2014

Point-in-Time Count Methodology Guide

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This guide provides Continuums of Care (CoCs) with standards and guidance concerning acceptable methodologies and approaches to conducting Point-in-Time (PIT) counts of homeless people. This guide replaces the **Guide to Counting Sheltered Homeless People and the Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People.**

The audience for this guide and toolkit are CoC stakeholders involved in planning and executing the PIT count. This includes the CoC collaborative applicant, HMIS lead, Consolidated Plan (Con Plan) jurisdictions, and other CoC members and local stakeholders involved in planning and executing the PIT count.

Although some CoCs have spent significant time and resources in past years developing their PIT count methodologies and approaches, HUD is requiring that all CoCs review this entire guide to ensure that their current PIT count practices meet all of HUD's PIT count minimum standards. HUD also recommends that CoCs regularly review and refer to this guide to answer questions about PIT count preparation, implementation, and analysis.

As a companion to this guide, HUD developed a series of supplemental PIT count resources to help CoCs to plan and implement their PIT counts, including training resources and tools. As these resources become available HUD will announce them via listserv and publish them online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page**. CoCs should use these supplemental resources because they are designed to meet HUD's PIT count data collection requirements and are based on community best practices.

If CoCs are not certain that their current PIT count methodology meets HUD's minimum standards or have other questions about their PIT count methodology that are not covered in this guide, visit the Ask a Question page on HUD's HUD Exchange Resource Exchange and submit a question related to the PIT count.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PIT COUNT METHODOLOGY GUIDE

1.1 Purpose

This guide explains the minimum standards established by HUD for PIT counts and is intended to help CoCs choose and implement methodologies for conducting sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts. CoCs should consider their individual characteristics and resources when using this guide to select an appropriate methodology or methodologies. The guide also provides information on planning and executing successful sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts and offers advice on how to clean and analyze PIT count data for submission to HUD. CoCs should review this guide in its entirety, as well as the accompanying resources available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page.** To submit a question, select **HDX (PIT, HIC, AHAR, Pulse)** for the Program/System under *Your Details*, then under *Question Details*, choose **PIT** as the topic and subtopic.

1.2 The Importance of Accurate PIT Counts

PIT counts are a critical source of data on the number and characteristics of people who are homeless in the United States. These data are used to measure homelessness on a local and national level and are published annually on HUD's **HUD Exchange website**, which can be viewed by CoCs and the general public. PIT count data are also provided annually to Congress as part of the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The AHAR is used by Congress, HUD, other federal departments, and the general public to understand the nature and extent of homelessness. HUD's PIT count data has become increasingly important as a measure of our local and national progress related to preventing and ending homelessness, especially with relation to our progress towards meeting the goals of ***Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness***. Therefore, it has become necessary to ask for more detailed information and to ensure that the data submitted to HUD are as complete and accurate as practicable.

PIT count data and CoC efforts to produce an accurate count also play a critical role in the annual CoC Program Competition. HUD requires CoCs to submit PIT count data and information on the methodology used to generate their sheltered and unsheltered counts. HUD uses this information to ensure that the data are valid and reliable and then to evaluate the progress CoCs are making on reducing homelessness generally and among specific subpopulations. Collecting valid and reliable data and making progress on reducing homelessness are scoring factors in HUD's CoC Program Competition and can influence CoC Program funding awards.

In addition to informing national priorities and HUD funding decisions, PIT count data are an extremely important source for local program and system planning. To be responsive to the needs of persons experiencing homelessness in the community, CoCs need to understand how many individuals and families are being served by their homeless services system, as well as how many are unsheltered and might still need access to services. Current and accurate data on the number and characteristics of homeless persons in the community are useful for policy and planning decisions and enable CoCs to adjust the types of services available according to need, resulting in more efficient use of limited resources. Having reliable local data on homelessness can also play a critical role in raising public awareness of the challenges facing people who are homeless and bolster efforts to garner additional public and private support.

1.3 PIT Count Minimum Standards

Legal Requirements

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act authorized HUD to require CoCs to conduct PIT counts. Section 427(b)(3) states:

> "Homelessness Counts. – The Secretary shall not require that communities conduct an actual count of homeless people other than those described in paragraphs (1) through (4) of section 103(a) of this Act."

This statutory language establishes HUD's authority to require PIT counts but limits the count to persons who are defined as living on the streets or in shelters (which is what section 103(a) paragraphs 1 through 4 define). This is further clarified in Standard Nos. 7 and 11 below.

In the CoC Program interim rule HUD further clarified the requirements for conducting PIT counts. In the definition section HUD defines the PIT count as "count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons carried out on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January or at such other time as required by HUD" (24 CFR 578.3). HUD outlined CoC planning requirements in 24 CFR 578.7(c)(2):

> "(2) Planning for and conducting, at least biennially, a point-in-time count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets the following requirements:
>
> i.   Homeless persons who are living in a place not designed or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for humans must be counted as unsheltered homeless persons.
>
> ii. Persons living in emergency shelters and transitional housing projects must be counted as sheltered homeless persons.
>
> iii. Other requirements established by HUD by Notice."

The Con Plan jurisdictions, which are States, local governments, or territories that receive Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME), and/or Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA) formula funding, are required to conduct a homeless needs assessment, per Section 105(b) of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act:

> "A housing strategy submitted under this section shall be in a form that the Secretary determines to be appropriate for the assistance the jurisdiction may be provided and shall…
>
> (2) describe the nature and extent of homelessness, including rural homelessness, within the jurisdiction, providing an estimate of the special needs of various categories of persons who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, including tabular representation of such information, and a description of the jurisdiction's strategy for
>
> > (A) helping low-income families avoid becoming homeless;
> >
> > (B) addressing the emergency shelter and transitional housing needs of homeless persons (including a brief inventory of facilities and services that meet such needs within that jurisdiction); and
> >
> > (C) helping homeless persons make the transition to permanent housing and independent living;"

Further, Con Plan jurisdictions are required to report on their compliance with the state and housing strategy, including actions taken as a result of the homeless need assessment, per section 108(a) of the Cranston-Gonzalez National Affordable Housing Act:

"Each participating jurisdiction shall annually review and report, in a form acceptable to the Secretary, on the progress it has made in carrying out its housing strategy, which report shall include an evaluation of the jurisdiction's progress in meeting its goal established in section 12705(b)(15) of this title, and information on the number and types of households served, including the number of very low-income, low-income, and moderate-income persons served and the racial and ethnic status of persons served that will be assisted with funds made available."

The homeless needs assessment requirements for local governments, including the requirement to use PIT count data, are stated in 24 CFR 91.205(c)(1):

"The plan must describe, in a form prescribed by HUD, the nature and extent of unsheltered and sheltered homelessness, including rural homelessness, within the jurisdiction. At a minimum, the recipient must use data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and data from the Point-In-Time (PIT) count conducted in accordance with HUD standards.

(i)   The description must include, for each category of homeless persons specified by HUD (including chronically homeless individuals and families, families with children, veterans and their families, and unaccompanied youth), the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night, the number of persons who experience homelessness each year, the number of persons who lose their housing and become homeless each year, the number of persons who exit homelessness each year, the number of days that persons experience homelessness, and other measures specified by HUD.

(ii)   The plan also must contain a brief narrative description of the nature and extent of homelessness by racial and ethnic group, to the extent information is available."

Similarly, in 24 CFR 91.305(c)(1), States are required to submit a homeless needs assessment as part of their Con Plan process:

"The plan must describe, in a form prescribed by HUD, the nature and extent of homelessness, including rural homelessness, within the state.

(i)   The description must include, for each category of homeless persons specified by HUD (including chronically homeless individuals and families, families with children, veterans and their families, and unaccompanied youth), the number of persons experiencing homelessness on a given night, the number of persons who experience homelessness each year, the number of persons who lose their housing and become homeless each year, the number of persons who exit homelessness each year, and the number of days that persons experience homelessness, and any other measures specified by HUD.

(ii)   The plan also must contain a brief narrative description of the nature and extent of homelessness by racial and ethnic group, to the extent that information is available."

In an effort to fulfill the legal requirements stated above, further improve the quality and accuracy of PIT counts, ensure consistent PIT count practices across CoCs, and assist CoCs in selecting an appropriate count approach, HUD has developed 14 PIT count standards that CoCs must meet. CoCs should strive to continuously improve PIT count methodologies consistent with these standards.

A complete list of the PIT count standards are presented in the text boxes below. The standards are repeated and explained in the relevant chapters as indicated below. This section provides guidance for the general count standards.

Count Standards

General PIT Count Standards (Chapters 1 and 3)

Standard No. 1:

CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least biennially, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements.

Standard No. 2:

The sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts must be conducted during the last 10 days in January and represent all homeless persons who were sheltered and unsheltered on a single night during that period.

Standard No. 3:

The final PIT count methodology must be approved by the CoC in accordance with the **CoC's governance charter.**

Standards Regarding Coordination of the PIT Count with the Con Plan Jurisdiction (Chapter 5)

Standard No. 4:

All CoCs should consult and collaborate with all Con Plan jurisdictions in the geographical boundary of the CoC, including those that do not have ESG funding, to assist the jurisdictions in submitting PIT count data that is relevant to completing their Con Plans.

Standard No. 5:

CoCs must provide PIT count data to the entity(ies) responsible for the Con Plan jurisdiction(s) associated with the CoC.

