



Homeless Emergency and Active Readiness Toolkit (HEART): Get Connected

# Tulare County Case Study:

A Community-Driven Constellation Model

## TULARE COUNTY AT A GLANCE

- Population: 478,918
- Location: Rural
- Median Income: \$64,474 (2022)
- Sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January (2024): 1,260

## SUMMARY

Tulare County demonstrates the benefits of “getting connected” through its constellation model, a network of interconnected groups and individuals working together to integrate the needs of people experiencing homelessness into emergency preparedness and response activities. The model includes the Community Care Coalition, Community Coordination Team, Unhoused Advocacy Work Group, and Countywide Task Force on Homelessness. The Community Care Coalition serves as the central hub, focusing on open communication, community-driven solutions, and fostering strong partnerships between non-profits, government agencies, and citizens. The model's structure prioritizes informal meetings, diverse participation, organic growth, empowered teams, and relationship building. Tulare County's success is attributed to a collaborative approach, clear communication, efficient resource mobilization, and quick resource activation, focusing on preparedness and trust-building.

## THE HEART OF THE CONSTELLATION: THE COMMUNITY CARE COALITION

Tulare County implemented a unique "constellation model" – a network of interconnected groups and individuals working together – to integrate the needs of people experiencing homelessness into emergency preparedness and response activities. This network includes:

- **Community Care Coalition:** Coordinates information sharing and resource allocation.
- **Community Coordination Team:** Conducts direct street and encampment outreach and coordinates with other service teams.
- **Unhoused Advocacy Work Group:** Focuses on supporting individuals experiencing homelessness during emergencies through a multidisciplinary team including representatives from Behavioral Health, Public Health, Human Services, Environmental Health, Animal Care, and other social safety net providers.
- **Countywide Task Force on Homelessness:** Comprised of governmental representatives, community organizations, and community members that develops long-term solutions for homelessness.



HEART: Get Connected

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Established amid multiple crises beginning in early 2020, the Community Care Coalition functions as the central hub of the County's constellation model. The group works to bridge gaps in support services through collaboration, information sharing, and strategic resource coordination.

The Coalition prioritizes open communication, community-driven solutions, and fostering strong partnerships between non-profits, government agencies, and community members. This commitment to collaboration is evident in their structure:

- **Highly Informal:** Meetings are held twice a month via Zoom, with a "walk-on" format allowing anyone to participate without prior registration.
- **Diverse Participation:** Regular attendees include representatives from various county agencies, city mayors, Continuum of Care, non-profits, businesses, and engaged citizens. This diverse mix fosters a rich exchange of ideas and perspectives.
- **Organic Growth:** The Coalition thrives on an agenda-free environment, which allows for spontaneous resource sharing and brainstorming during non-emergency periods. Conversely, during disasters, a focused agenda ensures efficient response.
- **Empowered Teams:** Needs identified within the Coalition lead to the formation of dedicated teams to address specific community concerns. This allows for focused action on various issues.
- **Growth Beyond Emergencies:** Initially formed for emergency response, the Coalition has become a vital platform for ongoing community support and collaboration.
- **Trusting Relationships:** The Coalition emphasizes the importance of forming strong bonds, where trust and open communication are key to building successful partnerships.

## CHECK YOUR LOGOS AT THE DOOR

Tulare County's success hinges on a core principle: leaving organizational logos at the door. Here, there is a focus on being prepared and building trust, with everyone working together to meet the community's needs, not individual or organizational agendas. The Coalition focuses on finding gaps and using all available resources to help everyone. The goal is simple: ensure all community members get the help they need.

## COORDINATING COLLABORATION

Tulare County has a designated Access and Functional Needs (AFN) Liaison whose role is to support vulnerable populations, including people experiencing homelessness, during emergencies. The AFN Liaison helps identify people with access and functional needs, engage in outreach efforts, and assist in connecting people with resources and services during emergencies. The AFN Liaison developed a workflow for getting information from the Coalition to the Emergency Operations Center. This collaboration creates a clear and efficient system for:

- **Sharing information**
- **Mobilizing resources**
- **Finding creative solutions to community needs**

This Coalition facilitates connections across the county. Health departments join forces with homelessness service providers and other non-profits, working together to get information to people experiencing homelessness. Strong relationships with fire and police have also been developed to keep people living in encampments safe during emergencies, providing supplies, resources, connection to mental health support, and other services.

## JOINT INFORMATION CENTER: “ONE BAND, ONE SOUND”

Tulare County understands the power of clear and inclusive communication. Here's how the Coalition and other groups work to keep the community informed:

- **Reaching Everyone:** Breaks down communication silos to ensure all residents, including people experiencing homelessness, are included in planning and response efforts.
- **211 Lifeline:** Provides a critical central point for information sharing and coordinated messaging.
- **Multi-Platform Approach:** Utilizes a mix of Facebook, radio, television, and text messaging to ensure updates reach everyone.
- **Community Care Coalition Serves as Hub:** Acts as a central communication point, fostering collaboration and ensuring county staff and partners stay informed about community needs.

## QUICK ACTIVATION AND CROSS-SHARING RESOURCES

Tulare County's rapid response and resource-sharing strategies are key to their success:

- **Preparation:** The Access and Functional Needs Liaison works closely with law enforcement, fire departments, and unhoused individuals to ensure everyone is ready for emergencies.
- **Resource Hub:** The Emergency Services Manager keeps a centralized list of available resources, ensuring everyone knows who has what and how to mobilize it quickly.
- **Quick Sheltering:** Established contracts with known providers and locations serving people experiencing homelessness allow for swift deployment of temporary emergency shelters whenever needed.
- **Building Trust:** Prioritizing the safety and well-being of people experiencing homelessness fosters positive relationships and builds trust.
- **Transparent Donations:** Tulare County utilizes donations which are channeled through reputable non-profits like Tulare County United Way or [Friends of Tulare County](#).



## REPLICATING TULARE COUNTY'S SUCCESS: KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

Tulare County's constellation model offers valuable insights for communities seeking to improve their response to crises and support for people experiencing homelessness. Here are key takeaways to consider when replicating this approach:

- **Start Small, Grow Collaboratively:** Begin with a clear objective and regular meetings. The model exemplifies the power of organic growth through relationship building. Even a small initial group, focused on shared concerns and resource exchange, can evolve into something significant.
- **Identify Community Champions:** Engage trusted individuals who understand local needs and can advocate for them. These champions can lead subcommittees within resource centers, pinpointing resource gaps and devising solutions.
- **Continuously Assess Preparedness:** Regularly assess preparedness, plan for future incidents, and conduct training for both staff and community members.
- **Invest in Dedicated Support:** Consider establishing a salaried, county-funded position to provide ongoing assistance. This role can be filled by someone with lived experience of homelessness to utilize their experience and expertise.

## CONCLUSION

Tulare County's approach emphasizes relationship-building and trust, with a focus on cross-sharing resources and breaking down silos. The model's informal structure, diverse participation, and flexibility foster a culture where members feel empowered to share ideas and mobilize resources quickly during crises. The AFN Liaison plays a crucial role in connecting these groups with the Emergency Operations Center, enabling seamless information flow and coordinated action across county services. This model exemplifies how a whole-community approach, rooted in open communication and trust, can ensure that people experiencing homelessness receive the support they need during emergencies.

### Special thanks to:

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