Emergency shelter programs provide people experiencing homelessness with a temporary place to stay. Emergency shelters are an immediate and safe alternative to sleeping on the street.

The success of emergency shelter programs is captured in the outcome “night of shelter for a person experiencing homelessness.” This guide includes protocols for calculating nights of shelter provided by a nonprofit and the cost to provide the necessary shelter.

This guide is appropriate for nonprofits of any size operating an emergency shelter program whose primary charitable activity is to provide immediate relief to people facing homelessness. This guide is not intended for non-emergency shelter programs for the homeless (e.g., transitional housing, permanent housing, rapid rehousing, safe havens, street outreach). The impact calculation uses data typically already on hand and does not require intermediate or advanced training in data analysis. The output of this exercise is an impact statement, e.g., $50 provides a night of shelter for a person experiencing homelessness.

Resources
→ Use this free template to automatically calculate impact.
→ For more information, see the impact methodology for emergency shelter programs.
Impact Calculation Steps

1. Define the program (<10 minutes)
2. Gather program data (1-2 hours)
3. Calculate impact (<30 minutes using template)
   a. Estimate outcomes attributable to the nonprofit’s program
   b. Count costs needed to achieve those outcomes
   c. Divide costs by outcomes to calculate impact
4. Communicate findings (1 hour)

1. Define the program

Identify the following:

- Name of the program
- Scope of the program. If there are multiple locations, it is acceptable to aggregate them into one equation or analyze them one at a time.
- Time period of analysis. Select a period with complete data on nights of shelter and completed financial statements.

2. Gather program data

Impact analysis of emergency shelter programs requires 4 data points, of which at least 3 are supplied by the nonprofit. Below is a list of the most important data points. When collecting data, keep in mind:

- All data must match the chosen time period
- If missing or incomplete, data can be estimated
- Some data points are standard values derived from research literature, government statistics or other organizations. This is indicated.
- Be prepared with the basics of the program: program activities, geography, beneficiary type, and timeframe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Point</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of nights of shelter</td>
<td>Use the total nights of emergency shelter provided in a given period. If this information is not available on hand, it can be estimated based on the point-in-time count of sheltered individuals made</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learn more at impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center
### Cost Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total program costs related to providing a night of shelter</th>
<th>Only use costs directly associated with a night of shelter. For nonprofits that run multiple shelter and housing programs, exclude costs for any non-emergency shelter programs (e.g., permanent supportive housing). Exclude the costs of extra services such as meals, case management, job training and mental health services.</th>
<th>Nonprofit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiary costs</td>
<td>Report beneficiary costs if they are substantial. Often, beneficiary costs are in the form of overnight fees, reported as program revenue. Beneficiary costs can be estimated at $0 if no fees are charged.</td>
<td>Nonprofit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner costs</td>
<td>Report partner costs if they are substantial. They can be estimated at $0 if they are not substantial. Partner costs are infrequently reported and are defaulted to $0 for emergency shelters.</td>
<td>Standard value</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3. Calculate impact

To calculate the impact of an emergency shelter program, divide the total program-related costs incurred by all cost-bearing parties (including beneficiaries and partner organizations) by the total number of shelter-nights provided over the reporting period. If using the calculation template, follow the instructions there and skip to the next section.

**Outcomes calculation**

\[ \text{Outcomes} = \text{Nights of shelter} - \text{Counterfactual nights of shelter} \]

- **Nights of shelter**: Total nights of shelter provided by the program to house individuals facing homelessness.
- **Counterfactual nights of shelter**: How many nights of shelter program beneficiaries would have received from other emergency shelters in the absence of the program. The M.E.I. sets the counterfactual at 0 for emergency shelters on the assumption that there is no slack capacity in the homeless shelter system and one fewer night of shelter provided is one more night of homelessness.

Learn more at [impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center](https://impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center)
Cost calculation

\[ \text{Cost} = \text{Program costs} + \text{Partner costs} + \text{Beneficiary costs} \]

**Program costs**: Direct expenses. Include only the cost to run emergency shelters. Basic services in addition to a bed such as showers, toiletries, and laundry are part of “a night of shelter” and should be included. Exclude extra services like meals, case management, job training, and mental health services. Also exclude the cost of additional housing programs such as transitional housing or permanent supportive housing.

