

Sweeps Hotline How-To

This is a general, step-by-step guide to help you build a Sweeps Hotline, modeled off Portland's [People's Neighborhood Legal Collective Sweeps Support Hotline](#).

Background on Portland's Hotline

Portland's hotline came about.....

The hotline is modeled off Portland's Jail Support Hotline, which has been running successfully for several years now.

Structure

While the hotline is central to Portland's operation, it's only one component of a three part structure. That structure includes:

- Ground support/Rapid Response team
- Legal observation (almost identical to that of National Lawyers' Guild)
- Hotline

These three components are important in offering support to houseless folks before, during, and after a sweep occurs.

As best as the PDX Sweeps Hotline volunteers can anticipate a sweep happening— whether it's from a hotline call or some other form of communication, they're able to have legal observers on hand to dispatch them to the site. The ground support/rapid response team is also deployed to take down the names of people who are being swept and help account for their belongings.

Hotline

Call Process

When the hotline receives a call, the volunteer asks a set of short but crucial questions in order to connect them with the appropriate resources:

- Name of the person being swept or person making the call and what's the best way/phone number to get in touch ?
 - Doesn't have to be legal name
- What are the person's pronouns?
- What is the location of the sweep?
- Does the person have any medical condition?
- Do they have urgent medication needs?
- Is the person a member of a vulnerable population (BIPOC, trans or non-binary, with a disability)?

Responses to the call will vary depending on the situation. For example, in some instances, if the person's belongings have already been taken by the time the ground support/rapid response team shows up to a call, the team will take an accounting of the person's belongings to try and help the person retrieve them after the sweep. In other instances, the team has helped move a person's belongings into a storage unit when the person was arrested to protect them from being discarded or stolen. If the person who is being swept has an urgent medical condition or needs urgent medication that has been discarded, the ground support team works to secure this medication or connect them with medical resources.

Hotline Set Up

The PDX Hotline uses an old system that exists on a URL. For added security, the hotline also uses a secure server which is located outside of the US. The folks who helped Portland set up this secure Hotline have offered to help other groups who wish to establish a hotline at no charge. Because the hotline platform is web-based, volunteers can easily work remotely and answer calls from any location.

Additional Security Considerations

PDX Hotline uses a platform called Cryptpad, which is similar to Google Docs, but encrypted so it provides a higher level of privacy and security. They use Cryptpad for volunteer training documents and to take notes from Hotline calls.

For more details about the technical side of the hotline and security considerations, please reach out to WRAP staff and we'll connect you with the right PDX people.

Lessons learned + other considerations

Legal Observing

PDX has found it best to work in conjunction with existing legal observing groups and volunteers. They've found there's no need to reinvent the wheel—trained observers of existing groups are likely willing and happy to observe for Sweeps so if there are existing legal observer groups in your area, consider pulling volunteers from there.

Volunteers

Even though Portland is relatively small in terms of geography and population and the hotline call volume hasn't been high (yet), Portland has found that they still need a lot more volunteers. The number of volunteers you'll need will depend on your city size, geography, and the volume of sweeps. You'll also need a group of dedicated on-call volunteers for the ground

support/rapid response team, which is a crucial component to the model. If someone can call a sweep in but there isn't any support beyond the call, what is your hotline really offering?