Sheltered PIT Count Standards (Chapters 2 and 4)

Standard No. 6:

CoCs must account for and report on all sheltered homeless people residing in the CoC through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' sheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 7:

CoCs must be able to verify that the sheltered homeless people identified in the count are sheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)."

Standard No. 8:

CoCs should use client data already collected and entered in HMIS as the primary data source for the sheltered PIT count for emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects that participate in HMIS.

Unsheltered PIT Count Standards (Chapters 2 and 5)

Standard No. 9:

CoCs must account for and report on all unsheltered homeless people residing in the CoC's geography through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' unsheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 10:

CoCs may exclude geographic areas where the CoC has determined that there are no unsheltered homeless people, including areas that are uninhabitable (e.g., deserts). CoCs must document the criteria and decision-making process used to identify and exclude specific geographic areas.

Standard No. 11:

CoCs must be able to verify that the unsheltered homeless people identified in the count are unsheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Data Quality Standards (Chapter 6)

Standard No. 12:

CoCs must ensure that during the PIT count homeless persons are only counted once. It is critical that the counting methods be coordinated to ensure that there is no double-counting. Therefore, CoCs must also collect sufficient information to be able to reliably deduplicate the PIT count (i.e., ensure that the same homeless person was not counted more than once).

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Standard No. 13:

Surveys of people for the sheltered or unsheltered count must be administered in a manner that protects participant privacy and safety, as well as the safety of the person completing the survey.

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Standard No. 14:

CoCs are required to ensure that people conducting the PIT count, including project staff and community volunteers, are appropriately trained about count standards, data collection procedures, and protocols for privacy, security, and personal safety.

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1.4 PIT Count Data Collection Requirements

Though this guide provides information on selecting and executing the appropriate PIT count methodology for CoCs, it does not provide comprehensive information on the reporting requirements for the sheltered and unsheltered counts. CoCs are responsible for reviewing the current *Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program* and are required to collect and report information on sheltered and unsheltered people as described in the Notice and in HUD's annual data submission guidance, which is available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page.**

Many CoCs use the PIT count as an opportunity to collect additional information on the characteristics of the homeless people in their community beyond HUD required information. When using survey instruments, CoCs should consider whether adding multiple additional questions creates a survey that is prohibitively long and difficult to administer, especially when surveying people at night in an unsheltered setting. When CoCs develop their survey instruments they must first ensure they are collecting the data required by HUD. CoCs should carefully consider whether additional data collection beyond the HUD-required elements will result in an undue burden on provider staff and homeless persons and hinder the data quality of the HUD-required elements.

1.5 How to Use This Guide

The following five chapters provide information on various stages of planning, executing, and analyzing and reporting on the PIT count.

> **Chapter 2,** *Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology*, explains basic methodologies for sheltered and unsheltered counts and outlines how CoCs could select the appropriate count methodology. All CoCs should review the guidance in this chapter to ensure that their count methodology meets all of HUD's new PIT count standards.

Chapter 3, *Planning Your PIT Count*, discusses the steps that CoCs should take in planning their sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts, including engaging community partners, developing a timeline for planning and executing the count, and recruiting, training, and deploying volunteers.

Chapter 4, *Executing the Sheltered Count*, provides detailed guidance on planning and executing the sheltered count using multiple data sources. It also includes guidance on how to meet standards for conducting the sheltered PIT count.

Chapter 5, *Executing the Unsheltered Count*, describes the various acceptable methods for conducting an unsheltered count. It includes guidance on how to meet standards for conducting the unsheltered PIT count, as well as strategies for counting unsheltered homeless youth, veterans, and chronically homeless persons.

Chapter 6, *After the PIT Count*, provides guidance on how to process the PIT count data after the count, including interpreting the data, deduplication techniques, and cleaning and submitting data to HUD.

The accompanying PIT count resources available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page** offer CoCs tools and templates for planning and executing their PIT counts in accordance with HUD requirements.

2. Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology

The methodology that CoCs select to conduct its sheltered and unsheltered count is influenced by the CoCs' geographic and demographic characteristics, as well as their resources and capacity. CoCs should evaluate the completeness and quality of their existing PIT count data before adopting or revising their counting methodology. This chapter will help CoCs understand HUD's minimum standards for conducting sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts and identify the best counting approaches for their communities. All CoCs should review and consider the approaches described in this chapter to ensure that their count methodology is consistent with HUD PIT count standards and guidance.

2.1 PIT Count Approaches: Census versus Sample

HUD requires CoCs to collect reliable data on the *total number* and *characteristics* of *all* people (i.e., sheltered and unsheltered) residing in the CoCs' geographic area who are homeless on a single night and report these data to HUD. CoCs often do not have complete data on everyone who is homeless and so must estimate some data. Therefore, HUD allows CoCs to use multiple approaches to complete their count, including a census approach, sample, or a combination of census and sampling approaches (shown in the graphic below). It is important for CoCs to closely examine their local circumstances, including resources, capacity, and other reporting needs, to determine whether a census or a sampling approach is appropriate for each aspect of their PIT count.

Census **VS** **Sampling**
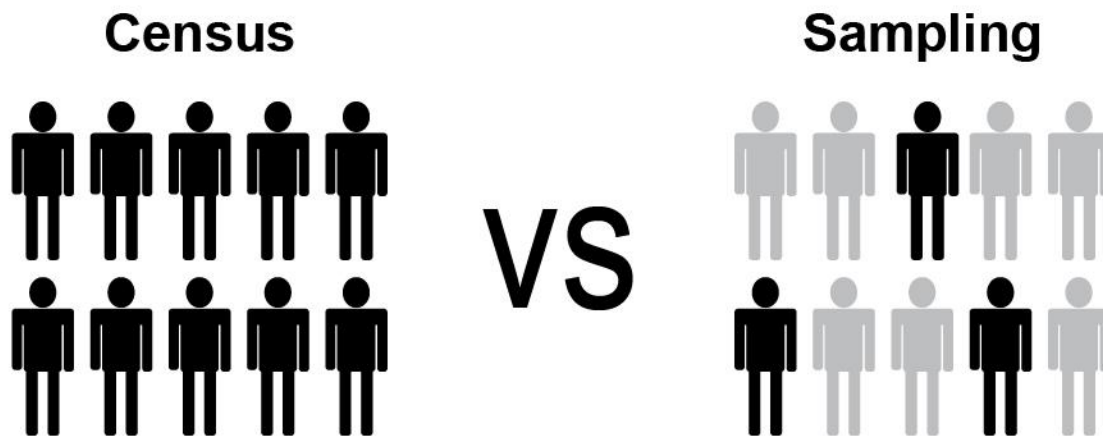
- A **census** count is an enumeration of <u>all</u> homeless people or a distinct subset of homeless people (e.g., households with adults and children) in CoCs. This counting approach provides a direct and complete count of all people and their characteristics, does not require any estimates, and can be used as a benchmark for future PIT counts. A census count should incorporate the entire CoCs' geography. However, it can be difficult and resource intensive to canvass, count, and survey all homeless persons in the CoCs.

- **Sampling** is a partial enumeration of the entire homeless population (or a subset of the homeless population) and can be more feasible for some CoCs or for certain required data (e.g., substance use disorder). CoCs may sample a smaller group of homeless people that are selected from the larger homeless population or a subset (e.g., homeless youth) and use it to estimate the number and characteristics of the entire homeless population or a

subset within the CoCs. CoCs may also sample by counting homeless people located in certain geographic regions within the CoCs and then use this information to estimate the overall homeless population. Sampling can provide an accurate measure of the CoCs' homeless population if it is done correctly, including an appropriate sample size (see *Appendix A: Choosing the Sample Size for the PIT Count* for more information about the appropriate sample size). As illustrated and discussed below, there are two approaches to sampling – random sampling and non-random sampling.

