Impacting Homelessness

Transforming Field Data into Actionable Intelligence

esri®

Communities across the country are working hard to eliminate homelessness. City and county staff, nonprofit workers, and volunteers scour the streets to survey the people living without shelter. But after the boots-on-the-ground work is complete and stacks of paper tally sheets land on someone's desk, what communities have in their possession is much more than just a number.

With intelligent mapping and survey tools, your organization can do more with the data you collect in the field. Geographic information system (GIS) technology delivers the power of geography and spatial analysis to help human services organizations collect, manage, visualize, and understand this data in new ways. Even without a physical address, the location of homeless individuals has a key role in identifying patterns and trends. Then, communities can truly understand the problem, see where the need is greatest, and determine the best approach for connecting people with critical resources.

Organizations are eliminating pen-and-paper workflows and turning to GIS technology to give homeless count data new meaning. The following five tips illustrate how your organization can modernize its data collection approach; enhance collaboration and awareness; and make better decisions with ArcGIS®, the world-leading GIS platform created by Esri.

1. Use a Modern Solution to Capture Data

Before your organization can pair homeless populations with resources, you need to understand who these people are and where they're located. Whether your organization conducts homeless point-in-time counts or does survey work to assess housing needs, you need staff and volunteers working in the field to identify these people. Traditionally, organizations have equipped fieldworkers with paper surveys to record critical information. Staff then manually entered this data in a system, resulting in a time-intensive process that leaves room for errors. Good news—there's a better, more effective and efficient way.

By digitizing forms and surveys with ArcGIS, you can standardize responses and reduce errors. Ready-to-use applications allow you to quickly develop custom survey forms and maps with a bonus key capability: recording the exact location of homeless persons for historical reference and future analysis. With a variety of mobile and desktop applications available on Esri's mapping platform,

fieldworkers can collect data in real time—even without a network connection—and publish it in ArcGIS. Data is displayed in dynamic maps for anyone and everyone in the organization to view and analyze.

Collect the following information with a mobile field data collection tool:

- Veteran status/services
- Homeless point-in-time count data
- Sheltered and unsheltered population counts
- Housing needs
- Medical needs
- Behavioral and mental health needs
- Transportation options
- Encampment details

Explore app at
esriurl.com/Homeless

Extend mobile applications that allow you to collect data from field crews and volunteers on any device, anytime, anywhere.

2. Apply Data and Analytics to Everything You Do

"For the first time, we can drill down to the exact location of unsheltered individuals. By knowing where they are located, who they are, and how to find them, we can better serve our homeless populations and get them the help they need."

– Melvia Richards, Housing Manager of Dekalb County's Community Development Department

With your digitized field data solution in place and dataset ready to use in the ArcGIS platform, you can perform the planning and analysis you need to make important decisions with confidence—not guesswork. Then, your organization can bring the right resources to the people who need them most.

By merging your field data with authoritative data in Esri's mapping platform, you can see your data in a new light. From assessing homelessness patterns in order to select the best location for a new shelter to analyzing demographic and income-level data to see which populations are at risk of becoming homeless, the purposes are limitless. Be better able to provide food, shelter, and emergency services by visualizing and analyzing demand, populations, and access.

Use your data to make better-informed decisions, and prioritize the use and location of social services. With location intelligence, your organization can improve communication, increase collaboration, and improve long-range planning.
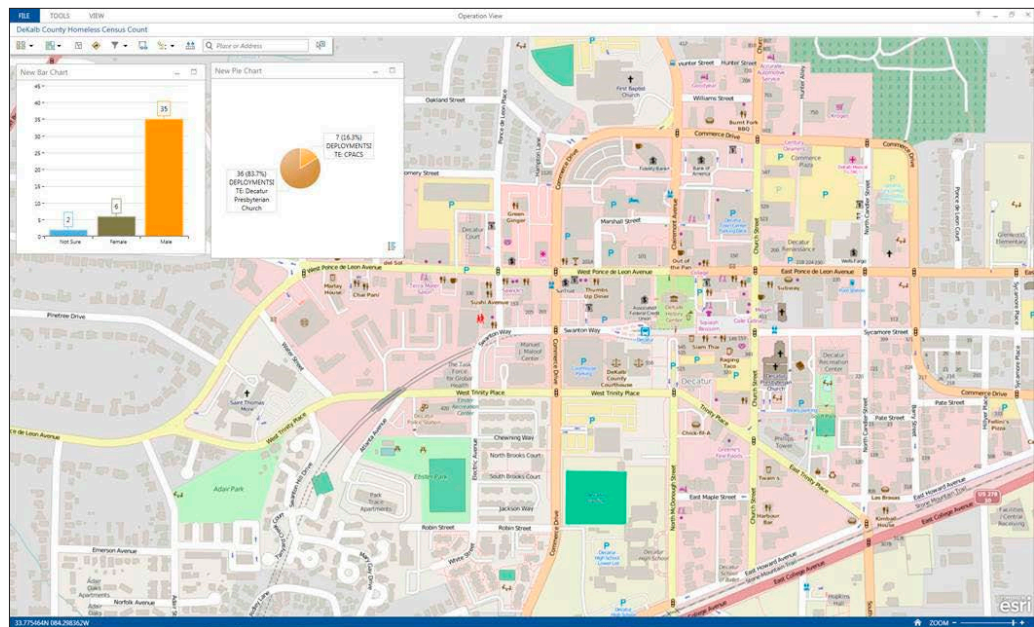
Good-bye, paper survey—hello digital form. For its 2015 point-in-time count, DeKalb County developed a new survey tool using GeoForm, an ArcGIS web application template. The solution delivered results in real time and added functionalities to the county's traditional workflow, including the ability to upload photos.

