

Alissa Parrish: Alright, good morning, everyone, I think we are going to go ahead and get started, it's our last morning of NHSDC. We're here to talk about using data to move racial equity conversations forward. I think we can go to the next slide?

My name is Alissa Parrish, I use she/her pronouns. I am with ICF, and I'm going to kick it over to Brooke real quick to introduce herself.

Brooke Abrams: Hi, everyone, my name is Brooke Abrams. I am with Abt Associates, and my pronouns are she/her/hers. It's great to see all of you. And just a reminder, unless you are, like, eating, and drinking, please have your masks on. Thank you.

Alissa Parrish: Alright, we have slides this morning. Alright, our learning objectives this morning is we're going to understand the essential elements of conducting a racial equity analysis. We are going to learn how to interpret data to identify racial disparities, and separate that out from a potential data quality, or collection issues that could be impacting the interpretation of that data.

And then we're going to determine how to utilize racial equity data to inform program and system decisions, so using that data that we have to make informed decisions; and then have continuous quality improvement processes in place to make sure that we're doing that on an ongoing basis. The next slide, please.

Agenda, we're going to talk through conducting a race equity analysis, addressing again, those data quality and collection issues that could be impacting the way in which we are analyzing that information. We're going to spend a little bit of time defining community, and who's involved in that process; so incorporating, I think, what we would consider nontraditional partners.

Using a race equity analysis to inform community conversations and our decision making processes, those ongoing monitoring processes, which are so important to make sure that we are doing what we think we are doing. And then if we get to it, we are going to get to a hands-on exercise with you all in the room to interrogate some data.

Brooke Abrams: Alright, so before we get into conducting a racial equity analysis, I think it's really important to just center what we mean by data equity, and name that as a core value with, throughout the racial equity analysis. So when we say data equity, we're identifying that as sources have biases at each step of the data lifecycle.

So we're talking from the beginning of funding, motivations for the data to project analysis, interpretation, communication of that data. And then dissemination through it, dissemination of that data, right, making sure that our communities, and our stakeholders, and those who are most impacted have ownership of that data, and are then able to use that to impact change in their community as they, as seen fit from persons most impacted.

So what does that mean, right? It involves authentic, meaningful interrogation of the data. Being able to use inclusive processes, and dismantling racism, and other "isms," right; like, we think of sexism, ableism, a bunch of other "isms" that, sort of, combine together to contribute to inequities. Right?

I think what's really important about data equity is that we recognize that knowledge is a social

construct, and that we can honor multiple realities, experiences, and truths as vigorous, right, as valuable, as valid data. And so as we're, sort of, walking through the racial equity analysis, we want to ask ourselves, "How are we operationalizing measures for, that account for a population-centered differences?"

How are we incorporating individuals, persons with lived experiences, community, to understand different contexts with which different populations navigate the homelessness response system? Can you move to the next slide?

Alright so as you design your race equity analysis approach, there are going to be multiple strategies that you might want to raise up, really, just making sure that those strategies are outcome oriented, and evaluated for success. Right, and success as also, sort of, co-identified by the community, community stakeholders, right, those most impacted.

Those strategies should also be very targeted. And then throughout the analysis as we analyze the data that we have, right, recognizing that all data is imperfect whether it's, quantitative, qualitative, right? Together, we can leverage different data sources. We can leverage different data approaches to be able to have a comprehensive analysis for the project.

And then incorporating diverse perspectives, of course, really, how can the priority populations, and other researchers implement a culturally responsive equity analysis, right? And all of those purposes, the format of that, the language of the tools that you might imply, the instrument that's used in the research, and the evaluation, making sure that those are informed by, and developed by a diverse group of stakeholders.

Alright, so what are some of the keys of ineffective race equity analysis? Right, so identifying stakeholders is one of the first steps of an effective race equity analysis. Who do you have at the table and who is missing, right? Is your stakeholder group diverse enough to recognize that there are key persons missing at the table to help inform the development of that race equity analysis, right?

How are you meaningfully engaging the project's priorities or target populations in defining the purpose, the goal, the objectives of the project, right? All of these are very important. Being able to identify and document racial inequities, right, that can be used, sort of, as a landscape assessment to see where folks are situated in your system.

How folks are accessing the homelessness response system, and what services they're accessing, right? And then using that information, that data to then have more conversations about how to approach those things, right, how to approach next steps.

