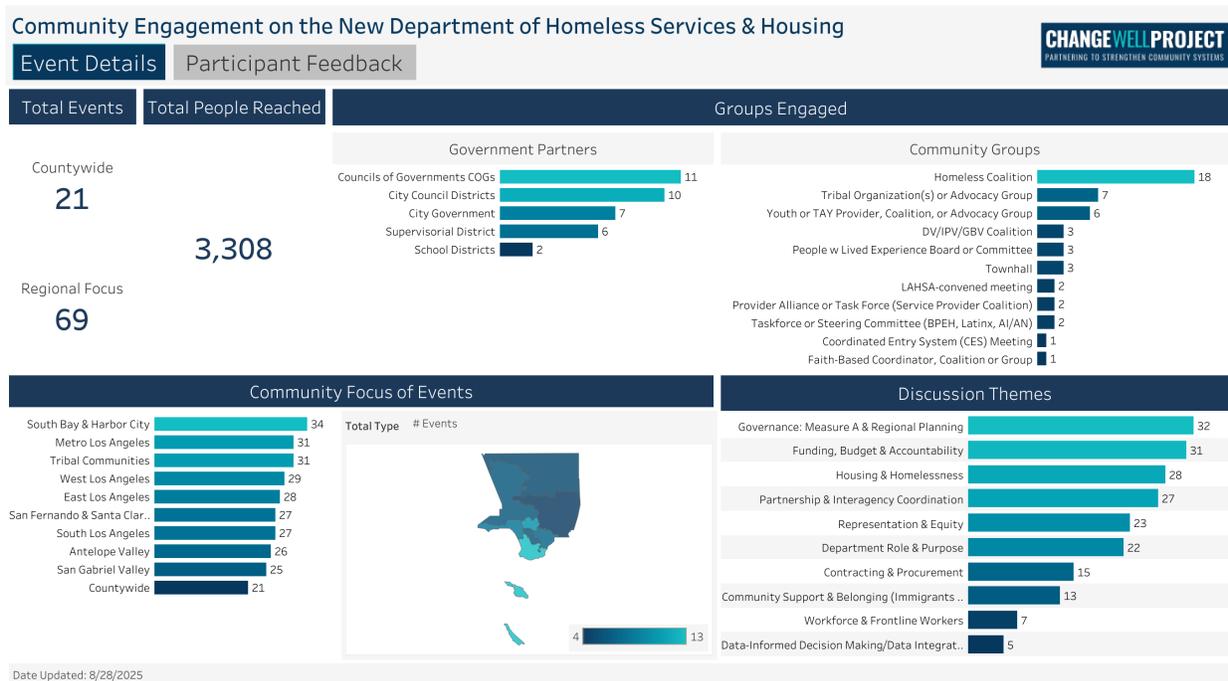
Discovery & Community Engagement

This phase was centered on deep learning and discovery—taking stock of the work already underway so we are not retracing steps or repeating questions that have been answered through previous community engagements. It was also about recognizing who needed to be at the table and starting early conversations to shape the process. During this time, we focused on aligning with ongoing efforts, strengthening the relationships that already existed, and

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making sure the insights that were contributed in past conversations and processes were not only acknowledged but also actively woven into the foundation of what came next. This report focuses on what we accomplished and what we learned during the first phase of the engagement. To help visualize CWP’s accomplishments, the following [Community Engagement Dashboard](#) was developed.



The community engagement events for the HSH reached 3,308 people through various venues, including sixty-nine (69) regional-specific and twenty-one (21) countywide events. These included one-on-one meetings, small and medium-sized group presentations, and large-capacity town hall events. The events engaged a broad range of communities within Los Angeles County and covered all eight (8) Service Planning Areas (SPAs).

To reach a broad audience in a condensed time frame, the focus was on leveraging the networks within existing coalitions, cross-sector tables, and population-focused or affinity groups, such as Homeless Coalitions, DV/IPV/GBV coalitions, LA Emissary, and the Lived Experience Advisory Board (LEAB).

Additionally, government partners, including Councils of Governments (COGs), City of Los Angeles Council Districts, Supervisorial Districts, city governments, school districts, and Tribal communities, were also included.

This strategy successfully reached organizations deeply involved in the rehousing system, including those partnering in coalitions and affinity groups.

Overall Challenges in Phase 1

Timing: Although the CWP contract was executed within a few weeks, it was challenging to meet with many groups, as summer vacations were ramping up and some groups had summer recesses or already full agendas. In response, we coordinated individual or small group presentations with many individuals and groups and hosted special sessions for groups outside of their regularly scheduled meetings or during the summer recess.

Service provider capacity: Service providers shared concerns about the timing of their involvement in shaping the new department. While they value community engagement, many expressed that they are already being asked to provide input across multiple spaces, which feels overwhelming on top of budget cuts, staff layoffs, and the urgent responsibility of preventing program participants from falling into homelessness.

Burnout and duplication: Multiple community engagements on similar topics are happening simultaneously, managed by different consultants. In response, we collaborated, cross-promoted, and explained how various community engagement initiatives are interconnected.