Five Ways to Impact Homelessness with GIS

Communities across the country are working hard to eliminate homelessness. City and county staff, nonprofit workers, and volunteers scour the streets to survey the amount of people living without shelter. But after the boots-on-the-ground work is complete and stacks of paper tally sheets land on someone's desk, what communities have in their possession is much more than just a number.

Intelligent Tools

3. Communicate with a Single, Open System

Go beyond one-time counts and use the power of geography to help you communicate with your mobile workforce on a daily basis. Outreach teams must communicate with partners—such as law enforcement, service providers, and veterans' services—to connect homeless populations with critical resources. With the ArcGIS platform, all partners can connect and share case information using a single, open system. And ready-to-use mobile applications can help your organization navigate teams to the appropriate location. Connecting your fieldworkers with local service providers can help close the communication gap and make data actionable.

In addition to streamlining internal communication, it's important to keep the public and stakeholders informed of your work. Map templates available in the ArcGIS platform can help you tell your story. Take advantage of a variety of interactive story map templates to engage your audience in learning about your organization's work to eliminate homelessness. You can embed web maps, hyperlinks, videos, and photos. Esri® Story Map can also serve as a vehicle for administrators to showcase your program's efforts and report them to the community. Share your story maps on your websites and social media feeds.

For more examples and inspiration see
esriurl.com/Gallery
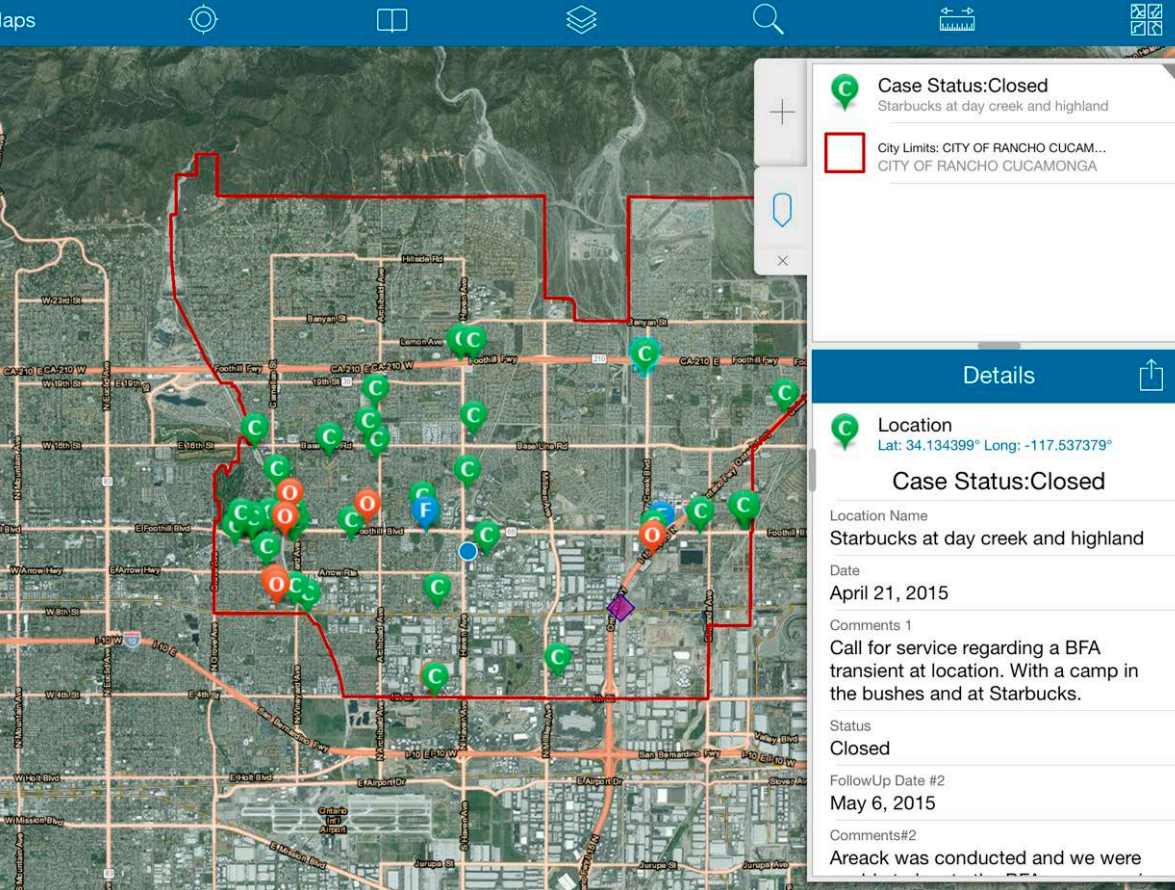
In just two hours, the City of Rancho Cucamonga's GIS staff configured Esri's Collector for ArcGIS app to replace a pen-and-paper field survey. It's no longer an issue when the outreach team members—from both the city and the sheriff's department—are in the field at different times. With the mobile app implementation, individual team members drop a pin on a map to create a case and enter data about the area and each homeless person. Staff can visualize the concentration of homeless encampments throughout the city and determine where to dispatch cleanup crews and a partner agency's outreach specialists, based on case status.