And that leads into the process of examining local, cultural, and historical contexts, right. Different populations have different accessibility to whether it's resources; or they have different histories in the ways in which they have access to the system. Right, all of those contexts are going to be very important for providing services, and helping folks most impacted navigate those systems.

Of course, considering adverse impacts, right, being able to advance equitable impacts as defined by those most impacted, and community stakeholders, right. And then, being able to examine alternative, alternatives or improvements, right, this is really important. Because as we go through the race equity analysis, and as you're developing your approach, you're going to realize that there

might need to be some flexibility.

You might not have certain data sets that you can leverage, right. You might have imperfect data. There might be other ways. There are other ways that you can leverage qualitative data and we'll talk about that a little bit later on. But we can leverage qualitative data and ask the ways in which folks are impacted, ask users, sort of, what issues that they're facing, right?

All of those are meaningful measures, meaningful data that we can use as alternatives. And then being able to ensure viability, and sustainability of that, what happens once the data is collected, and analyzed, right? What are the next steps?

How are we being transparent with communities once we have that information? And then how do we identify success indicators? In the Equity Demos, the HUD SNAPS Equity Demo, one of the key questions that we asked folks, that we asked community coaches, and community leads was, "What do you define success as your community, in your community?" Right?

We know that we have, like, the, the standard ones, like exits to permanent housing and, and a lot of those, sort of, questions or services being accessed, right. But is there a different, sort of, defining metric that communities, and community stakeholders are seeing as relevant as well? We should be lifting those questions up.

Alright, so again, I think it's important to define racial, or Racial Equity Impact Analysis. So we are defining that as a process to explore how different racial and ethnic groups could be impacted by proposed policies, procedures, processes, or even funding, right, given that we know that particular marginalized populations, and individuals are situated differently within the homelessness response system.

So parts of a Racial Equity Impact Analysis include inclusion, right; so again, who is being left out of the analysis, right? Are there ways to include these groups through other data sources or approaches? If there aren't ways to identify or to include them, right, are we being transparent in the ways that they are excluded?

And being able to then develop a pathway forward to speak to that exclusion, right? Can we cite any other known work on excluded populations, and then acknowledge those final products? And using that as a way forward to, of course, correct in the future as we continue doing this work.

When we're talking about data, what, how can data be collected in a way that considers how biases can be baked into data? Right, can we plan how the diverse group of stakeholders and persons most impacted can collaborate across project entities to be able to to define which data should be collected?

Right, how it should be applied, working to develop and utilize strategies, tools, and models that lead to better outcomes for those most impacted. Just, really, recognizing the story behind the data, we talked about that as, sort of, understanding these cultural, historical, environmental contexts with which people live, and thrive, and work in their environment.

All of those things are very important to raise up, again, developing those strategies that are going to be most relevant. Determining and, sort of, defining that impact from the analysis, you have the

evaluation component, and then, sort of, of course, correcting, refining that to see where there are any gaps.

Who is being excluded? Are there other folks we need to bring to the table? Right, this is an iterative process as you continue with your evaluation and your analysis.

So you can approach your Racial Equity Impact Analysis via a racial equity theory of change. So this racial equity theory of change, again, was developed by the HUD SNAPS Equity Demo. And what they're doing is, sort of, using if/then statements to reimagine a new environment, a different environment for those who are experiencing homelessness.

So what they're saying is if communities can use a racial equity lens to examine disproportionality in the state of homelessness in their communities, then we can learn to reduce systemic racism in the homelessness response system by using culturally responsive data evaluation approaches to identify that unmet housing needs and those services.

If communities participate in supported discussions and learning opportunities; I'll add diverse, supported discussions, co-created, diverse, supported discussions by using persons with lived expertise and partners so that we can center equity during the data collection analysis, and the interpretation phase.

If we can do that, then we can understand what necessary skills, resources, or decision making bodies should be present so that we can work towards a more racially equitable homelessness response system that will result in a more community-led, informed culture, and solutions in the community.

Alissa Parrish: So we talk about what kind of data do we need? I think Fran and William touched on this a little bit yesterday morning during their plenary. It started with the CoC Race Equity Analysis Tool; I think we've all seen it.

