While bringing together diverse stakeholders is a necessary step towards ending homelessness, it is not sufficient. Too often people convene to talk, learn best practices, and plan without making necessary changes in their own behavior. Too often they acknowledge that they know what should be done, but then fail to follow through because doing so may compromise immediate self-interests for funding, recognition, and feeling helpful.

Thinking *and* acting systemically are required to end homelessness.

**THINKING SYSTEMICALLY**

- Why does homelessness persist, even though we have the best intentions to end it?
- What are the leverage points that produce sustainable, system-wide results?
- How do we (as an organization) inadvertently contribute to the problem?
- How can I motivate others to implement, even if doing so is against their self-interests?

*At the community level, this involves:*  
- Engage key stakeholders
- Bridge the gap between reality and vision; identify interventions and how to implement them
- Test for commitment to change; develop a shared vision

*At the national level, this involves:*  
- Educate funders and providers along continuum of care about a systems approach
- Convene stakeholders to mobilize a systems approach
- Run local demonstrations in communities; expand community model

[www.funderstogether.org](http://www.funderstogether.org)
How a Systems Approach Benefits Funders

Turbocharge Your Convening Power

Donors have a unique ability to engage stakeholders across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors. Bringing people together with a systems change lens creates a space for people to reconsider their immediate interests in service of the bigger picture. Systems thinking enables people to map the unintended consequences of actions, allows them to take responsibility for the problem, and empowers them to be a part of the solution in more effective ways. They become more motivated to and able to act in service of the whole instead of only their part—ultimately achieving greater impact.

Increase the Impact of Your Grantmaking

Funders faced with the philanthropic challenge of wanting to help people in both the short- and long-term often fail to recognize that quick fixes can hinder their ability to apply sustainable solutions. Because funders address chronic, complex problems, they must adopt a way of thinking to match. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linear Thinking</th>
<th>Systems Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causality</strong></td>
<td>System performance is largely determined by interdependencies among system elements that are indirect, circular, and not always obvious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A problem's symptoms and underlying causes are directly connected.</td>
<td>The unintended and delayed consequences of most quick fixes neutralize or reverse immediate gains over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time</strong></td>
<td>Because actions taken by one group often have delayed negative consequences on its own performance, as well as the behavior of others, each group unwittingly contributes to the very problem it tries to solve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A policy that achieves short-term success ensures long-term success.</td>
<td>To improve the performance of the whole, improve the relationships among the parts. Identify a few key interdependencies and shift them in a sustained, coordinated way over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most problems are caused by external factors beyond our control.</td>
<td>To improve the performance of the whole, we must improve the performance of its parts. Tackle many independent initiatives simultaneously to improve all of the parts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>To improve the performance of the whole, we must improve the performance of its parts. Tackle many independent initiatives simultaneously to improve all of the parts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enhance Your Ability to Advocate for Effective Strategies to End Homelessness

Policymakers similarly confuse linear and systemic thinking. As a result, they can recommend policies that support quick fixes at the expense of long-term solutions. Funders can help education policymakers about a systems approach and thereby advocate for sustainable, system-wide solutions to complex problems like homelessness.

Want to learn more about systems change? Looking for someone to present at your next event? Contact Anne Miskey, Executive Director of Funders Together, at anne@funderstogether.org or at 617.245.0314.