

The National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth

SINGLE-POINT-OF-CONTACT (SPOC) Programs in the United States: Research Brief

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This research brief examines Single-Point-of-Contact (SPOC) programs across U.S. colleges and universities, focusing on how institutions support students experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and housing instability. NAEHCY defines SPOCs as designated safe and supportive offices or staff committed to helping students navigate admissions, enrollment, and college persistence through supportive services and connections to resources.

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A National Look at Single-Point-of-Contact (SPOC) Programs

“NAEHCY DEFINES SINGLE-POINT-OF-CONTACT (SPOC) PROGRAMS AS designated safe and supportive college offices and/or staff members committed to helping students experiencing homelessness to successfully navigate the college admissions and enrollment process and succeed while in college by providing supportive services and connecting them to on- and off-campus resources.” (Havlik, 2024, p. 9)

Survey Results (Havlik & Gros, in progress)

SPOCs at the university level were surveyed across the United States on their roles and experiences. One hundred eighteen individuals responded to the survey. 34 states were represented

- Participant roles included point of contact for housing and food-insecure students (n = 81), student affairs (n = 73), student services (n = 56), basic needs coordinator (n = 48), and campus homeless liaison (n = 31). Most participants had multiple roles.

Survey Takeaways

- When asked how they felt their university met students' housing needs, on a scale of 1 = not true at all to 4 = very true, participants reported a mean of 2.29 (SD = 0.15).
- When asked about how the university meets students' food needs, the mean was slightly higher at 3.02 (SD = .015).
- When asked to report the ways that students with food and housing insecurity are identified on campus, “students self-identify” (n = 115) was the most frequently reported way students are identified, followed by informal internal process (n = 85), identifying students based on who accesses basic needs support, such as food pantry (n = 77), formal internal referral process (n = 69)

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Services Provided

The most frequent services provided by the university to support food and housing needs included having an on-campus food pantry (n = 102), mental health counseling (n = 98), and emergency funds to cover basic needs (n = 90).

- Few participants reported off-campus shelter/transitional housing (n = 15), food scholarships (n = 18), and off-campus food pantry (n = 28).
- Private and 4-year universities were more likely to have year-round housing
- Public universities were more likely to provide advising or coaching specific to housing and food insecurity
- 4-year universities are more likely to have Swipe Out Hunger programs

Participants reported higher confidence in their ability to support students' food needs (M = 3.22, SD = 0.86) than in their ability to support students' housing needs (M = 2.74, SD = 0.96).

SPOC Training

- Most of the participants reported having no training (n = 55, 46.6%).
- There was an association between receiving required training and participants reporting higher levels of “I am capable of learning about homelessness and food insecurity for my work.”
- Job experience matters. Participants with 6+ years of experience reported being more confident to support food insecurity vs. those with 1-5 years

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Interview Findings (Havlik & Jackson, under review)

Follow-up interviews were conducted with eight of the survey participants. Themes shared across the participants included:

- Universities rely on external funding to address food and housing insecurity on campus.
- There were inconsistencies in how the university structured its support for food and housing insecurity. Participants noted the disconnect between administrators and staff.
- Multifaceted challenges arise in addressing housing. None of the institutions had a clear answer on how to address housing insecurity effectively.
- Food insecurity is more straightforward to address than housing, but it comes with its own challenges. Food pantries seem to be the primary approach to supporting food insecurity on campus.

References

Havlik, S. (2024). National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth (NAEHCY) Single Point of Contact (SPOC) Resource and User Guide: For Professionals Supporting Youth Experiencing Homelessness Preparing for and Attending College. 2nd Edition.

Havlik, S. & Gros, B. (In progress). Examining housing and food insecurity support on college campuses.

Havlik, S. & Jackson, L. (under review). Point-of-contact programs: Perspectives on addressing food and housing insecurity on college campuses.