It's a great starting point, right, if this is the first time your community is really looking at your data in this way with this lens. It relies on the PIT Count data. I think we all know; I don't need to sit here and tell you the limitations that we have with the PIT Count data. But that's what it relies on.

It also relies on community comparison data with census and poverty rates, so it does give you a snapshot to show who was counted in your PIT Count on that night as experiencing homelessness compared to your census and poverty rates.

Again, it's a really great starting point but we talk about incorporating that with other data that you already have available to you. So that is one piece of information that you can take in this race equity analysis. I think you're also looking at your comprehensive HMIS data. So who is being served in your homeless response system?

I think, equally as important is who, and Brooke mentioned this, too; like, similarly to, like, who is not at your table, who is not in your HMIS system? So not only who is disproportionately overrepresented in your system, but who is underrepresented?

And I think often we have taken that at face value of we recognized, okay, this specific

demographic or this specific population is not showing up in our homeless response system. They must not need our services, right? That's the assumption that we're making. But unless at the community level, we have really interrogated that, and made sure that that, that is truly the reason.

That it's not because, maybe there are some additional barriers or some lack of supports to accessing our homeless response system. We can't and shouldn't make that assumption about folks who are underrepresented in our system.

And then this, how are we –? I'm sorry, going back. How are we serving them or not? So this isn't talking about performance of the people that we are serving, we are talking about the performance of our system. So we are looking at measures such as length of stay, how long are they experiencing homelessness?

I mean, you know these. They are the Stella P, length of time experiencing homelessness, exits to permanent housing, returns to our homeless system. I think those are the big three when it comes to Stella P. But we can also look at more performance related metrics, depending on how you use your HMIS, specifically related to Coordinated Entry.

Like, how many referrals does it take for someone to get housed? Is there a difference in that depending on if we break that out by race or demographics? Other measures –? That length of time between acceptance into a permanent housing project and actually housing move-in date, right. Are there distinct differences between how folks are navigating through that, or how we're helping them navigate through that?

So looking at performance based data, not just, like, who we're serving, because as we have talked about before, we already know that there's a disproportionate amount of Black and brown folks accessing our system. It's then, how we are serving them once they are in our system.

So defining who, who we need at this table, right, I think I mentioned this yesterday during a session. This isn't just about, like, who is at your table but who helped build your table? So making sure that there are two decision making power, but also as we looked at, floods of new, new funding opportunities coming into communities this year, what does community look like?

What does partner mean? Who is getting that funding in your community? So incorporating the voices of people lived experience, our Black, indigenous, and other people of color, but also those organizations who have trusted working relationships with minoritized populations.

So reaching out to local chapters, we have NAACP, the Urban League, all of these different local chapters that have built relationships with the minoritized populations over time. And I'm specifically saying and intentionally saying minoritized, not minority. Because we are the ones who minoritize them over time.

And local leaders from these organizations that connect you to local faith based groups, I think, in a lot of minoritized communities, the faith is really a big piece, and a center point of their community; so leveraging those relationships, social service agencies like the Boys and Girls Club, and other members of our underserved populations.

So how, right? Reaching new partners can be difficult. So I think it really is trying to figure out this

mutually beneficial relationship, not just, like, what can you do for me? But alternatively, what can I do for you? I think we've started having these conversations as we look at CoCs trying to connect more with their Tribal Nations, right?

This isn't just about what, what can you do for me, but what can I also do for you? So accessing mailing lists, asking to post notices to their websites, and alternatively, you offering to post some of their stuff on your website. Asking to co-host events, all of those different pieces feel more like a collaboration and a true partnership, and again, like a dynamic back and forth of helping each other.

Brooke Abrams: So as we think about, sort of, the different components of our analyses and our different approaches, we know that we can approach these via quant and qualitative data. Both alone are imperfect, right, but we do know that analysis is limited if it only uses quantitative data.

So we know that quantitative data can highlight different, sort of, disproportionalities, right, but oftentimes qualitative data is a lot, helps us be a lot more clear about the ways in which folks are impacted. Why are those experiences, sort of, playing out the way that they do when they're trying to access services, right?

So it understands the context with which things are occurring across particular populations as they are navigating through the homelessness response system.

We can also ask, like, what is the client experience? Right, though, that's, sort of, an example of a qualitative measure. When, as we're using, sort of, qualitative data, we can also employ things like focus groups, interviews, different long form surveys, all of those are examples of qualitative instruments.