Community confusion: Community members were unsure of the relationship between the various efforts. In response, we collaborated, cross-promoted, and clearly explained how these initiatives connect.

Feedback on the Community Engagement Plan

During each meeting, verbal feedback was solicited on the engagement plan, plan logistics were reviewed, a nomination process was discussed, and the top priorities for each community group were identified.

Stakeholders raised concerns that the HSH implementation timeline may not align with community engagement, risking perceptions of tokenism. They also cited barriers to participation, including inadequate compensation, scheduling conflicts for Transitional Age Youth, and safety concerns for immigrant communities. Additionally, participants noted that they had participated in and provided substantial feedback and recommendations in past County engagements yet still lacked clarity on how community input informed decision-making, which contributed to mistrust.

How the Plan was Adapted to be Responsive to Feedback

In response to the main and pressing concern raised about the timeline for community engagement, Change Well Project partnered with the new Department to host monthly town halls starting in July. These town halls are specifically designed to gather community feedback on items that are on an accelerated timeline.

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- July Town Hall – Change Well Project and HSH cohosted its first town hall, attracting over 1600 registered participants and more than 600 attendees. The event focused on collecting feedback about the functions and structure of the new department. CWP used two methods to gather data on the initial version of the new department’s organizational structure: (1) we led eleven virtual small group discussions, asking two questions to over 450 participants, and (2) we distributed a brief survey with the same questions, which received 125 responses.

We asked both small group discussion and survey participants to review the functional org chart released on February 28, 2025, and then respond to questions about what functions were missing and how HSH should organize its work. [See the summary report here.](#)

- August Town Hall- The second town hall, held on August 20, 2025, by the Department of Homeless Services and Housing (HSH) and Change Well Project, focused on the existing Housing for Health (HFH) Supportive Housing and/or Services Master Agreement (SHSMA). Three hundred and eighty-seven (387) people registered for the event, with two hundred and forty-five attending. HSH provided an overview of how the SHSMA functions, why it is an effective model, and how HSH plans to leverage this model as it establishes the new department. We facilitated ten (10) breakout groups to have discussions about issues and concerns from existing HFH Providers and barriers to accessing the SHSMA for non-contracted providers. [See the summary report here.](#)

Other Adaptations to the Engagement Plan

- CWP ensured that stipends for lived experts were sufficient, and we later transitioned engagements from in-person to virtual formats to make them more accessible.
- CWP is collaborating with trusted messengers who work with immigrant communities to schedule virtual events as an alternative to in-person sessions. We are responding to the clear feedback to create a parallel, safe space where immigrant community members can participate in a virtual space given the concerns regarding in-person events.
- CWP is collaborating with the new department to develop public-facing dashboards and publicly available reports, thereby closing the loop and demonstrating how community feedback informs decision-making.
- We recognized the need to ensure representation by individuals that understand the specific community needs in unincorporated areas of the County. We are ensuring representation by service providers that provide services in unincorporated areas. Additionally, with the collaboration of CEO-HI, we are inviting additional local representatives from unincorporated areas to the two-day workshops.
- CWP reviewed previous reports and recommendations and created a summary of high-level themes raised through the excellent work of working groups such as Black People Experiencing Homelessness, LATINX, and American Indian/Alaska Native. This

summary directly informs Phase II of this engagement plan, generating questions for each region to develop solutions. [See the summary report here.](#)

Community Priorities and Common Discussion Themes

Many of the themes discussed with community groups and coalitions during this phase were also transformed into design questions for the next stage of engagement. Highlights include:

- Community Support & Belonging (Immigrants & Underserved Populations) (**13**)
- Contracting & Procurement (**15**)
- Data-Informed Decision Making / Data Integration (**5**)
- Department Role & Purpose (**22**)
- Funding, Budget & Accountability (**31**)
- Housing & Homelessness (**28**)
- Governance: Measure A & Regional Planning (**32**)
- Partnership & Interagency Coordination (**26**)
- Representation & Equity (**23**)
- Workforce & Frontline Workers (**7**)

New Department Formation & Structure:

- Prevent repeating the known issues of previous systems in the new department.
- Ensure that there are clear goals, defined operations, and transparent success metrics for the new department.
- Focus on building a geographical presence and adopting a systems approach that goes beyond individual adults and is tailored for subpopulations such as TAY and families. This includes staffing that reflects the populations it serves.
 - Ensuring that diverse voices are included in the planning and decision-making processes.

Oversight and Accountability:

- There was an emphasis on transparency and accountability in contracting, resource allocation, and regular reporting on outcomes, including the number of people housed and the results of different programs and different regions.

Coordination and Collaboration:

- A major concern centered on communication clarity, specifically regarding how HSH will operate and the roles of various system partners.
- There is a desire to prevent duplication of effort and to encourage collaboration among the County, unincorporated areas, cities, and various service providers. By working

together more effectively, the system can avoid redundant work and save resources. This might include sharing client data (with proper privacy safeguards), coordinating outreach efforts, and aligning funding sources. Currently, information isn't flowing smoothly, which results in duplicated efforts or, worse, people being overlooked. The importance of regular updates, transparent reporting, and easy access to information was emphasized.