Random Sampling

VS
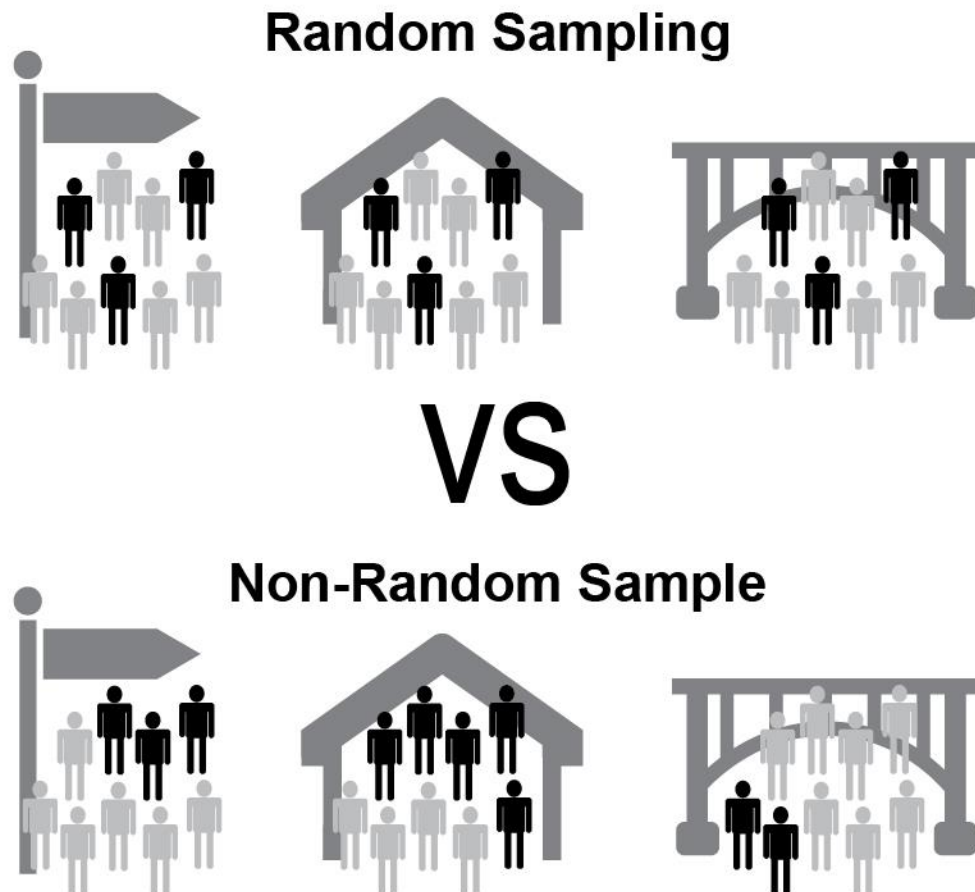
Non-Random Sample

> In a **random probability sample (random sample)**, people (or geographic areas) are randomly selected from the entire population (or CoC geographic area). A random sample requires that each respondent in the population to be represented by the sample (e.g., sheltered homeless adults in households with at least one adult and child) has an equal chance of being selected to be in the sample. Some people will be selected and some will not. Data from a random sample may then be extrapolated to estimate the number or characteristics of all people the sample is designed to represent.

For example, one approach for selecting a random sample of homeless people would be to select every third unsheltered homeless person encountered for an interview. Information collected from people included in a random sample must be reliably adjusted to account for the entire homeless population in the CoCs.

CoCs with a large geographic area might also be required to randomly select geographic areas in which to count and interview people. An example of using a random geographic sample is a CoC that selects some geographic areas (e.g., according to

Census tracts or, city blocks) to represent the entire CoC geography. The data collected from the homeless people counted and interviewed in these regions would then be adjusted to represent the overall homeless population.

➢ **A non-random sample** is a sample that is not selected randomly, rather it is selected based on the convenience of gathering information or purposively with some other goal in mind (e.g., via shelter intake and data collection for HMIS). A non-random sample does not statistically represent the entire population, but if the non-random sample covers a large portion of the population or subpopulation believed to have similar characteristics (e.g., sheltered youth), extrapolation to derive estimates for the entire population or subpopulation is likely to be accurate. As a rule of thumb, data from a non-random sample may be used for extrapolation if reliable data exists for 80 percent or more of the clients in a given household type and project type (e.g., households without children in emergency shelters) and there is no known reason to believe that the characteristics of people included in the non-random sample are different than those who are not included. CoCs should be aware that a non-random sample has an inherent bias towards people in that sample, which tends to be people that are easier to find. CoCs should strive to use a random sample whenever practicable but may use a non-random sample if there is no alternative.

For example, a CoC has two shelters and one transitional housing project for youth each of which participates in HMIS. Data is collected on race at project entry. Among the 100 youth sheltered on the night of the count, only 85 percent (85) provided a response and the remainder (15) did not respond, refused to respond or had missing data. Even though these 85 sheltered youth provided data for another reason (project intake and HMIS data collection), they represent a high proportion (greater than 80 percent) of youth who are sheltered and their data may be used as a non-random sample to estimate the racial characteristics of the 15 who did not provide data. Therefore, if among the 85 who provided data, 40 (47 percent) were white, 40 (47 percent) were black, 5 (6 percent) were Asian, and, among these, 10 (12 percent) reported multiple races, then the CoC may estimate that overall 47 (47 percent) were white, 47 (47 percent) were black, 6 (6 percent) were Asian, and 12 (12 percent) were multiple races.

• CoCs may choose to **combine census and sampling approaches** to complete their PIT count. For example, a CoC may conduct a census to count the total number of homeless people in the CoC, while using a random sampling approach to generate the necessary demographic information, such as gender and race.
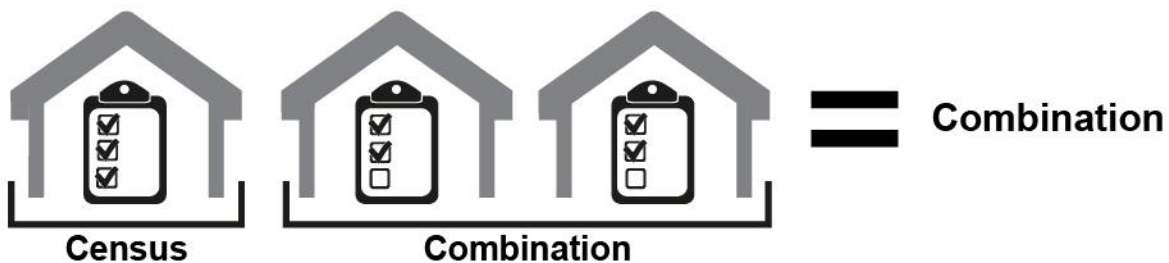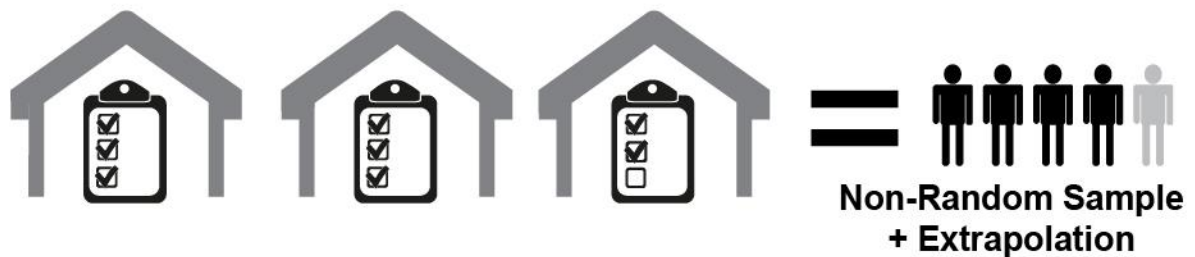
It is preferable for CoCs to conduct a census count when practicable, as it is by definition the most complete and accurate information available. However, it might not be feasible for CoCs to conduct a census count. In such instances, the CoCs should rely on a sampling method consistent with HUD minimum standards and this guide to generate some or all portions of its PIT count. Whatever methodology is chosen, it is essential that CoCs have a plan to deduplicate the data.

2.2 Sheltered Homeless Count Methodology

HUD has outlined three standards for conducting a count of people who are homeless and in shelter (emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing projects) on the night of the count. When deciding on a counting approach, CoCs must ensure that the approach fulfills these three requirements.

Standard No. 6:

CoCs must account for and report on all sheltered homeless people residing in the CoC through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' sheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 7:

CoCs must be able to verify that the sheltered homeless people identified in the count are sheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the __Homeless Definition Final Rule__:

> "An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)."

Standard No. 8:

CoCs should use client data already collected and entered in HMIS as the primary data source for the sheltered PIT count for emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects that participate in HMIS.

The PIT count and Housing Inventory Count (HIC) are integrally related. The sum total number of persons reported in emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects in the PIT count fields of the HIC must match the sum total of sheltered persons reported in the PIT count. This constitutes the universe of sheltered people for whom CoCs must provide actual or estimated demographic characteristics for the sheltered PIT count. Because the PIT and HIC data must match, it is critical that CoCs conduct their PIT count and HIC at the same time.

As described above, there are three main approaches that CoCs may use to generate accurate sheltered PIT counts:

1. Complete census count
2. Random sample and extrapolation
3. Non-random sample and extrapolation

CoCs should consider these approaches or combinations of these approaches when deciding how to collect population and subpopulation data for people in shelter.

Choosing a Sheltered Homeless Count Methodology

To determine which approach is viable for CoCs or what specific data are necessary for a PIT count of people in shelter, consider the following:

How many shelter projects collect complete and high-quality data from all clients they serve for each data point (e.g., veteran status) required for the population and subpopulation counts and will have this data for clients served on the night of the count (see section 4.2 for a discussion of high-quality data)?

- *If all projects collect complete and accurate data from __all__ clients for each population and subpopulation characteristic*, a **census** count approach may be used for the sheltered count.

- For projects that participate in HMIS and have entered these data into the community's HMIS, the data collection is already completed and the necessary information should be extracted from the HMIS.

- For projects that do not participate in HMIS, a provider-level survey (per the instructions in Chapter 4, *Executing the Sheltered Count*) should be conducted. [1]

- *If most projects collect all the required characteristics of their clients*, a **non-random sample plus extrapolation approach** may be used.[2]

  - As noted, this method is appropriate if reliable data exists for 80 percent or more of the clients in a given household type and project type (e.g., households without children in emergency shelters) **and** there is no known reason to believe that the client characteristics at the non-participating projects are different than the participating projects. If the client characteristics of non-participating projects are different than those of participating projects, or if data on a given characteristic is not available for at least 80 percent of all clients, then survey all clients (i.e., conduct a census) or conduct a random sample of clients at the non-participating projects.

- *If some projects collect all required client characteristics, some collect only some client characteristics, and some do not collect any characteristics*, then a **combination** of approaches may be used.

  - For projects that collect *all required characteristics* of all their clients, collect all the data on client characteristics from these projects via HMIS or a project-level survey.