And, sort of, throughout the design of the qualitative approach and that, the instrument development, we want to be asking, are those interviews and focus groups being conducted in a way that centers racial equity, and leads with community voice, and perspectives, in intersecting identities, right? What do clients say that they need to end homelessness?

Right, that's so important and, I think, something that's often overlooked. A lot of times folks think that we have, like, these answers, and a lot of ways we are collaborating in that, in that respect. But asking something so simple as, "What do you say that you need to end homelessness," is so powerful, and also a form of qualitative data that can be collected.

And all, what folks say that they need different across multiple intersecting identities, right, race, ethnicity, race, ethnicity, gender, right, national origin, et cetera? So the next slide, really, just talks about different qualitative indicators.

One of those are experience measures or housing stability measures, again, through the, the HUD SNAPS Equity Demo. These are some of the core qualitative indicators that communities can have access to.

Experience measures are those that are self-reported experiences that hopefully help us to understand experiences of homelessness across BIPOC populations: so satisfaction with experience, level of household well-being, cultural alignment and appropriateness of services, et cetera.

And when we're thinking about housing stability measures, we're trying to track increases in housing stability across BIPOC populations, right? So was the individual connected to services and were those services culturally appropriate? Was the individual connected to mainstream benefits? Have they been connected to employment? All of those things are really going to be essential for housing stability.

This is really important in an approach that I know a lot of other, like, TA providers have used in, in trying to understand where power sits within structures, right. So in the equity data analysis, we're sampling equitably, but within existing resources, right, we don't want to burden communities.

So again, operating off of that understanding that data need not be perfect to start centering equity, right? This is, sort of, where that comes from, and making sure that if we are needing to leverage other data sources, that we're not doing that at the expense of the community, right. Really trying to use what we have and being transparent about what is there and what is not there.

Data reliability without discounting small sample sizes, right, this is so important because we know that data is imperfect. And oftentimes we don't have large sample sizes. Some might think that the interpretation or the power of that interpretation isn't really enough to, sort of, make any generalizations or take any important information from that.

That is just, simply not true, we can use those experiences, and that small end to be able to help us understand the who's, the how's, the to what extents, right. They're all important pieces of information throughout the data collection process.

And then providing opportunities to find out why people opt out of providing data, that's so important. Because we know we have a lot of missingness a lot of unknowns, right? Trying to talk to those people and understand why that is, and maybe in the, like, during the next time, our processes can account for that and be more sensitive to that.

When we're talking about shifting power, this is also super important across community stakeholders, and data coaches, and users, right? We want to acknowledge the value of decentralized power in decision making. Asking where across the team or where across the community stakeholders, where does that power lie?

Right, determining what that power is used to accomplish, and exploring where power is unequal, and what factors are causing this. That's really important, particularly in decision making bodies when it comes time to understanding what data folks are using, how data is being collected, right? All just, sort of, runs full circle in the data analysis.

Alissa Parrish: Alright, so I am not doing a data quality session at this NHSDC, but I still get to talk about data quality. So this is my shameless plug for a comprehensive data quality management program. There is a great resource on the HUD Exchange about this.

We're not just talking about a plan, right, we're talking about the whole comprehensive process to make sure that you have enforcement. You have buy-in, you have incentives. You have folks that understand clear roles and responsibilities for their part in ensuring high data quality.

I think we all know that data quality in HMIS is never going to be perfect but that doesn't mean that

we can't start with what we have and continue to improve upon that over time. So some of these common issues, I think, you all know this way more than I do at this point:

The timeliness of data entry, length of stay, night by night shelters, not exiting people so they're just staying in our system forever and driving up our length of time. This unknown exit destination, I remember, this was a huge pain point with large shelters. That probably still is a huge pain point with large shelters.

And that can feel really daunting, right, because the reality is that in mass shelters, folks leave, and they don't come back. They don't have a responsibility to tell you where they're going, they may not even know where they're going. Right, so even if you can look at decreasing that unknown exit destination by 2%, like, that's 2% more information you had about destinations than you did today, right?

So realistic benchmarks, that's a huge part of your data quality management program. Setting those benchmarks realistically, reviewing those over time, that continuous quality improvement cycle when it comes to data quality as well. And being able to look at those separate from your race equity analysis.

