

**Community Commitment Program
Volunteer Guide**



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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in volunteering and supporting some of our community’s most vulnerable neighbors. This guide will provide context around efforts and operations to support the unsheltered population, safety procedures and tips on navigating interactions and situations that might arise at an encampment. Please review and always feel free to ask questions!

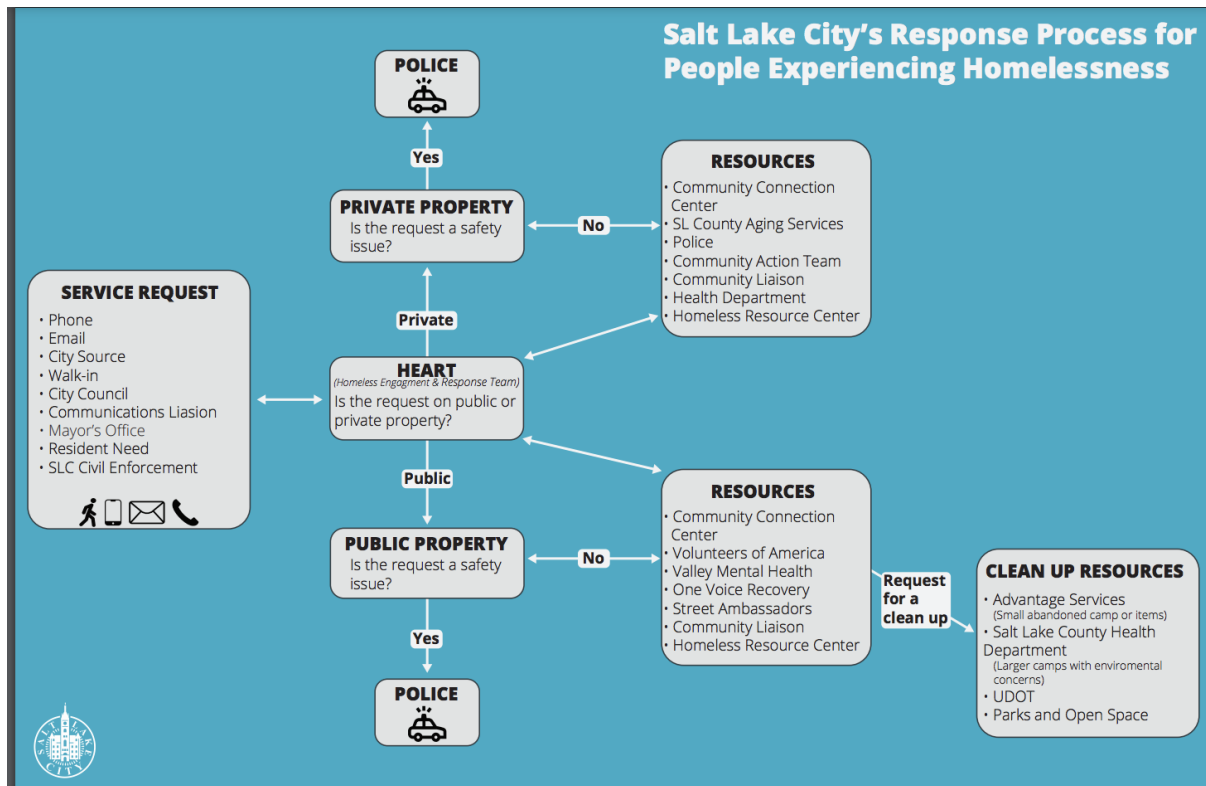
What is Salt Lake City doing about homelessness?

Salt Lake City and its community partners are working hard to address the ongoing challenge of homelessness. We recognize that there is no single solution when helping those in need and are implementing both long- and short-term solutions with the goal of creating safety for everyone in our public spaces.

We are committed to:

- Treating all people with respect, including those experiencing homelessness, residents, business owners and visitors.
- Maintaining public spaces that are clean, safe, and accessible to all.
- Using law enforcement intervention only when criminal activity needs to be addressed.

The below chart illustrates basic steps Salt Lake City takes to respond to the needs of community members and some of the community partners we work with to accomplish our goals:



The Community Commitment Program

Many smaller concerns about homelessness can be resolved using the process illustrated by the above chart. When there is growing concern about a large encampment and it begins to impact the health and safety of camp residents and the community, Salt Lake City's Homeless Engagement And Response Team (HEART) coordinates with community partners on a more strategic approach to connect with unsheltered individuals. This strategic approach is called the Community Commitment Program.