  - For projects that *collect some of the required characteristics*, extrapolate for the characteristics that are available for at least 80 percent of the clients. Then conduct a census survey or select and survey a random sample of clients at these projects for client characteristics (e.g., veteran status) that are not available for at least 80 percent of clients.

  - For projects that *do not collect any of the necessary information*, conduct a census survey or select and survey a random sample of clients at each project to obtain all the required population and subpopulation characteristics.

In general, a census of all clients served by projects is preferred to achieve the highest level of accuracy and is particularly important if the characteristics of clients are not the same at the various projects.

A random sample may be conducted on a single night at one project when the project cannot provide complete PIT count data. A random sample may also be used across multiple projects with incomplete data if the projects serve the same household type and persons with similar characteristics (i.e., two or more projects that target homeless veterans). For communities with a substantial number of large projects that have not collected data necessary for the PIT count, CoCs may decide to select a sample of projects

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[1] Data quality checks (e.g., missing data rates, whether entry and exit dates are accurate,) must be performed before the final decision is made to rely on HMIS or project-level administrative data for the PIT count. These checks ensure that all the required data are recorded by each project and that these data are accurate. For any required characteristic that are not available for 100 percent of clients, CoCs must plan to extrapolate ("non-random sample plus extrapolate approach") for data that are available for at least 80 percent of clients.

[2] In this case, the projects that participate in HMIS form the non-random sample, and information about the clients in these projects is used to estimate the number and characteristics of clients in non-participating projects. Essentially, this approach assumes that occupancy rates (i.e., percent of beds occupied on the night of the PIT count) and client characteristics in HMIS-participating projects are similar to the occupancy rates and client characteristics of non-participating projects.

and then select a sample of the clients from each project. In this situation, the CoCs should seek the help of someone with expertise in survey design and extrapolation to ensure an appropriate sample is selected and the results are adjusted correctly.

2.3 Unsheltered Homeless Count Methodology

HUD has outlined three standards for conducting counts of people who are homeless and unsheltered on the night of the count. When deciding on a counting approach, CoCs must ensure that the approach fulfills these requirements.

Standard No. 9:

CoCs must account for and report on all unsheltered homeless people residing in the CoC's geography through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' unsheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 10:

CoCs may exclude geographic areas where the CoC has determined that there are no unsheltered homeless people, including areas that are uninhabitable (e.g., deserts). CoCs must document the criteria and decision-making process used to identify and exclude specific geographic areas.

CoCs may complete their unsheltered count on the night designated for the count (i.e., "night of the count" approach), over the 7 days following the night of the count (i.e., "post-night"), or through a combination of these approaches. Post-night counts are typically service-based counts. **If a CoC collects data over multiple nights and/or days using a post-night approach, the CoC must ensure that the persons counted are limited to persons who were unsheltered on the night chosen for the PIT count per Standard No. 2 and that the CoC can properly deduplicate their data per Standard No. 12.** These approaches, including different variations of the night of the count method are described below (see Chapter 5, *Executing the Unsheltered Count*, for more detail on these methods).

> ### Standard No. 11:
>
> CoCs must be able to verify that the unsheltered homeless people identified in the count are unsheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the Homeless Definition Final Rule:
>
> > "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

- **Night of the count:** A count of people who are unsheltered on the night the CoC designated for its PIT count (often referred to as a "street count"). This includes counting people who are staying in public or private places not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including cars, parks, abandoned buildings, buses or train stations, airports, or camping grounds, during the period between dusk and dawn on the night designated for the PIT count, when people who are homeless are typically either in shelter or in unsheltered locations for the night. In addition to counting people who are unsheltered, a night of the count approach can also include interviews to determine the characteristics of all people or a sample of people counted.

  The strategies and considerations used in a **night of the count** approach are also applicable to other nights during which CoCs may conduct their counts in the week following the CoCs' designated PIT count date. However, on nights other than the PIT count night, CoCs must interview people encountered on nights after the PIT count night to determine if: (1) they were unsheltered on the night of the count, and (2) if they were already counted.

  In a **night of the count** approach, CoCs conduct their counts through either a **complete coverage** or a **known locations** approach or a combination of these approaches.

  - ➤ **Complete coverage count:** In this approach, the whole CoC geography is canvassed. Instead of going only to specific blocks or locations (e.g., the bus station), CoCs send teams of enumerators throughout the geography covered by their CoCs, searching for and counting all people who are unsheltered.

  - ➤ **Known locations count:** This approach identifies known locations where people who are unsheltered are located at night or sends enumerators to specific neighborhoods, blocks, census tracts, or other geographies within the CoCs to count unsheltered homeless people staying in those locations. For example, if homeless outreach teams are aware of an encampment of homeless persons under a bridge and alongside the highway, the CoCs would send enumerators to this location as part of the unsheltered count. When using this approach, CoCs should attempt to canvass all known locations within their geography where people who are unsheltered are believed to be staying, unless doing so is not feasible or safe, in which case an alternative method should be used to count people in known locations not included on the night of the count. The known locations approach is only acceptable by itself if the locations are the only potential places unsheltered persons might be on the night of the count or in the week following the night of the count. If not, the known locations count must be supplemented

by a random sample of other areas or by a service-based count to cover the unsheltered persons not at the known locations on the night of the count.

> **Random sample of areas count:** This approach identifies all the geographic areas in the community where people who are unsheltered might be located and selects a random sample of these areas to canvas. Per Standard No. 10, geographic areas where CoCs have determined there are no unsheltered homeless people are excluded from this list. Each area to be represented by the sample (once the collected sample data are weighted) must have a chance to be selected for the sample. CoCs must use a statistically reliable approach in order to conduct and use data from a random sample of areas count. CoCs will likely require assistance from someone with expertise in survey design and extrapolation to ensure an appropriate sample is selected and the results are adjusted accurately.

- **Service-based count (post-night of the count):** A survey of people at various social service locations or other public or private locations to identify people who were unsheltered, but not counted, on the night of the count–either because CoCs did not use a night of the count approach or because unsheltered people were missed on the night of the count. **Service-based counts may only be conducted within the 7-day period after the designated count night.** Service-based counts are conducted at locations frequented by people who are homeless, including soup kitchens, day shelters, libraries, and other community locations and include interviews to determine whether people were unsheltered on the night of the count, as well as their characteristics.

Choosing an Unsheltered Count Methodology

CoCs should consider the following questions and related guidance to determine which method is appropriate for their CoC geographic area, particularly which method will likely result in the most accurate count of the CoCs' unsheltered homeless population.

- Which geographic areas within the CoC are the most important to completely cover during an unsheltered count?

- Which Con Plan jurisdictions fall within the CoC's geographic area?

- How large a geographic area does the CoC cover?

  > If the CoC covers a relatively compact geographic area and the CoC has the resources to send enumerators to cover all of the geography on the night of the count, then the CoC should conduct a **night of the count** method using a **complete coverage** or a **known locations** approach to determine the total number of unsheltered people, plus a **random sample** approach with an interview of those sampled to determine the characteristics of unsheltered people.

  > Alternatively, a CoC covering a larger geographic area could use a combination of strategies, such as a **known locations** count in high probability neighborhoods and specific areas where outreach staff have previously or currently identified people staying, as well as a **service-based count** at locations across the CoC geography in the days following the night of the count.

- Does the CoC have very limited resources relative to the geographic area of the CoC to count and survey all unsheltered people on the night of the count?

  > If yes, the CoC could use a **service-based count approach** to interview all people at locations where people who are homeless are likely to go to identify who was unsheltered on the night of the count and determine their characteristics.

> If the CoC does not have sufficient resources to canvas all of the geographic areas, the CoC could select a **random sample of areas** approach or combine this approach with a **known locations count** and/or a **service-based count.**

> If the CoC does not have sufficient resources to interview all unsheltered people (whether during the night of the count or during a service-based count) the CoC could interview a random sample of people.

- Does the CoC believe that there might be people experiencing homelessness that enumerators are not likely to identify during an unsheltered count or are there other barriers that could limit the ability of enumerators to conduct interviews during the night of the count?

> If yes, the CoC may combine a known locations count on the night of the count with a service-based count approach to attempt to account for any homeless persons who might not have been identified on the night of the count.

3. PLANNING YOUR PIT COUNT

Early, organized, and structured planning is essential for executing a comprehensive and efficient PIT count. Involving key partners, implementing an appropriate organizing structure and timeline, and using community providers and volunteers appropriately can be the deciding factors in the success of a PIT count. This chapter will cover the key steps and activities involved in planning CoC PIT counts, including:

- Developing a PIT count plan
- Establishing a timeline of count activities
- Determining who to count
- Involving partner organizations
- Managing PIT count planning and execution
- Engaging reluctant providers
- Using volunteers to conduct the PIT count

3.1 Developing a PIT Count Plan

A PIT count requires some basic logistics planning. CoCs must develop a PIT count plan to ensure that the PIT count meets all of the HUD-required minimum standards and collects the required PIT count data. The plan should address the following:

- PIT count committee membership, roles, and responsibilities related to implementing a successful count to completion

- The intent and scope of the activities on the night of the count and related to any count approaches occurring in the 7-day period following the count

- Date and time for the count

- Methodologies for the sheltered and unsheltered count, including enhanced approaches for hard to count geographies and subpopulations

- A data quality plan

- Identification and confirmation of locations to count sheltered and unsheltered people

- Survey development

- Volunteer roles, recruitment, and training

- The role and acquisition, if necessary, of incentives

- Count publicity

1. Set up PIT Count Committee and Subcommittees

CoCs can effectively plan and manage their PIT counts by establishing a PIT count committee (or subcommittee under a larger committee). The primary PIT count committee should be a subcommittee of the CoCs, either solely focused on the PIT count year-round or part of a committee that focuses on the data needs of the CoCs. The organizing structures are responsible for carrying out the PIT count methodology outlined by the CoCs. The primary focus of these committees are to oversee the PIT count process and ensure that all aspects of the count are executed according to the CoCs' PIT count plan. This can include:

- Engaging providers and volunteers in the PIT count process
- Overseeing the sheltered and unsheltered counts
- Monitoring the cleaning of the PIT count data

Standard No. 1:

CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least biennially, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements.