4. Achieve Real-Time Operational Awareness

The success of homeless outreach programs depends on government agencies, nonprofits, and the community working together to accomplish the same mission. To determine how to best use internal and external resources, directors and executives at all levels need a sound understanding of how their programs are performing. Being able to understand operations in real time allows organizations to stay accountable while delivering the right resources to the people who need them most—and getting the job done faster.

With the ArcGIS platform, organizations can gain a high-level overview of all operations, in real time, and in one place. Operations Dashboard for ArcGIS is a ready-to-use application that you can configure for your outreach program so that you can focus on what matters most. Interactive maps and data sources update automatically as field information changes, so executives can see the current location of outreach teams, where surveying is occurring, what types of issues are becoming apparent, and where data is missing. Shelter staff can access real-time data to know how many people they are serving, while administrators have a current view of shelter capacity across a region. Giving executives visualizations of your work allows them to be better prepared for public inquiries and budget appropriately.

"GIS helps us get our jobs done faster, keep our community safe, and connect the city's homeless population with critical resources. With ArcGIS, we can show the big picture of our community's homeless issues and what we're doing to help."

– Alison Guerrero, Senior Community Improvement Officer, City of Rancho Cucamonga

5. Engage Your Community

Your community has a vital role in helping to end homelessness. Volunteers are essential to helping with local point-in-time counts by collecting data in the field. Maximize the use of your volunteers' time by equipping them with easy-to-use mobile data collection tools. With secure GIS web applications, your volunteers can collect critical data on mobile phones and tablets, then you can publish web maps and applications that help inform and engage citizens.

You can share information on where to find a free health clinic, how to volunteer, where to donate funds, who the local heroes are, and so much more. With an application such as Esri's Locator Map, you can bring all these resources together so that citizens and social workers alike can help those in need.
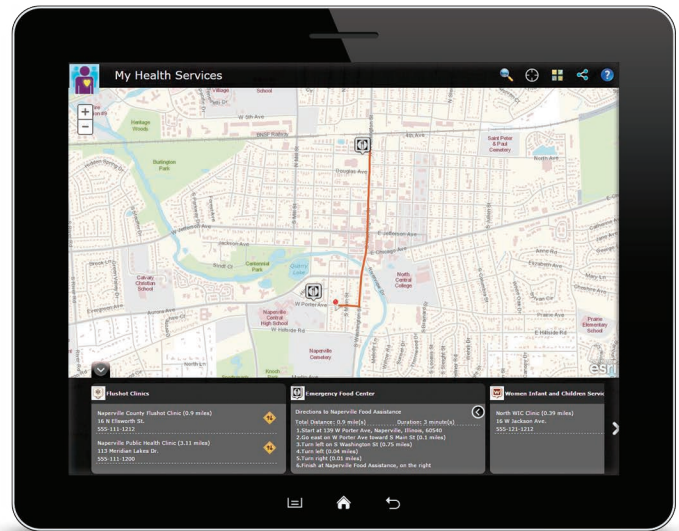
Explore app at esriurl.com/MyGov

Next Steps

Why wait any longer to adopt GIS into your current workflows? Chances are, your organization or a partner already owns the technology. For more than 40 years, Esri has been a trusted solution provider for public health, human services, and other government departments around the globe.

Esri has made it simpler by extending a single, scalable platform that provides accurate data, advanced analytical tools, and configurable applications that any department can use to effectively impact homelessness. With a location strategy, access to real-world applications, and advanced planning and analysis tools, your department will have what it takes to make a difference in the lives of vulnerable people.

Don't wait for the next point-in-time count. Esri has the solutions you need to become a modern crusader against homelessness.

Contact: go.esri.com/Homeless

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Esri inspires and enables people to positively impact their future through a deeper, geographic understanding of the changing world around them.

Governments, industry leaders, academics, and nongovernmental organizations trust us to connect them with the analytic knowledge they need to make the critical decisions that shape the planet. For more than 40 years, Esri has cultivated collaborative relationships with partners who share our commitment to solving earth's most pressing challenges with geographic expertise and rational resolve. Today, we believe that geography is at the heart of a more resilient and sustainable future. Creating responsible products and solutions drives our passion for improving quality of life everywhere.

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