



SWAP Tools: Frequently Asked Technical Questions Including BYC & Budget Tool

General Questions:

Q: Who can I contact if I have questions about using the SWAP tools, including the BYC, Budget Tools, and SPP?

A: Contact Focus Strategies at info@focusstrategies.net. You can also call us from 8:30-5pm Pacific Time, Mon-Fri. Indicate it's a SWAP question – please specify whether it's a policy or technical question, and we'll be glad to connect you with someone who can help. If you get our voicemail, leave a message for Nina Prudhomme, Administrative Analyst, and we'll get back to you shortly.

Q: What is HDX?

A: HDX stands for "Homeless Data Exchange", the web based portal for reporting data to HUD, including your HIC, PIT, and AHAR.

Q: Will we be expected to provide personal or identifying client information?

A: The only piece of Protected Identifying Information (PII) that the BYC requires is date of birth. However, this information is only used to generate the aggregated dataset at the household level.

Q: Why is calculated HIC utilization rate 100% for all Rapid Rehousing projects?

A: Rapid Rehousing projects do not have fixed inventory of beds or units so utilization rate, as calculated for other project types, is not applicable as a performance measure for RRH; However, other variables are dependent on utilization rate so an assumed utilization rate of 100% is applied to all Rapid Rehousing projects.

Q: How should I code Safe Haven programs?

A: Safe Haven projects should be recoded as ES or TH aligning with the project type that most accurately reflects how the Safe Haven is operated. If you are unsure which project type to use for your Safe Haven(s), contact Focus Strategies.

Questions Regarding HMIS Data:

Q: How many years of data are included?

A: The analysis includes data from any client with an open record during a two year timeframe. The dataset should include any record that was open at least one day during the analysis year and the year prior to that. The analysis year should be the most recently completed calendar year. For example, if you start this process during 2016, then the analysis year will be 2015, and the data input into the BYC will be from calendar years 2014 and 2015.

Q: How “perfect” do the data need to be?

A: The data should be "cleaned" and checked for potential quality issues before being entered into the BYC. More detailed instructions for how to do this and what to look for are discussed in the User's Guide.

Q: Will we need to create a custom HMIS report to pull the HMIS data?

A: You will need to export raw (not aggregated) data from the HMIS system. There are detailed instructions in the User's Guide about which variables to export and an HMIS Excel template that shows the organization and fields needed.

Q: Our community records stays in the night-by-night method (as described in the 2014 HMIS Standards) to count the number of nights attended. This shows several one-night stays for an individual as opposed to one multiple night stay. In order to get a meaningful representation of length of stay (LOS), should I code the exit dates to equal the date of entry plus the number of nights stayed before putting that information into the BYC?

A: Many emergency shelters record data in the night-by-night method, and the entry and exit date(s) need to be modified in order to appropriately capture “length of stay” for the purpose of the SWAP tools (BYC and SPP). The User’s Guide for the BYC has detailed instructions on how to address this issue.

Q: I know it is important to complete Appendix C steps in order. Can I skip steps that don’t apply?

A: Yes, you can skip steps that do not apply.

Q: Our HMIS leaves relationship to HH blank for singles. Should I replace these values with “self”?

A: You should replace the blank values with “self” as long as you are sure that the cells are blank because they are singles, and not because the data is missing for that record. If you do have missing data as well, you should code the missing data as “data not collected” first, and then replace the single records as “self”.

Q: I noticed instances where there are overlapping but not identical entry/exit records for households. (I.e. one record is 1/1/2012-1/2/2012 and one is 1/1/2012-1/5/2012.) Or, for example, I have a household with a record for 12/5/13-12/5/13 and 12/5/13-12/13/14 for the same shelter. Do I need to collapse these records? Note – it is reasonable for a client to be enrolled in two or more different projects at the same time (i.e., a RRH project and an ES project or an SSO and a housing project). This is allowable per HUD Data Standards and should not be an issue for the tools.

A: Overlapping records should ideally be resolved. We recommend contacting the project directly to confirm which (if any) of the records should be kept. With that information, you can correct the record(s) manually to reflect what actually happened at the project. You should also make sure the record is changed in HMIS. If this issue is pervasive and/or not able to be fixed, it may be worth excluding the program from analysis altogether. Feel free to contact us with more specific information about the programs and/or projects if you are unsure of which route to take.

Q: Should I recode “blank” to “data not collected” for the HMIS data?

A: The BYC will recode all values listed as “BLANK” to “Data not collected” in prior living and destination recoding, so as long as the entries say “BLANK” (as opposed to simply blank cells). If, however, you have

blank cells, you will need to refer to Appendix C in the BYC User's Guide for directions on how to recode all of the blank cells to say "BLANK".