Standard No. 3:

The final PIT count methodology must be approved by the CoC in accordance with the **CoC's governance charter**.

The structure of the PIT count committee can take many forms depending on the size of the CoCs. Committees charged with overseeing a PIT count could involve a variety of CoC members, other community stakeholders (e.g., representatives from Con Plan jurisdictions), or partners assisting with the count (e.g., a university researcher). People with the following types of professional and personal experience are often most useful in PIT count planning: shelter project staff, homeless outreach workers, researchers, law enforcement representatives, and people who have experienced homelessness.

Regional PIT Count Coordination in Balance of State CoCs

Larger CoCs that cover several counties as well as statewide or Balance of State CoCs have found it helpful to designate local or regional coordinators to assist in identifying appropriate service locations, coordinating the outreach, conducting regional trainings, serving as the central point of contact for survey collection, and ultimately managing the data collection effort for their region.

For example one Balance of State CoC splits its geography into different regions with its own coordinator. Each of the regional coordinators serves as the main point of contact for the sheltered and unsheltered counts, and provides general guidance and training to the enumerators in his or her region.

In larger CoCs, such as statewide or Balance of State CoCs, the PIT count committee may consider creating smaller subcommittees that can be tasked with specific aspects of the count.

Subcommittees can address multiple issues, including:

- **Leading PIT count tasks** such as confirming count locations, recruiting and managing volunteers, and securing incentives.

- **Conducting outreach to providers** to identify known locations where homeless people congregate, service providers used by homeless people, and other information that might be useful for planning purposes.

- **Designing or modifying survey data collection instruments** to be used for the sheltered and unsheltered count.

In smaller CoCs, it might be effective to delegate PIT count responsibilities to individual committee members,

2. Determine the Intent and Scope of the Activities on the Night of the Count and in the Days Following the Count

Depending on the resources available and the way CoCs conduct their counts, the PIT count can be an opportunity to meet other CoC objectives. While the primary intent of the PIT count is to enumerate the size and characteristics of the population of people who are homeless, CoCs can also use the PIT count as an opportunity to conduct extensive outreach, engagement, screening, and triage. Many CoCs that created a registry of people experiencing homelessness in need of services use the PIT count to update their registries. Other CoCs use the PIT count as an opportunity to engage the public in a meaningful way to enhance their volunteer base and community awareness. CoCs must decide the intent and scope of the count to know what resources will be needed on the night of the count and to determine how best to allocate those available resources.

3. Considerations and Requirements for Selecting a Date and Time

HUD requires that CoCs conduct their PIT counts during the last 10 calendar days of January — between January 22 and January 31. CoCs should select the best night during this period to conduct the count. CoCs must designate a single night for their count so that the sheltered and unsheltered counts, as well as the Housing Inventory Count (HIC), are all based on the same night. This is particularly important for CoCs that conduct surveys over multiple days. The survey should include questions to determine whether the person interviewed was homeless on the night the CoC designated for the count. HUD strongly recommends that CoCs conduct the sheltered and unsheltered count, and the HIC, at the same time.

> ### Standard No. 2:
>
> The sheltered and unsheltered PIT counts must be conducted during the last 10 days in January and represent all homeless persons who were sheltered and unsheltered on a single night during that period.

CoCs that intend to perform their required PIT count on a date outside of the last 10 days in January must submit a PIT count date exception request to HUD for consideration. CoCs may conduct supplemental counts throughout the year without HUD permission. Additional guidance on PIT count exceptions can be found in the *Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program*, located on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page.**

Day of the Week

Selecting a day for the PIT count that everyone agrees upon is important. Some CoCs intentionally choose the same day each year, while others choose days when it is easier to recruit volunteers or attempt to work around any special events that might be taking place. CoCs should avoid specific dates if it is aware that local government or other

entities will be conducting activities that would disrupt the typical living arrangements of people experiencing homelessness.

Counts of unsheltered homeless people sleeping in places not designed for or ordinarily used for sleeping accommodations should occur at night. HUD requires that CoCs report the count date. However, the term "night" signifies a single period of time from sunset to sunrise, which spans two actual dates. The "night of the count" begins at sunset on the date of the count and ends at sunrise on the following day. Often, unsheltered counts are conducted at times that can be generally referred to as "the middle of the night."

For example, before sending individuals conducting the unsheltered count out at 3 a.m. in January, it is important to identify that if "the date of the count" is January 25, then "the night of the count" starts at sunset on January 25 and ends at sunrise on January 26. While the date of the count is January 25, the unsheltered count might actually be conducted on the following date.
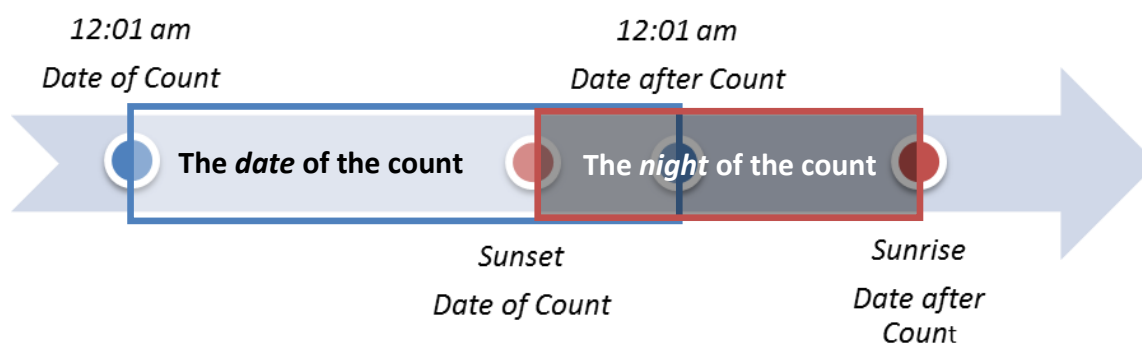
Why Does HUD Require January Counts?

Counting and interviewing people sleeping in unsheltered locations during the winter months can provide a more precise count of people who are unable or unwilling to access emergency shelter or other crisis response assistance. In many communities, winter is the season when the public is most concerned about the ability of homeless people to survive, and many CoCs find it easier to recruit volunteers. A count on one of the coldest nights of the year can be very effective in raising public awareness of the challenges faced by homeless people without shelter. Additionally, conducting the count during the end of the month helps to count people who cycle in and out of homelessness and who may be able to pay for temporary housing (e.g., motel) at the beginning of the month when public benefit payments are available but are unable to do so at the end of the month. Lastly, these counts are important local benchmarks that help measure changes in need at the population and subpopulation level. Counts should help CoCs adjust their interventions to be more effective.

Conducting PIT counts in January ensures that CoCs have sufficient time to compile data and report the information to HUD via the Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX) in advance of the annual CoC Program Competition. This timeframe also provides consistency to the national data HUD receives from CoCs. Because it is easier to count people in shelter than on the street –or *with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground*–conducting the count on a night when the shelters are most full will lead to the most accurate count. HUD recognizes that, while this approach may improve the overall accuracy of the count, a January PIT count is not intended to represent the extent to which people may be unsheltered at other times during the year or over more than a 1-night period.

4. Determine Methodology for Count

After identifying and considering local circumstances, capacity, and timing, CoCs must identify an appropriate counting methodology. Choosing an appropriate count methodology is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2, *Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology*.

> **Standard No. 1:**
>
> CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least biennially, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements.

> **Standard No. 3:**
>
> The final PIT count methodology must be approved by the CoC in accordance with the **CoC's governance charter.**

Once the PIT count methodology is determined, the CoC Board must be review and approve it.

5. Create Data Quality Plan

Each CoC must have a plan for data quality and deduplication for the PIT count. CoCs should develop the procedures for deduplication during the PIT count planning process. Specifically, CoCs must consider deduplication when creating or updating the PIT count survey, selecting geography to ensure there is no overlap in canvassing, and training volunteers on how to conduct the count. Aligning the timing of the count with when shelters are closed minimizes the risk of double counting homeless persons.

> **Standard No. 12:**
>
> CoCs must ensure that during the PIT count homeless persons are only counted once. It is critical that the counting methods be coordinated to ensure that there is no double-counting. Therefore, CoCs must also collect sufficient information to be able to reliably deduplicate the PIT count (i.e., ensure that the same homeless person was not counted more than once).