So pinning, pinpointing those in your data sets, and being able to pull those out: I did a race equity analysis for a large community, they had a large data set. And in my previous life, I was very used to being able to account for those in the system itself before pulling the data out.

And I had forgotten that, like, I can't do that in this because I don't have access, direct access to the system. So I'm getting a data set after the fact, after it's pulled out of the system. And initially analyzed it and realize, like, there is some really funky stuff going on here.

And then if this is true, there's, like, some really significant disparities in the data sets. Which we know is true, but it just felt really off. So then started looking at approximate date homelessness started, like, my favorite data element, and realized that the system had been set up in such a way that you couldn't necessarily account for that.

There wasn't conditional logic, right, so we had end users entering in dates, like, I don't know, 11/20/31, or whatever. It was throwing off everything. And so being able to account for those in the data set and find those before you actually analyze it was something that could help.

I'm not going to be able to account for all of that, especially because I'm, like, third removed from the data in this community, specifically. But it was really helpful to be able to account for what I could account for. And then, oops, sorry, one more thing on this.

William spoke to this yesterday, and he specifically used Alaska Balance of State as his example. Which, I'm going to build on that because I used to support Alaska Balance of State in my previous life, they did break down race a little bit further. So you can't, not have the universal data element of race, right?

And we are bound by the census options but we have changed that language over time, which is great. And we will continue to monitor that and look at ways in which we can improve upon that. But Alaska, specifically, had an additional question about Native, Native corporation.

So there's 13 recognized Native corporations across the state. That question was an additional question for Alaska systems, specifically. And that was captured like a universal data element; so on all the clients that were served and seen in that system.

And then we could do additional, custom local analysis to understand of Alaskan, American-Indian Alaskan Natives, because that is a combined race category, who is also identifying with a Native corporation, and which Native corporations?

So that's just an example of additional race data, or cultural data, or heritage data. I'm not sure what you want to call that, but Native corporation data specifically in Alaska, to be able to break that down further.

And then CQI, my favorite thing, continuous quality improvement, so we implement the change. We monitor it, go over time, we report on it, we analyze it, all within an inclusive, and diverse, with inclusive, and diverse stakeholders. And then we improve upon that.

We know that race equity analysis is not a one-time thing. We didn't, racism did not come about overnight, we are not going to solve it overnight. And so this has to be an ongoing process. And it's not going to be a quick fix, either. And what will work today may not work tomorrow, so we're continuously improving upon this process.

And when something new shows up in the data, we need to pivot, kind of, like we did with the pandemic. When the pandemic hit, vulnerability changed. We pivoted as we needed to, and we'll have to pivot again.

Brooke Abrams: So here, we just want to recognize that, sort of, data analysis, and evaluation is a, it is an iterative process of, sort of, learning, sharing, and informing, right. So as we engage with the community, really, being able to understand what the data is actually demonstrating, right; collecting different types of data and being able to identify those solutions.

Being able to also revise investments based off of this racial equity analysis. Alissa talked about pivoting, this is a really core place where that can take place, right? So what program types are meeting those goals and those outcomes for any population? And what agencies are servicing that population most effectively, right?

And then incorporating equity into funding processes, and contracting, developing specific equity goals that are going to include, are going to include, sort of, what we learn from that equity impact analysis into funding processes based off of that current data, right. Requiring programs to report on that equity and or outcomes that are disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and other intersections that are very relevant according to persons most impacted.

Alissa Parrish: Okay, so we're going to introduce Austin ECHO at this point. These are not the folks that are here with us this morning to present, but that is okay. They could introduce themselves. I mean, it's the right organization, it's just different humans.

So I don't know if we can pull up Preston and Summer? And I think I saw Felice join as well.

Preston Petty: Absolutely, and I'm going to slowly talk for a bit, just to make sure that you all can hear me, and all of the audio, and whatnot is set up okay there.

Alissa Parrish: It's perfect. Thank you, Preston.

Preston Petty: Fantastic. Well, everyone, yes, despite what you might think, my name is not Claire. I am Preston Petty, and I am the Coordinated Entry Program Director at ECHO over here in Austin, Texas.

And yeah, I'm very happy to say that I have Summer right here who will introduce yourself much better than I can. But we're here to talk a little bit about the steps that we took in a place that I imagine a lot of different communities in the room are right now of knowing that you don't like VI-SPDAT.