**Partner costs**: Expenses incurred by partners to run emergency shelters. Unless otherwise reported, assumed at $0.

**Beneficiary costs**: Some emergency shelters charge an overnight fee to beneficiaries after an initial period of free accommodation. Deduct this revenue from the nonprofit’s program cost, then add this revenue to beneficiary costs. Otherwise, assume to be $0.

Impact Calculation

\[ \text{Impact} = \frac{\text{Cost}}{\text{Outcomes}} \]

Apply a 5% discount rate to convert impact into current year values.

4. Communicate findings

Impact calculations are presented as an impact statement:

\[ \text{\$50 provides a night of shelter for a person experiencing homelessness.} \]

At a minimum, accompany the impact statement with the name of the nonprofit. Space permitting, the following can be added:

- Program details (name, activities, beneficiaries served, geography)
- Outcome and cost data source and time period
- Method for attributing outcomes
- Outcomes, cost and impact calculations

Website

Impact statements can accompany other program information, such as number of people served, or be presented standalone on the home, program, impact or other relevant pages.

Learn more at [impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center](http://impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center)
Calculating Impact Series  Emergency Shelter Programs

The calculation template provides a snippet of code that you can add to your website and display your impact statement.

ImpactMatters Rating
If you have completed the impact calculation template, you may be eligible for an impact rating from ImpactMatters. Submit the spreadsheet here and ImpactMatters will be in touch: https://forms.gle/3N8feJsyTX3TR47E9

GuideStar Platinum
GuideStar is a database of millions of organizations used by donors and nonprofit professionals. GuideStar awards seals based on transparency. This impact calculation can be used to attain GuideStar’s highest seal, Platinum. To do so, follow the steps below:

- Click “Update nonprofit profile” in the top menu. If you haven’t already gained access to your organization, click “Find and get approved” and follow the instructions. Then, click on your organization’s name to get started.
- To receive a Platinum seal, you must first complete the steps for Bronze, Silver and Gold. Follow GuideStar’s instructions for doing so.
  - When filling out the programs section of Bronze, make sure to create a program that matches the program or programs you used calculate impact. Enter the details for the program, including the budget. We recommend including this note in the program description: “The impact of this program was calculated using ImpactMatters’ Methodology for Estimating Impact and reported through GuideStar’s Platinum Seal program.”
- On the Platinum screen, click “Add a new metric”. Select the metric “Number of bed nights (nights spent in shelter).” After selecting the metric, enter your result and the associated year. Select “Outcome” as the metric type.
- Complete your GuideStar Platinum level.

Example: Lighthouse Christian Ministries

- Program activities: Providing people experiencing homelessness with a temporary place to stay
- Geography: Wenatchee, WA
- Beneficiaries: Homeless people
  Families

Data was collected by reviewing nonprofit’s tax form 990 and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Learn more at impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center
Calculating Impact Series  Emergency Shelter Programs

We assume that the provision of shelter by one nonprofit does not diminish the provision of shelter by any other (neighboring) nonprofit. We also assume there is, in general, no slack capacity in the homeless shelter system. In the absence of a given shelter, beneficiaries would not be able to stay at another shelter because other shelters are assumed to have no beds to spare. We therefore set the counterfactual to zero.

**Outcomes calculation**

$$15,680 \text{ nights of shelter} = 15,680 \text{ nights of shelter} - 0 \text{ counterfactual nights of shelter}$$

**Cost calculation**

$$\$56,787 \text{ in total cost} = \$56,787 \text{ program costs} + \$0 \text{ partner costs} + \$0 \text{ beneficiary costs}$$

**Impact Calculation**

$$\$3.58 \text{ to provide a night of shelter} = \$62,616 \div 17,488 \text{ nights of shelter}$$

5% discount rate has been applied to convert impact into current year values. Impact statement is rounded.

Impact: $4 provides a night of shelter to a person experiencing homelessness.
Click [here](mailto:) to see their full rating.

This guide was prepared by ImpactMatters, a nonprofit rating agency that helps donors find high impact nonprofits. ImpactMatters develops and disseminates resources, tools, and guidelines to help nonprofits communicate impact. Learn more at impactmatters.org/nonprofit-center.

Direct feedback on this guideline to [info@impactmatters.org](mailto:).