Questions Regarding the HIC:

Q: If I know I need to exclude some data from HMIS in the BYC, does that mean that I should just delete the associated projects from the HIC in the BYC?

A: The uploaded HIC will guide the entire analysis. The projects included in the HIC are the projects that will be analyzed in the BYC. If you realize, based on HMIS data, that you need to exclude a project that you originally planned on including you will need to delete the project(s) from the HIC Excel template and upload the new HIC.

Q: Which projects should I consider excluding from analysis in the BYC?

A: You should plan to exclude programs that do not have enough HMIS data to make analysis relevant and/or consistent (e.g., new or under construction projects that do not have two years of HMIS data, projects that are changing operations such as a TH project that has been reallocated to PH and available data represents old project operations, or projects that have closed since the HIC was prepared). If there are projects in which the data is poor, insufficient, or not representative of the project today, and, therefore, cannot be included in the BYC, they can later be added as part of the "Year-One Changes" in the SPP.

Q: I would like to include rapid re-housing in the BYC if possible, but there are some challenges. I am planning to use calendar years 2014 and 2015 for the BYC, but our rapid re-housing projects started in July 2014. Would it be possible to use July 2012 – July 2016 RRH HMIS data for the BYC? Or would we be better off just including RRH in year 1 of the SPP?

A: The BYC was developed to use two calendar years of HMIS data. If you don't yet have two years of calendar year data, you should include the RRH projects in the first year of the SPP.

Q: We have family units for TH and PSH. In the 2015 HIC, one of our TH programs was at 100% unit occupancy (10); however, due to the size of the families, only 26 of the 30 beds were utilized because families do not share units. How is this taken into account for the BYC and SPP?

A: The utilization rate calculated by the HIC can be overridden in the BYC if there is reason to believe that the utilization rate on the night of the sheltered PIT/HIC does not represent the average daily utilization rate of a project. In the case of this particular project, it is possible to manually override the HIC utilization rate to a more accurate utilization rate of 100%. The HIC utilization rate is used only as a (potential) indicator of data quality. The BYC will calculate a utilization rate based on HMIS data that will be used in modeling changes in the SPP. Any discrepancies between the reported utilization rate (HIC) and calculated utilization rate (HMIS) are reviewed as one of the data quality measures in the BYC.

Q: I have my HIC uploaded and I see that there's an error. Do I need to go back and start the template over since I have already started entering budget information?

A: Yes, unfortunately, you will need to fix the HIC and reenter the information you have put in the budget page before proceeding. All projects in the HIC must have "C" completed and a value greater than 0 in at least one of the following columns: N, O, P, and R.

Q: Do we need to address the differences in HMIS/PIT info by changing utilization rates in the HIC?

A: No, you should not specifically change your utilization rate for the purpose of matching the utilization rates from HMIS data and that from the HIC. If you see a large difference between the two rates, that could be indicative of a count night that was out of the ordinary in some way, due to the nature of the program itself, or potentially due to data quality issues. You are able to override the utilization rate as calculated in the HIC in the BYC if there is reason to believe that it is not representative of the average daily utilization rate for the project. In general, the BYC is designed to provide an accurate annual utilization rate, which is important to analysis of program and system effectiveness, and also essential for modeling how related changes to the system will impact the size of the homeless population (which is the purpose of the SPP).

Questions Regarding the Budget Tool:

Q: Why might some of my projects not show up in the drop-down list on the budget supplementary spreadsheet?

A: This may happen if two (or more) of your programs have the same name. Make sure that all of the programs from the HIC have unique names. If this does not solve the problem, then contact us directly so that we may help you further.

Q: Are we able to change the headings of the budget categories on the supplementary budget spreadsheet?

A: The information compiled on the budget spreadsheet is designed for the BYC. Changing the budget spreadsheet by creating extra columns or changing the names of one or more of the columns might distort the link between the information in that spreadsheet and the BYC information as well as create the potential for inconsistencies with the way data are presented between communities. For these reasons, we do not recommend making any changes in the budget document. There is an area to put comments in the budget spreadsheet if additional information is desired.

Q: Should we ask providers for budget information for the time period that matches the HMIS analysis year or should we ask them for their most recent annual budget (which could be for different time periods but would likely be more accurate than if they have to break it out)?

A: Please ask for their most recently completed budget year. For some providers, this may be a calendar year, some might be a Federal fiscal year, etc. Even though this may not match exactly to the data time period, this generally is not an issue. Further detail is provided in Appendix B in the User's Guide for the BYC.