But wondering, what should we replace it with? How should we replace it? What are we going to do? So I'll kick it over to Summer now.

Summer Wright: Hi, just as Preston's name is not Claire, my name is not Akram. I serve on the Homelessness Response System Leadership Council in Austin, basically, our CoC governing board, as well as being an advocate with lived expertise. And yeah, I think Preston summed it up, I'm excited to present on this, so.

Okay so yeah, so looking at the data, the VI-SPDAT, we saw that it was prioritizing Black clients at one point less than white clients, consistently over the course of many years. Which, yeah, which was not okay considering that in Austin, and Travis County, 8% of our population is Black, whereas 36% of our homeless population is Black. And we knew we needed to do something about that.

The next slide? Yeah and so, yeah. Sorry, I, I'm not familiar with this –

Alissa Parrish: I've....

Summer Wright: – Slide, specifically, so you'll give me a second to read them before I decide what I'm saying next.

Alissa Parrish: Summer, I actually put this slide in here because we were preparing to not have you available to us. So I could speak to this really quickly. I'm sorry.

Summer Wright: Okay, thank you.

Alissa Parrish: Just really quickly so, I think in the Coordinated Entry notice, there has been a huge emphasis on the word, "tool," right, that was taken very literally in the Coordinated Entry notice, and communities really hung onto that. I think what we're really looking at is an approach, which is what Austin is talking us through, is not just their tool, like their end results, but really, the process in which they took to get to that end result.

And so we know that, and we spoke to this more comprehensively yesterday, but no one tool can fulfill this requirement. It has to be locally driven. It has to be locally informed. It has to be inclusive. It has to be, and diverse, and really focused on racial equity, being really intentional about

that.

So I'm going to hand it back over to Summer now, and we can go to the next slide. Sorry about that.

Alissa Parrish: This also may have been mine, sorry.

Summer Wright: Yeah I can, I can try to read it real quick and present on it, if you want. But so yeah, essentially, we knew that there were issues with our tool. We knew, one, that it's asking people sensitive questions and not delivering results that respect what we're, we're asking people to put into it.

We knew that we needed something better to assess vulnerability because the most vulnerable people were not being housed. This is us on the back end, and also something we consistently heard from service providers. We had people that were referring to organizations outside of the Continuum of Care because of the fact that they didn't have to use the VI-SPDAT for that.

And so, yeah, we looked at this as more than just.... We were – sorry, I also have a dog in the background. And so we wanted to build this from the ground up from an equitable approach, not just taking another thing, looking at national data based on a small sample size that wasn't part of our community built by people who were not reflective of our population on the street. We wanted to make it local, and have it be built by people who were representative, or had themselves experienced homelessness.

And so yeah, next slide, yeah so in September of 2019, ECHO, which is our collaborative applicant, the central, back end org of Austin. Preston, I hope I'm representing you well. They published the Racial Disparities Report, and it revealed what we know, that clients of color were consistently scoring lower than white clients, which is not okay.

Yeah and so in December, yeah, in December, we established the Racial Equity Task Group, which was a committee under the, previously the Membership Council; now the Leadership Council on which I serve, to look at building something better.

I'm sorry, Preston, can you take this while I deal with the dog?

Preston Petty: Absolutely, I can. Yeah so like summer just started to describe, so end of December, we founded the latest iteration of our equity task group. And as timing goes, that was, literally, right before the pandemic hit.

So it just so happened that we had the right group of people all together in the right space when we had to make a bunch of really important, very big decisions very fast about how we were going to change our system overall. And I think as many communities did, if we're going to have to drastically change our system, then let's start with equity in mind. So that's what we tried to do.

So we started off with a process of trying to – we knew some things about the VI-SPDAT that were good, but obviously, the actual disparity within them meant that it was incomplete. So we started off by piloting some supplemental questions that we wanted to capture some areas of vulnerability not captured by the VI-SPDAT.

So we had a interim process by which we added some additional questions to our assessment tool to cover what we saw as gaps within the VI-SPDAT at the time, and then spent the following time piling up additional questions with the end goal of retiring the VI-SPDAT as a standalone tool, and replacing it with our own completely homegrown, tested, and selected combination of vulnerability, and prioritization factors based on local experiences, and local decisions.