The Community Commitment Program is a focused outreach effort to address encampment concerns and the broader needs of our unsheltered neighbors, including providing access to mental health and substance abuse treatment providers, the Homeless Resource Centers, advocacy groups, and residents and businesses who want to help.

The City collaborates with the Salt Lake County Health Department (SLCoHD), the Salt Lake City Community Connections Center (CCC), social workers and public safety officers, legal defenders, and the Salt Lake City Justice Court in this effort.

Salt Lake City facilitates connection between unsheltered residents and service providers by hosting Community Commitment Program resource fairs near large encampments. Once the date, time, and location of a resource fair is determined, the above-listed community organizations assemble at the fair to offer services to those living in an encampment. Providers help unsheltered folks resolve warrants, get identification, enter treatment programs, and access storage facilities, and find housing and job opportunities.

As a volunteer with the Community Commitment Program, you will assist the City and its partners set up for resource fairs by putting up booths, tables, chairs, and other items needed on-site. After a resource fair ends, volunteers will help with the taking down and loading up of materials.

Building Understanding

The causes of homelessness are numerous and complex. Homelessness is impacted by factors such as a shortage of affordable housing options, stagnant wages, domestic violence and disputes, mental health crises, divorce, loss of a job, and unexpected medical crises, or another traumatic event. As a volunteer working with people experiencing homelessness, it is important to understand the complexity of each person's story. Try to offer each person you meet at the volunteer site the same respect and kindness you would offer a friend. Our volunteer efforts are focused on offering help, not heroically rescuing or, alternatively, passing judgement on any individual's circumstances.

If you're hoping to learn more about those experiencing homelessness, a great first step is volunteering! We also recommend the following materials, which allow individuals to tell their own personal stories about homelessness:

- [Invisible People YouTube Channel](#)
- [ON THE STREETS -- a feature documentary on homelessness in L.A.](#)
- [Opinion | What Home Means to the Homeless](#)
- [Myths & Questions About Homelessness](#)

Volunteers Do's & Don'ts

Volunteers Will:

- Alert appropriate staff as soon as possible if not able to attend a volunteer session.
- Sign-in and sign-out for each volunteer session.
- Complete all required background checks and trainings.
- Be open-minded, professional, and respectful to everyone on-site.
- Demonstrate genuine concern for the needs of our unsheltered neighbors while working to address those needs.
- Work cooperatively with other volunteers, service providers, and City staff to meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Dress appropriately for weather conditions and bring water.
- Ensure the wellbeing of service providers, volunteers, and individuals experiencing homelessness by adhering to all safety guidelines and instructions.
- Remember that individuals experiencing homeless are capable adults, not children. Avoid using a condescending tone or language in your conversations.
- Be prepared to meet new people, each with their own story and background.

Volunteers Will Not:

- Take unsheltered individuals to their homes.
- Give financial assistance or gifts to the unsheltered individuals.
- Give counsel to unsheltered individuals unless it is part of their approved volunteer function.
- Provide transportation.
- Offer employment to unsheltered individuals unless they have registered with the Department of Workforce Services.
- Hold property for shelter guests at any time.
- Give, solicit, borrow, or accept; food, money, transportation, or gifts of any kind to or from individuals experiencing homelessness.
- Take photos or video of any of the unsheltered individuals

- Act as representatives of Salt Lake City in any capacity, including in media, interviews, or other related activities.
- Speak poorly of or gossip about anyone you meet on-site.

General Safety Guidelines

- Volunteers are not to intervene in any altercation, putting themselves or others at risk.
- Do not approach those who are giving signs or indicating that they do not want to be bothered.
- Wear comfortable shoes and clothing, dressing for your environment.
- Do not carry valuables or other personal possessions of high value.
- Do not remain in spots where you are privy to a drug deal in progress or other illegal activity. Leave the area immediately without drawing attention to yourself.
- Do not interrupt the sale of drugs or sex. Leave the area immediately without drawing attention to yourself.
- Never enter a person's cars, tents, or enclosed areas. Stand outside in the doorway or ask the person to step out.
- Volunteers should always establish at least an arm's length of space between them and individuals.
- Volunteers should remain aware of their surroundings and ensure an exit option is available, not to be cornered or trapped and not to trap or corner individuals.
- Volunteers should be aware of their surroundings to avoid contact with needles, human waste, and other bodily fluid.
- Volunteers should always take precautions when approaching persons with pets.