Data quality and deduplication plans must include methods for determining the following:

- Verifying that persons included in the count are homeless per the PIT count requirements

- Confirming that all persons identified as homeless in the PIT count were homeless on the single night the CoC designated as its PIT count date

- That the persons identified as homeless on the CoC's designated PIT count date were not already counted

If persons do not meet all of the criteria above, CoCs should exclude the person from their PIT count data reported to HUD. If CoCs' methodology involve counting homeless persons over multiple days, they must use a survey instrument as part of its deduplication strategy. If CoCs want to complete a multi-day count without a survey that allows for deduplication, they must seek an exception from HUD. The exception must include a justification for why the count must occur over multiple days and why the CoCs do not intend to use a survey instrument for deduplication purposes.

6. *Identify and Confirm all Sheltered and Unsheltered Count Locations*

For the sheltered count, preparations should begin as early as practical to identify and confirm emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects in the CoCs that should be included in the PIT count. These are the same projects CoCs must inventory and include in their HIC. CoCs should review their HIC to ensure that they are including all projects listed in the count. On an ongoing basis, but minimally when updating the HIC, CoCs should seek to identify any new projects to ensure the HIC is a complete inventory, including projects that might not have been on the previous year's HIC because they are new or have not cooperated with the CoCs in the past.

For the unsheltered count, preparations should begin by identifying geographic areas where the count will be conducted. CoCs should use maps to confirm that all enumerators have defined areas within the CoCs to canvass and that the enumeration areas are not overlapping with others, which could result in some homeless persons being counted more than once.

7. *Develop Surveys*

CoCs must decide what information to gather during the PIT count and how the information will be collected. At a minimum, CoCs must collect information required by HUD as published in its *Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program*, which is available on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page**. CoCs might desire to collect additional information beyond what is required by HUD. CoCs should not finalize data collection instruments until HUD has published updated annual data collection guidance, or indicated no change from the prior year, and they have determined any other data that they desire to collect. Data collection instruments should be finalized before training PIT count enumerators. Sample survey instruments can be found on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page**.

8. *Recruit PIT Count Enumerators and Set Training Dates*

The timing of the CoCs' enumerator recruitment effort will depend on the recruitment strategy and the necessity to schedule adequate trainings (in general, the more training, the more lead time required). Volunteers serving as enumerators should be trained close to the time of the count to increase the likelihood that they will remember the count procedures and protocols.

Standard No. 14:

CoCs are required to ensure that people conducting the PIT count, including project staff and community volunteers, are appropriately trained about count standards, data collection procedures, and protocols for privacy, security, and personal safety.

Refer to the *Use of Volunteers for Planning and Executing the Count* section below for more detailed information on recruiting and using volunteers to assist in the count.

9. *Secure Incentives*

Many CoCs provide incentives to homeless people who participate in the PIT count. These items can include bus passes, meal gift cards, toiletries, backpacks, blankets, and socks. Some CoCs compile significant donations from local hotels, volunteer groups, and restaurants. Other communities hold drives at local sporting events, schools, or churches. Incentives not only provide necessities of daily living to those participating in the count, but also can raise community awareness about the count and homelessness. In addition, providing participants with distinctive and visible incentives can assist the enumerators in identifying those who have already been counted and help to reduce duplicate counting.

10. *Publicize the Count*

The media can be used as an effective outreach tool to support the PIT count. Publicity around the PIT count can be used in several key ways both during the count planning process and once the data are released. HUD perceives three key newsworthy phases in the PIT count process: planning for the count, conducting the count, and announcing the results of the count. CoCs should consider designating one person to discuss with the media the purpose, plan, and limitations of the PIT count, as well as how the PIT count data are utilized by both the CoC and HUD. This person can work with the media to:

- **Draw attention to local homelessness issues.** Publicizing current local data on homelessness can garner additional funding and resources to support the count and local programming to help homeless people. Take the opportunity to educate volunteers about the homeless data and plans in the CoC.

- **Recruit volunteers.** Volunteer recruitment should begin by late fall. To recruit volunteers, CoCs should briefly describe the different roles for volunteers and which dates their assistance is needed.

- **Increase participation among the unsheltered population.** Informing and educating unsheltered homeless people about the unsheltered count will help to prevent widespread avoidance of the enumerators (see Chapter 5, *Executing the Unsheltered Count*, for more information on this topic).

- **Report count results.** After all of the data has been tabulated, unduplicated, and verified, the CoC membership should review and interpret the count totals.

Key Media Tips for PIT Count

- Use local and statewide media outlets to both publicize the event and recruit volunteers to assist with the count.
- Use the media to report the PIT count results to communities.
- Create a press release. The release can either focus on local data or cumulative statewide results (for Balance of State CoCs).
- Address trends in data. Provide contextual information that might help explain trends.
- Articulate the uses *and* the limitations of count data. The CoC's count results alone might not answer 'why' questions, but they will usually provide good answers to 'where' and 'who' questions. Personalize data, provide anecdotes–but do not compromise the privacy rights of homeless persons.

3.2 Establishing a Timeline of Count Activities

To ensure adequate time to complete all the tasks necessary to execute a successful PIT count, CoCs should develop a PIT count timeline. This timeline should incorporate dates and deadlines for the completion of key tasks. The PIT count timeline can be an evolving document, with adjustments made to reflect new tasks and revised completion dates based on progress throughout the planning and implementation process. The chart below provides an example of the types of tasks that should be included in the timeline, as well as the approximate time these activities should be completed. CoCs should set more specific dates and deadlines for their individual timelines based on their progress and implementation schedules.

Summer	Early Fall	Late Fall/Early Winter	January	February/March
Set up steering committe and subcommittees	Reivew HUD data collection requirements	Develop and pilot test PIT count surveys	Week before count: Hold volunteer trainings	Tabulate PIT count data
Review HUD methodology requirements	CoCs approves PIT count plan and methodology	Continue to recruit volunteers	**Conduct PIT count** (during the last 10 calendar days in January)	Review data and conduct data cleaning
Select PIT count date and time	Identify universe of relevant ES, TH, and SH projects	Confirm sheltered and unsheltered count locations		Share data results with CoC board/members
Determine methodology	Begin volunteer recruitment	Finalize PIT count surveys		Report data to HUD
		Solicit donations		

For a more detailed PIT count planning timeline, refer to the resources available on **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page**.

Post-Count Activities

After the PIT count data are collected, CoCs still have several tasks to complete to finalize the count. These activities are covered in Chapter 6, *After the PIT Count.*

3.3 Determining Who to Count

HUD encourages communities to use all available resources and maximize the expertise of community stakeholders to find all homeless persons or to implement a methodology that will best represent all homeless persons in the area. However, HUD recognizes that even with the approved methodologies identified in this guide it is often difficult to find every single homeless person. There are often homeless persons who are in locations that CoCs simply are unaware of. Understanding this practical limitation, HUD requires CoCs to:

- Maximize their resources to find the homeless persons on the night of the count

- Implement a methodology that they believe will best identify the homeless population for the CoC

- Do their best to enumerate the size and nature of the homeless population in their areas

Sheltered Count

CoCs should include all individuals or families defined in Standard No. 7.

Standard No. 7:

CoCs must be able to verify that the sheltered homeless people identified in the count are sheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)."

This includes persons residing in emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects. Rapid re-housing (RRH) is considered permanent housing. However, **enrollment** in RRH does not mean a household is permanently housed. Homeless households currently residing on the street, in an emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing project, but who are also enrolled in a RRH program and awaiting placement should be counted based on where they resided on the night of the count. For example, a person residing in an emergency shelter and being assisted by an RRH project to obtain housing must be counted in the PIT count for emergency shelter. RRH assisted households who are still unsheltered on the night of the count (e.g., staying in an encampment and being assisted by a RRH project to obtain housing) must be included as part of the unsheltered count.

Unsheltered Count

CoCs should include all individuals or families defined in Standard No. 11.

Standard No. 11:

CoCs must be able to verify that the sheltered homeless people identified in the count are sheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

People Who Should NOT be Included in the PIT Count

Persons residing in the following settings on the night of the count are prohibited from being included in the sheltered or unsheltered PIT count:

- Persons counted in any location not listed on CoCs' Housing Inventory Count (HIC) (e.g., staying in projects with beds/units not dedicated for persons who are homeless)

- Persons residing in permanent housing (PH) programs, including persons housed using HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers

- Persons temporarily staying with family or friend (i.e., "doubled-up" or "couch surfing")

- Persons residing in housing they rent or own (i.e., permanent housing), including persons residing in rental housing with assistance from a RRH project on the night of the count

- Persons residing in institutions (e.g., jails, juvenile correction facilities, foster care, hospital beds, detox centers)

It is critical that CoCs are aware that the PIT count is designed to count a very specific population. As noted in Chapter 1, *Introduction to the PIT Count Methodology Guide*, section 427(b)(3) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act only allows HUD to require CoCs to count persons as defined in Standard Nos. 7 and 11. This means that some people, who might otherwise be included in HUD's broader homeless definition, are not included in the count. This does not mean that HUD does not recognize or value this part of the homeless population. In fact, HUD allows CoCs to serve these populations according to its regulations and any applicable Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA). HUD does not include these persons in the count because the law does not allow it and it is extremely burdensome on CoCs. For instance, for CoCs to try to enumerate the population at risk of homelessness (i.e., doubled-up or couch surfing), they would need much more robust and resource-intensive counting methodologies.