So I'm very happy to announce that as of summer of this year, we had finally gotten to the point where we had enough data where we knew that our tool and data was not perfect, but we were very confident that it was better than the VI-SPDAT as we were using it. So we started to place, steps in place to to formally replace it. Leadership Council, that was, presented the data, adopt the data in August of 2021, with an effective date of October 1st.

And I feel like I just ruined the surprise of that last – click, there, but yes, so we now have a new prioritization tool. So I think that we will send out, kind of, at the end just so folks can see, is, we do have a page on the ECHO slash CoC website that does, kind of, describe, kind of, in depth a lot of the pieces I just ran through awkwardly, kind of, quickly.

And it describes them from the voices of the people that actually did the work, and not the person in the ruffled buttoned up who's here taking visual credit. So I'll kick it back over to Summer.

Summer Wright: Thank you. Yeah, the next slide? Yeah so basically, developing the API was a collaborative process, as we said. Serving on the equity task group were people of color, specifically, we had Black representation, also Queer people. As my presence on there was as a trans person who has experienced chronic street homelessness, and has experienced it in Austin.

And so because of my presence, see, basically, I got us to include the need for a gender equity lens as well. And so, but overall, yeah, we had people, not only from, with expertise but from the system, and from the city. From equity organizations, we have people representing Black Trans Leadership of Austin. Yeah, next slide?

And so we wrote all of the new questions. And so it was an iterative process of deciding what we wanted to ask, and then looking at how can we ask this in the most trauma-informed way? How can we ask this in the least wordy way? Because we understand that the Coordinated Entry process can be retraumatizing for some people.

And that one of the ways to mitigate that was keeping it as short as possible. And so we got questions together, and we piloted them. And so throughout the process we had to hold each other accountable. I think, definitely, there was a big conversation surrounding the inclusion of trans equity, concerns around will this take away from racial equity?

And the final answer was, "No," on the street, our trans population is disproportionately of color. And there is overlaps there that we need to hold each other accountable. We need to have the hard conversations. And that's what's going to make the work good. Yeah, next slide?

So yeah, the API is a localized assessment built by us, built for us, and all of the questions were piloted locally. This is important because, yeah, this is important because I know a lot of people are interested to see specific questions. And it's always important to caveat this with our data is not going to be reflective of every community. This, the strength of the API is that, one, we piloted it

with an equity lens, specifically. And, two, that it was built in our community using our specific data on the population that we're working with. Next slide?

And so if we break the categories down, the questions, 21 of them, into categories, we can look at the health conditions associated with disparate health outcomes. a history of homelessness, what that's looked like, and the barriers that people may have to housing. The next slide?

And so we performed statistical step, and tests, Chi-square analyses. I don't know how to perform that, I just want to say up front. All I know is that it is a test performed by people who did know how to perform it. That test, the statistical significance of correlations between answers to questions, and improved scores for the populations that we were looking to treat more equitably.

And so under race, and ethnicity, breaking it down, not just into everyone who is non-white, but also looking specifically at Black clients, and specifically at Hispanic, and Latinx clients. Looking at gender, we were explicitly looking at transgender, and nonbinary, gender nonconforming folks. But as a, sort of, side benefit, I guess, the questions that helped our trans clients also provide equity for SIS women clients as well. So next slide?

Yeah and so I'm just gonna breeze through these real quick because like I said, these are the questions that work for our system. They may not be the questions that work for other systems. But when we look at the questions that support racial equity, we're looking at the presence of minor children within the household experiencing homelessness. Whether people are pregnant or breastfeeding, a history of high blood pressure?

And then one of the major issues that we know, of course, is returns to homelessness, and the difficulty of getting housing. And so you can see, educational history, involvement in foster care or juvenile justice. Whether people were born and raised in Austin? And where in Austin they were raised, specifically, looking at Zip Codes that have been gentrified.

And then this last question, I just want to point out, looking at being raised in a multigenerational household. This is a question that was proposed by a person of color who was involved in this work, and who had experienced homelessness. And who knew from her own personal background that she was raised in a multigenerational household, and it might be something to look for.

And so that question is another example of how having the right people at the table helps you know the right questions to ask. Next slide?

And so this is a little bit harder to see, but we do have the questions that are looking specifically at gender equity, having experienced harm, or the threat of harm, interest in programs relating to HIV, and AIDS, and mental health crises. I would like to note that one of the things here is that I believe all of these questions came from the original VI-SPDAT.

