



CALIFORNIA TRASH HOT SPOTS HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT CLEAN-UP PROGRAMS BEST PRACTICES

Pre-Engagement: What Works Before A Clean-Up

- ✓ Compassion first – Contact individuals in camps prior to any clean-up activity to build relationships and trust to enlist campers' support for trash and waste clean-up. (Trust is a must for enrollment!)
- ✓ Always work in teams of two, mixed gender teams (e.g., male and female) often works well for engaging new people – too many can overwhelm!
- ✓ If a camp is located on private property, identify the property owner and seek permission or cooperation.
- ✓ Communicate and partner with local homeless service providers and outreach teams.
- ✓ Work with local law enforcement and regulatory agencies when necessary.
- ✓ Provide clean camp education materials and flyers (e.g., leave no trace, cigarette butt collection, central kitchens) at homeless shelters, food pantries or homeless service centers.
- ✓ Think safety – Do safety training, stock up on first aid kits, train participants on handling toxics, sharps, and human waste. Have a disposal plan. See if mobile phones will work at the site. Identify hazards, such as poison oak, steep slopes, bees etc.
- ✓ Gather cleanup gear, hire portable restrooms if needed for big jobs, get sharps containers, hire disposal/recycling and hauling vehicles.
- ✓ Distribute bags and gloves (if needed) to homeless campers ahead of time so they can bag trash as they generate it.
- ✓ Select the staging locations for trash drop-offs carefully. The program will not likely be successful if homeless campers have to transport trash over a long distance (e.g., over a quarter of a mile).

What Works During The Clean-Up & For Ongoing Engagement

- ✓ Compassion (again!) – Always remember it is **very** traumatic to experience homelessness and that additional trauma makes recovery more difficult. Be respectful and you will build a community and gain homeless campers to help clean-up other sites and educate other campers.

- ✓ Be consistent – Show up when you said you were going to so they know they can count on you, as many before you have given up on them.
- ✓ For ongoing engagement, always work in teams of two, ideally mixed gender (e.g., male and female).
- ✓ Build up safe camps with services like trash pickup, portable restrooms, visits from local health agencies.
- ✓ Hold the homeless responsible for their own mess once you have established a relationship, and stress the importance of a clean camp – such as being able to find important items and prevent issues with rodents.
- ✓ Encourage homeless to spread the word about the service. They can help recruit new participants and you'll be amazed at how fast word spreads through the grapevine.

What Doesn't Work

- ✓ Clean-up events with random volunteers that the homeless campers do not know OR public clean-up events around their camps without prior notification – keep campers in loop!
- ✓ Arrests without an immediate clean-up plan. Other campers will tear through items that are left behind, leaving the items spread out over a large area.
- ✓ Posting photos or descriptions of camp locations on social media, which leads to harassment of homeless individuals.
- ✓ Ignoring the problem of trash generated from the thousands of people experiencing homelessness in California and doing nothing.

*Clean-up does not mean eviction. These guidelines are intended to improve engagement with people experiencing homelessness, as well as to educate them about and help them maintain a clean camp that does not pollute California's waterways and beaches.