

“Ask the Auditor”

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The Homeless Count and Accountability for Results

How did the City of Berkeley manage to reduce the 2003 rate of chronic homelessness by nearly half? They analyzed the data. They tried new approaches. This time, they had systems in place for setting goals, measuring progress, and establishing accountability for results.

This was not always the case. When the Auditor’s Office issued our [Assessment of Job Training/Job Placement Programs and Community Agency Contracts](#) in 2001, we found that nonprofit contractors could not answer simple questions about what they had accomplished. The programs were not adequately tracking and reporting how many individuals were trained or placed, and how many still had jobs a year later. Our 2000 [Report on Community Agency Contract Administration and Monitoring](#) included suggestions from City staff about how the City could do better.

In response, the City Manager held meetings with staff to improve community agency monitoring and program evaluation. By 2002, the Budget Office and the Housing Department had rolled out a plan requiring results-based reporting (“outcome measures”) in housing contracts. They trained City staff and the contractors. Since 2003, outcome measures are mandatory.

Over the past six years, the City of Berkeley implemented clear priorities and measurable results for homeless agencies. The City’s Homeless Commission now ranks housing services proposals based on whether the goal is to house the chronically homeless. They also recommend funding based on how well agencies plan and monitor not only efforts but results.

The number of chronically homeless people living on the streets of Berkeley dropped by 48 percent between 2003 and 2009, according to Alameda County’s [Everyone Home](#) survey. This happened because of the hard work and persistence of many organizations and individuals, not least the formerly homeless themselves.

There is a cost to accountability, but it is worth the effort. By making some tough decisions about priorities and by following through with accountability systems, the City has demonstrated some clear results worth celebrating.

Questions? Comments? Ideas for audits? Please contact me at www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/auditor, by phone (510 981-6750) or via email at Auditor@CityofBerkeley.info. You can also read our reports and sign up for updates on the web site.