CoCs that want to include other populations that do not meet HUD's PIT count population as defined in Standard Nos. 7 and 11 may choose to do so. CoCs must ensure that they are able to differentiate people who do not meet HUD's definitions per Standard Nos. 7 and 11 and that they can report to HUD based on its reporting requirements. CoCs deciding to expand their count beyond HUD's requirements must also ensure that including a broader population does not negatively impact their ability to meet HUD's reporting requirements. Expanding the count can provide CoCs additional insight about who they are serving and the specific needs of those they are serving. As long as CoCs take special care to meet HUD's PIT count requirements, HUD fully supports such expanded counting initiatives.

3.4 Involving Partner Organizations

CoCs often rely on a variety of partners, both HUD-funded and non-HUD funded, to help plan and execute the PIT count. These partner organizations usually bring additional expertise or resources to the PIT count process, such as research and analysis capabilities, access to volunteers, or experience in reaching and serving a specific homeless subpopulation. Typically, these partner organizations are involved in the count from the early planning stages, providing support and guidance as the count is being planned.

Partner with Local Service Providers to Conduct the Sheltered PIT Count

Local homeless service providers are key partners in conducting the sheltered PIT count, as these agencies are responsible for entering PIT count data into the local HMIS or for completing online or paper surveys about the people staying in their program on the night of the count.

CoCs should identify each Con Plan jurisdiction located within or overlapping the CoC's geographic boundary. When a CoC's boundaries include multiple Con Plan jurisdictions, that CoC must disaggregate CoC-wide data for each Con Plan jurisdiction by geocode. CoCs should refer to HUD's published list of geocodes and preliminary pro rata need amounts, which are annually updated, to determine which geocodes are associated with which CoC. CoCs must provide PIT count data to each entity responsible for a Con Plan within the CoC geography. This includes providing PIT count data to the entities responsible for submitting a Con Plan at the geocode level. HUD expects representatives from Con Plan jurisdictions to collaborate with CoCs to plan and complete the PIT count.

> ### Standard No. 4:
>
> All CoCs should consult and collaborate with all Con Plan jurisdictions in the geographical boundary of the CoC, including those that do not have ESG funding, to assist the jurisdictions in submitting PIT count data that is relevant to completing their Con Plans.

> ### Standard No. 5:
>
> CoCs must provide PIT count data to the entity(ies) responsible for the Con Plan jurisdiction(s) associated with the CoC.

The PIT count committee should solicit input from CoC members during the design phase of the count to identify the key locations and partners that should be involved in the count. The committee should also focus on involving a diverse and balanced representation of partners who have the capacity and time to organize and implement an effective PIT count.

Informative partners can include, but are not limited to the following:

- **Homeless service providers** such as emergency shelter, Safe Haven and transitional housing providers, homeless and runaway youth service providers, and providers focused on specific subpopulations (i.e., youth, veterans, Native Americans)

- **Community service providers** such as food and clothing banks, soup kitchens, day shelters or drop-in centers, community centers, halfway houses, community action agencies, detox programs, 211 operators, mental health providers, and mainstream social service agencies

- **Homeless coalitions and advocacy groups**

- **Homeless and formerly homeless individuals**

- **Outreach teams** such as Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), Health Care for the Homeless, Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV), and other local homeless outreach programs and teams
- **Federal partners** such as HUD, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Education, the Department of Health and Human Services
- **Local government partners** such as county and city governments, especially those that must complete Con Plans
- **Faith-based community partners**
- **Health service providers** such as Federally Qualified Health Centers and hospitals
- **Law enforcement** such as local sheriff, police, and corrections departments
- **Philanthropic foundations**
- **McKinney-Vento school liaisons**
- **Local colleges or universities**
- **Public housing agencies**
- **Public libraries**
- **Local businesses and chambers of commerce** such as those where people who are homeless might go for food, amenities, or respite
- **Community volunteer and civic groups**

Engaging PIT Count Partners

PIT count partner organizations can contribute in a number of ways to the overall execution of the PIT count. Some potential ways partner organizations can contribute include:

- Helping identify count locations
- Assisting in planning or day of count activities
- Recruiting volunteers
- Donating or purchase incentives
- Assisting in data collection, analysis, and reporting
- Leveraging participation of reluctant providers

Once each partner organization's participation is confirmed, a PIT count committee member should be tasked with ensuring that each partner's tasks are clearly defined. Regular communication, both orally and written, can ensure that all partners are engaged and completing their tasks on schedule.

Leveraging Community Support

The number of potential partners and the amount of support to accomplish a thorough PIT count varies widely among CoCs. Gaining political support and active participation from several key partner organizations can lead to wider community participation. Some potential options for leveraging community support include:

- **Local government officials (city, county, state):** Contact the local mayor's office or town/city council. Invite them to participate in the count. Ask if they can provide publicity, financial support, and if necessary, a letter encouraging reluctant or

non-participating providers to participate. It is especially important to engage local government officials responsible for submitting Con Plans because PIT count data will be used to complete their Con Plans.

- **Community leaders/homelessness advocates:** Often communities have people who are well connected and influential in the community who have a particular interest in ending homelessness. Look to local homeless coalitions, or boards of directors for these individuals. They can be very helpful in leveraging other necessary support and resources.

- **Local funders:** Community foundations and United Way can fund a number of human service organizations and have wide outreach capacity and influence. The organizations might be able to fund a particular part of the count or provide a volunteer base.

- **Faith-based community:** Religious leaders often have wide influence in their respective religious communities and larger community, and often have their own programs to serve homeless people. The leaders can be particularly influential in engaging the cooperation of faith-based missions that might be reluctant to participate in the PIT count.

- **Local colleges and universities:** Staff or faculty of local colleges or universities can assist in the development of count methodology, data analysis, and sampling tools. In addition, students can obtain field work experience by serving as PIT count volunteers.

- **Local law enforcement:** Local law enforcement (e.g., police and sheriff departments) can be a valuable resource for the unsheltered count. Officers can provide accurate information about known locations where people who are homeless live and sleep. Police officers are also sometimes needed to accompany enumerators and surveying areas that are known to be unsafe (e.g., abandoned buildings and alleys). In addition, increased vehicle patrols in higher crime areas might improve volunteer safety and participation.

However, CoCs should carefully consider how extensively they should involve law enforcement officers in the PIT count, especially if they will be in uniform and driving official vehicles. There is a fine line between providing safety and protection for enumerators and the potential suspicion and fear a law enforcement presence might elicit among people who are homeless, especially among people with criminal records, who could be engaged in illegal activities, or those who have had negative experiences with police. This might be true especially in remote locations or during the middle of the night. If CoCs involve local law enforcement, they must clarify that law enforcement involvement is intended to assist with the count and not for law enforcement actions apart from this support (e.g., serving warrants). Also, the participation of police officers could deter the participation of homeless youth in the count, as homeless youth might be involved in illicit activities, fleeing abuse, or trying to avoid being placed in foster care and thus might fear and avoid any interaction with law enforcement.

Thus, while law enforcement is often a critical partner in PIT count efforts and in the broader effort to end homelessness, CoCs must evaluate their local circumstances to determine how best to involve law enforcement in their counts.

3.5 Engaging Reluctant Homeless Providers

Some homeless providers that do not receive HUD funding choose not to participate in the PIT count. Provider staff might believe that they do not have the staff time or resources to participate in the count. They also might have concerns about protecting the privacy of their clients. While these project providers are not required to participate in the count, the CoC is required to include data about the project in their sheltered HIC and sheltered PIT count. CoCs

may need to use sampling techniques to derive the data if the provider refuses to participate (see Chapter 4, *Executing the Sheltered Count*, for additional details about completing the sheltered count). It is critical to get full participation of all homeless service providers, especially if the homeless people they serve comprise a significant percentage of a CoC's overall homeless population. Partner organizations involved in the PIT count, including faith-based community organizations, elected officials and community service providers, might be able to use their existing relationships with reluctant providers to help convince them to participate in the count.

Below are some tips for gaining the participation of homeless providers reluctant to participate in the PIT count.

- Meet in person with providers to address and alleviate their concerns directly.

- Hear their specific concerns in the planning process; integrate their ideas when practicable.

- Offer volunteer resources to assist them in conducting interviews and collecting data.

- Discuss the value of data collection for understanding local needs and securing needed resources and offer data and information gleaned from the count in return for their participation. This practice helps providers better understand the characteristics of homeless people outside of the clients they serve and offers information that can be used for resource development or other purposes.

In the event a provider chooses not to participate with its own staff, CoCs should ask if the provider would allow the CoC to send volunteers to administer surveys or at least conduct a basic observation-based count. If a provider continues to refuse, CoCs must strive to report as accurately as practicable about the homeless population residing in that project.

3.6 Using Volunteers to Conduct the PIT Count

While some communities are able to conduct the count primarily using staff from local service providers and outreach organizations, many recruit community volunteers to assist with the planning and data collection process. Volunteers can enable CoCs to:

- Cover a larger geographic area in the unsheltered count

- Conduct a count that is supported by the community, beyond organizations that actively participate in the CoCs

- Allow limited CoC staff time and planning resources to be used for PIT count oversight and monitoring

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Standard No. 13:

Surveys of people for the sheltered or unsheltered count must be administered in a manner that protects participant privacy and safety, as well as the safety of the person completing the survey.