- Cross-system, cross-agency, cross-jurisdictional collaboration was emphasized repeatedly.
- System partners emphasized the need to establish or rebuild authentic partnerships, transforming the current culture toward collaboration by engaging and aligning efforts with other municipalities, unincorporated areas, governing bodies, councils of governments, and tribal governments.
- There is an ongoing tension between the desire for a more coordinated regional approach to address homelessness and the need to preserve local control and responsiveness. This arises in the context of how the new county department will interact with cities and sub-regions, as well as how funding will be distributed.

Recognizing Unique Vulnerabilities and the Need for Culturally Responsive Services:

- Community members explicitly mentioned the importance of population-tailored approaches. Recognizing these differences means developing outreach strategies, housing options, and support services that are culturally sensitive, trauma-informed, and tailored to the specific needs of each group. This involves understanding cultural norms, values, and beliefs, as well as the unique barriers individuals face when accessing care, and incorporating these into service delivery. For example, HSH should recognize and understand Tribal sovereignty, culture, and the associated principles. It's a step toward a more equitable, responsive, and culturally respectful care for Tribal members. Populations discussed included:
 - Tribal members
 - Foster Youth
 - Immigrant Communities
 - People living with substance use disorders and mental health disorders
 - Veterans
 - Individuals Living in RVs
 - Single Women

Equity and Inclusion

Focusing on equity and inclusion requires removing systemic barriers, amplifying the voices of marginalized individuals, and building a system that is fair, just, and responsive to the needs of all people experiencing homelessness.

- **Addressing Systemic Disparities** requires looking at policies, practices, and funding models to ensure equitable access and outcomes.
- **Equity in Funding and Resource Allocation** includes addressing challenges in the Local Solutions Fund process, such as informing the community more widely (i.e., not just ECHRA and the Homeless Policy Deputies) through an input process that is fair and equitable and ensuring access to funding for smaller organizations providing services.

Participant Survey Feedback

Survey Results Dashboard

In addition to group discussions, CWP also surveyed meeting participants to gather demographic information and asked respondents to rank their top priorities.

As of 08/26/2025, there have been 161 responses.



Top Priorities

Rated as a top priority in five (5) of eight (8) Service Planning Areas.

- “Strategies the new county department should use to reduce racial disparities among people experiencing homelessness” was rated among the top two priorities in five of the eight Service Planning Areas.

Rated as a top priority in four (4) of eight (8) Service Planning Areas.

- “The structure of the new county department” was rated as among the top two priorities in four out of eight Service Planning Areas.

Rated as a top priority in three (3) of eight (8) Service Planning Areas.

- Contracting & payment processes for the new county department were rated as among the top two priorities in three of eight Service Planning Areas.

Conclusion

Phase I showcased both the broad and deep community interest in shaping the Department of Homeless Services & Housing. Through 69 regional-specific and 21 Countywide engagements reaching 3,308 people—and 161 survey responses as of August 26, 2025—there was a consistent call for clarity of purpose, transparent accountability, equitable resource distribution, and genuine partnership across jurisdictions and communities. Participants urged HSH to avoid recreating past system challenges, to establish a visible geographic presence across all SPAs, and to promote culturally responsive, trauma-informed approaches—especially for Tribal members, TAY, immigrants, single women, veterans, people with substance-use disorders and mental illness, and residents living in recreational vehicles (RV).

A call for urgency: providers and community members are navigating real capacity constraints and engagement fatigue. In response, CWP adapted—shifting some sessions to virtual formats, increasing stipends for lived-experience partners, and launching monthly town halls with HSH leadership to gather input on items moving on accelerated timelines. CWP is committed to “closing the loop” with public-facing dashboards and plain-language updates that show how input drives decisions.

The work ahead is clear. Phase II will work to translate the themes from this engagement into actionable design decisions: a functional organizational structure with clear roles and responsibilities; a procurement and payment approach that is fair, timely and includes advances, and is accessible to smaller providers; and a data-sharing framework that protects privacy while enabling coordinated outreach, accurate equity metrics, and real-time course correction. Achieving this will require co-design with cities, COGs, Tribal governments, service

providers, labor, people with lived experience, and county partners—anchored in shared outcomes and mutual accountability.

Immediate next steps (Phase II)

- **Publish the Phase I Engagement Summary and Dashboard:** Provide a clear account of what was heard during engagement, outline the next steps, and demonstrate how community feedback will directly inform decisions and shape the direction of the department.
- **Co-design sessions on priority topics:** Strategies to reduce disparities, design the structure of HSH and its mission to deliver services and housing and create a meaningful and sustainable feedback mechanism to ensure programs and process improvements evolve often and regularly, when needed.
- **Participation pathways:** Schedule mixed-format sessions (virtual + in-person) with targeted outreach to underrepresented communities; maintain stipends for lived-experience partners.
- **Feedback loop:** After each decision, publish a concise “What we heard / What we changed” report on the HSH website.

By carrying forward these commitments—with clarity, humility, and shared accountability—the new HSH can build a coordinated, transparent, and equitable system that helps more people in Los Angeles County exit homelessness more quickly and with dignity.