Street Smarts

Having street smarts means knowing how to respond in different situations and paying attention to your surroundings. Here are some simple precautions to keep in mind while volunteering near large encampments:

- Stay aware of your surroundings
- Assess the situation and make smart decisions, if someone is agitated leave them alone
- Travel in groups
- Smile and offer a quick greeting, this allows unsheltered individuals to see that you're not afraid and recognize their worth.
- Don't confront people unnecessarily

Suggestions for working with someone with mental illness

Homeless outreach utilizes a trauma informed and strength-based approach, it assumes that any individual encountered has experienced some form of trauma.

- Treat the person with respect, and as directly and naturally as possible.
- Speak clearly, communicate one thought at a time. Be sure to be very clear about what you are saying, repeating things as needed. Doing your best to ensure that things are not misunderstood.
- Ask permission questions when possible, allowing the person to have some control over the situation. Such as “Is it okay if I sit across the table from you?” or “Can I ask you some questions?”
- Praise or celebrate what you can, being mindful not to criticize or shame.
- Remember the person's perception may be different from your own.
- Don't try to argue against what a person's delusion or voices may be doing or saying. They are symptoms of mental illness.
- Allow the person to feel comfortable, do not stare at them, hover over them, or press them. Always allow them an easy exit.
- Be mindful of people's limits, giving space when needed.

Suggestions for working with someone who is under the influence

- Approach with care, respect the person's personal space.
- Use a gentle tone and calm body language that communicates that they are safe.
- Make clear, brief statements, focusing on the here and now.
- Always respect the person, do not make belittling, shaming, or condescending statements.
- Be respectful in your communication, stay calm, avoid getting into a confrontation, and utilize de-escalation skills.
- Avoiding labeling the person as an “alcoholic” or “Drug addict”. Ensuring to not use degrading terms for the client and their substance use. (e.g. “tweaker”, “pothead”, “crackhead”).
- Listen and empathize.
- Give the person time to process, be patient and repeat yourself if necessary.
- Leave the situation if the person is becoming increasingly upset or agitated or their behavior is inappropriate or if the person requests that you leave.
- Validate the person, recognize what is going on with them, what they are going through.

How to navigate/interact with homeless advocates and with the media

Salt Lake City communicates and works with local advocacy groups serving individuals experiencing homelessness. At times, these groups will be present at volunteer events. If

approached by a member of one of these groups with a request for a Facebook live interview or to assist their team with a project while onsite, please refer them to a Salt Lake City staff member.

The Community Commitment Program is an initiative that often brings out media outlets. The City is happy to field media questions and requests. And, as a volunteer, your input and ideas are appreciated. However, you do not represent or speak for the City of Salt Lake. If a member of the media approaches you for an interview, or with questions about what is happening and why, please refer them to a Salt Lake City staff member.

LGBTQ+ Sensitivity Training

LGBTQ Sensitivity is understanding and appreciating the differences each individual holds, the ability to interact with an individual with dignity and respect. We are guests within their lives. Remember that we will be working with a spectrum of individuals some of whom may be trans, gay, non-binary, and queer.

- Don't make assumptions about someone's pronouns, it is okay to ask and share your own
- Pronouns may be (she/her, he/him, they/them)
- Listen with respect and a genuine wish to learn
- Be prepared to change your understanding
- Don't ask a transgender person what their "real name" is
- Transgender people don't look any certain way and may or may not access medical care like hormones and surgeries as part of their transition, this is a personal choice for each individual
- Refrain from comments like: "You look just like a real woman/man" or "You're so brave" or "You'd pass so much better if you..."
- Remember that the person you are working with is always the expert on their own life

Sexual Harassment Policy

Salt Lake City does not tolerate sexual harassment of any kind. Sexual harassment has been defined by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as any unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when:

- Submission to such conduct is explicitly or implicitly a term/condition of volunteering.
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for decisions affecting a volunteer; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a volunteer's performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment.

Dress Code

1. Please wear comfortable and casual clothes that you don't mind getting dirty. Jeans, athletic shorts, or pants, etc...
2. Please wear closed-toed and close-heeled tennis shoes or boots.
3. Come prepared for the weather! Jackets, sunscreen, or hats are recommended.

Contact Information

- Please direct any questions or concerns to:
 - Allison Dupler - Community Commitment Program Coordinator
 - Cell:385-258-6283
 - Email: Allison.dupler@slcgov.com
 - Hailey Leek - SLC Corps Program Coordinator
 - Cell: 385-414-0430
 - Email: Hailey.leek@slcgov.com