It was not our goal to throw the baby out with the bathwater or cut off our nose to spite our face. We know that as a whole, VI-SPDAT wasn't working. But we were still able to look at the data from the questions to see which of these specific questions are upholding equity? And so, yeah, next slide?

And so now, instead of scoring lower, Black and Hispanic clients will consistently score higher on the API. And so yeah, as it says there, this is a huge step in the right direction. Yeah, next slide?

And so yeah, I think the, sort of, final or the mid-point is that this is an ongoing process. We know that our community changes over time. We know that our knowledge isn't perfect from the get-go. We know that there are always improvements to be made.

And so even now, we are in some very lengthy email threads going back and forth on how to phrase certain questions. Which certain, which questions to ask? Recently, camping on the street in Austin became criminalized via a ballot election, and looking at do we want to be asking about the impact of that knowing that clients who are Black are more likely to be swepted?

At least from what I've seen, or what we've seen, I guess; I don't want to only speak for myself. And so we're still looking at piloting new questions. And so, yeah, if I can – can you all see the chat if I put a link in there?

Alissa Parrish: Not really, but if you want to email us, we can stick it –

Summer Wright: Okay.

Alissa Parrish: – In the Whova app.

Summer Wright: Sure.

Alissa Parrish: Everybody has the Whova app.

Summer Wright: It's not an overly complicated link, it's just austinecho.org/api. And it goes over this in a much fuller way. I think it features some quotes from me, so I'm happy with it.

And yeah, it's just really well put together. I'm very thankful for Chris Davis on ECHO's staff, for doing that work. And then next slide, I'm not sure?

Okay so before this, I just want to say that the API is the first step and a strong step in the right direction. But, again, it's an ongoing process. And even beyond that, it doesn't solve equity in every regard, and even in regard to the Coordinated Entry.

We know that we need to provide more geographical equity in locations of accessing the Coordinated Entry. We need to know that – we, we know that we need people who are providing the Coordinated Entry to be more reflective of the population we're serving.

And so many more things beyond just that, but this is something I'm really proud of, I think everyone who has worked on it is really proud of. And it is the first step in a long line of steps, so thank you.

Alissa Parrish: I want to open it up for any questions, either for the ECHO team or for us in the last couple of minutes that we have here. The question was, "How are you working through prioritizing everyone with this iterative process, and making sure that the way in which you're doing that is consistent over time?" So if you're making shifts, or you are changing questions?

Preston Petty: Absolutely, so we basically have it set up as a two-phase process. One, when we're

doing questions of just testing them out, and asking them, those questions, themselves at the time, do not affect prioritization, or the order in which clients potentially receive services.

So we make sure they work first before we adopt them. And then, basically, what we do is rather than adopting them, kind of, piecemeal, or one by one, we adopt them in a, kind of, collective phases so that changes can, and benefits can, kind of, happen all at once while also minimizing the day to day, kind of, stressors, yep, stressor, confusion, prioritization, changing literally, every single week or every single month.

Alissa Parrish: Perfect, we had one more, hopefully, we can get to.

Torrey Rogers: Yeah. Do you all use dynamic prioritization when using your assessment tool? For example, do you put people in different buckets if they score a high or low? The high score goes to PSH, the low goes to Rapid, and you have to stay there? Or is it the most, the first available housing opportunity is what they get?

Preston Petty: That is a fantastic question and I appreciate you defining dynamic prioritization because I've heard about 40 different definitions. So that is the one I would have answered. One massive thing that we did change that we actually did not realize the deep implications at the time is when we did adopt the new interim prioritization questions in summer of last year, what we also did, is, we did away with the former bucket approach of, "You must pick one intervention and that will, therefore, be your intervention label, and that is the only thing you will wait for."

And instead, we shifted to another approach of, "Here's all the potential interventions within our system, and I would like you to tell me of all of these options, which ones would work, which ones are your preference?" But yep, which of them would work?

Please look at them each individually, and it is 1,000% okay to be in a situation, slash, logically we all know this where your housing needs could be met by either Rapid Rehousing or permanent supportive housing. So please opt into as many potential interventions as could potentially meet your needs. So yes, we do use dynamic prioritization.

Alissa Parrish: Alright, thank you so much, Summer and Preston. This was excellent. You're getting applause, you two, thank you.

[END OF TAPE]