Volunteer Roles

Volunteers can fulfill a number of critical roles in the PIT count. Some of the primary functions of PIT count volunteers can include, but are not limited to the following:

Enumeration Activities

- Canvass pre-defined areas to locate, screen, and survey homeless people

- Assist with the set-up/shutdown of count meet-up locations

- Manage the orderly distribution of materials to volunteers

Volunteer Training

- Give experienced counters formal speaking roles in volunteer trainings

Data Entry and Cleaning

- Input survey data into central database or HMIS

- Perform data quality checks

- Deduplicate data

- Verify sheltered program data with program staff

- Generate reports as specified by CoC

Securing Donations

- Solicit donations to use as incentives for PIT count participants to participate in the count and to assist in meeting their daily needs

- Solicit donations to support PIT count volunteers during the count, such as food and hot beverages

- Coordinate outreach efforts with person handling publicity and media relations

Steps for Volunteer Engagement

CoCs recruit volunteers from a variety of sources. There are several key steps to recruiting and training volunteers.

- Designate a subcommittee or individual to recruit and manage volunteers

- Determine volunteer roles

- Set volunteer training dates

- Recruit volunteers

- Train volunteers: review survey and methodology

- Solicit donations to support volunteers on the day of count

- Gather feedback from volunteers to improve future counts

Where to Find Potential Volunteers

- Members of local coalitions for homeless people
- College or university students looking for field work experience or service hours
- Staff of soup kitchens, shelters, and other services
- Representatives from Con Plan jurisdictions
- Other state, city, or county workers in agencies that might have some experience or interest in homelessness, such as human services, health, or housing agencies
- Federal partners with local homeless services in the CoC's area
- Human service professionals, who have had some involvement in providing social services, particularly to homeless persons
- Community service volunteer organizations, churches, and other religious organizations
- Neighborhood and business associations

Appeals to volunteers should describe the time commitment involved, the duration of training, any risks to volunteers, and the safety measures that are in place. Recruiting methods can include:

- Posting notices and fliers at government or nonprofit agencies, public locations, and local businesses

- Mailing or emailing invitations to key individuals and agencies

- Creating a ready to customize friend-to-friend volunteer recruitment email

- Enlisting student support from local universities and colleges

- Posting announcements on CoC and member websites

- Organizing a phone bank to recruit previous volunteers

- Contacting coalition members or agency heads and asking them to recruit among their memberships or employees

- Posting on **www.serve.gov** and other websites that link volunteers to service opportunities

- Running a newspaper advertisement to recruit volunteers from the general public

It is imperative that any solicitation for volunteers include a point of contact who is accessible and knowledgeable about the CoC's count. The easier it is to contact someone and receive clear answers to basic questions about the count the more likely it is that volunteers will decide to participate in the count. It is a good practice for CoCs to maintain a list of PIT count volunteers and to update and use that list for each count as a starting point for soliciting support for the PIT count.

Including People Who Have Experienced Homelessness

People who have experienced homelessness are an indispensable resource to a successful public places count and should be incorporated in the count process. Several CoCs rely on input and assistance from currently or formerly homeless people when planning, organizing, and implementing a count. When recruiting people who are homeless, CoCs should be sensitive to any shelter restrictions that could limit participation, such as program curfews or other requirements.

Current or formerly homeless people can assist in an unsheltered count by:

• Helping to identify known locations for the unsheltered count in advance of the count.

• Gaining access to homeless encampments otherwise unknown to the public.

• Participating in the count. Several CoCs recruit and encourage the participation of homeless individuals on the night of the count. Homeless individuals can either participate as volunteers or in some instances can be paid if resources allow.

Training Volunteers

Enumerator training is an essential component in producing accurate homeless counts. Nearly all volunteer roles will require some training, especially since the reliability and validity of the count results depends heavily on all volunteers using the methodology consistently.

Both new and experienced volunteers should receive training as it will remind "old hands" of the count methodology and procedures. For past volunteers, it is also important to high-light any changes to the count methodology. Pairing a new volunteer with an experienced volunteer who has previously participated in the count is also a recommended practice and can help further orient new volunteers.

Conducting Trainings

CoCs can conduct trainings in person or remotely by conference call, potentially through an online web-based program (e.g., Go-To Meeting, WebEx). Some CoCs, particularly those with large geographies, use a train-the-trainer approach. In a train-the-trainer model, local/regional coordinators could be trained and provided with standardized training materials that they then use in their own communities to provide training to local volunteers and staff. CoCs can hold numerous trainings in various locations and at various times, depending on the number of volunteers/ enumerators, the times they are available to attend, and their geographical locations.

It is helpful to develop formal training materials, such as PowerPoint presentations, PIT count handbooks, sample scripts, and written survey instructions. Whatever training method(s) are used, ensure that the key methodology is written concisely and clearly on a one- to two-page handout that is distributed to volunteers to use as a quick reference tool during the count. Training materials should emphasize who should be counted, who should _not_ be counted, the importance of consistency, the challenges created when enumerators use their own judgment rather than adhering to the protocol, and key safety issues and protocols. CoCs should also develop a protocol for informing volunteers if any guidance has changed since the training was provided, especially when there are multiple trainings.

Training Topics

Typical training topics include:

- Overview of the purpose and benefits of accurate data

- Overview of previous results

- Terminology and definitions (i.e., homeless definitions, PIT count, sheltered, unsheltered)

- Counting methods

- When to count and period of data collection

- Where to count

- Who to count

- Role playing and practice

- Count team configurations and points of contact

- Enumerator responsibilities (including returning forms, assembly and distribution of any incentives)

- Overview of the survey instrument and screening questions

- Suggestions for how to safely and respectfully approach people who are unsheltered

- How to accurately complete PIT count forms (e.g., what to do when the interviewee refuses to answer some or all of the questions)

- Outreach to specific subpopulations (e.g., youth, veterans, chronically homeless)

- How to help people connect to emergency shelter or other assistance they might need

- How to remain safe and what to do in case of trouble

- What to wear (i.e., warm clothes, non-descript clothes, no jewelry)

- What to bring (i.e., water, flashlight, pens/pencils, incentives)

- How to report back to the CoC

Supply or Ensure Enumerators Have Resources Needed to Conduct the Count, Which Might Include:

- Surveys

- Flashlights (with fresh batteries)

- Cell phone/radio (fully charged)

- Central number to call in case of questions

- Clip boards

- Pens and pencils

- Tally sheets (if applicable)

- Instruction sheet

- Resource sheets/cards and incentives (if available) for distribution

- Maps showing their survey area

- Suitable/adequate clothing, shoes, and protective layers

Training for the night of the count. It is essential to specify carefully to enumerators who should be counted and what information is to be obtained by observation. CoCs typically instruct enumerators to exclude people:

- In uniforms (e.g., security guards, police, building maintenance people)

- Engaged in illegal activities (e.g., selling drugs or engaged in prostitution)

- Conducting commercial transactions (e.g., delivering newspapers or other goods)
- Who are obviously not homeless (e.g., people leaving a bar at 2 a.m.)

The training should present and review the protocol for every location to be canvassed, such as parks, alleys, parking ramps, and abandoned buildings. It might be helpful to prepare a one- or two-page summary of the enumeration guidelines for distribution to volunteers.

The intensity of training will depend on the level of experience of the volunteers and whether volunteers will be required to conduct interviews. CoCs that have conducted counts for many years using the same cadre of experienced enumerators might opt to require training only for team leaders. The key to this approach is making sure that the team leaders pass along instructions to the other volunteers and monitor data collection so that the information is collected and reported consistently.

Training for service-based count. The level of training required for a service-based count is typically higher, since service-based enumerations require more detailed interviews and typically rely on a combination of service provider staff (or other personnel at the location being canvassed), outreach workers, and volunteers. Service providers, especially mainstream service providers such as welfare agencies, might not ordinarily ask clients about their homeless status and housing needs. As a result, service providers and staff at other locations who are directly involved in post-night counts will require instructions on conducting the interviews and a clear and simple survey form. PIT count volunteers will similarly require considerable training.

For CoCs covering a large geographic area, local coordinators can play a critical role in gathering completed survey forms and making sure that the forms are being completed correctly. CoCs that conduct service-based counts across a large geographic area might find they must invest considerable resources to ensure the training is accessible to all of the individuals and organizations participating in the data collection effort.

4. EXECUTING THE SHELTERED COUNT

All CoCs must conduct an annual count to determine the number and characteristics of people who are homeless and staying in shelter (emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing) on the night designated for the count. This chapter will discuss HUD standards that apply to a sheltered count, as well as provide guidance to CoCs on when and how to use different available data sources to generate an accurate PIT count of people in shelter.

Standard No. 1:

CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least biennially, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements.

Standard No. 6:

CoCs must account for and report on all sheltered homeless people residing in the CoC through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' sheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 7:

CoCs must be able to verify that the sheltered homeless people identified in the count are sheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family living in a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangement (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals)."

4.1 Coordinating the PIT Count with the Housing Inventory Count (HIC)

It is important that the sheltered PIT count be closely coordinated with the completion of the annual HIC. All homeless providers included in the sheltered count must also be included in the HIC and all people served in those projects on the night of the count should be included in the sheltered count. CoCs should include all sheltered homeless providers on their HIC, even if the provider does not participate in HMIS. For more information, refer to the most recent **Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program**.

4.2 Using HMIS to Generate the Sheltered Count

Standard No. 8:

CoCs should use client data already collected and entered in HMIS as the primary data source for the sheltered PIT count for emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects that participate in HMIS.

A fully-implemented HMIS with reliable data quality is the best way for CoCs to efficiently and effectively conduct a sheltered homeless count. A fully implemented HMIS has high rates of participation in HMIS across homeless assistance providers in the CoC geography and assures data quality through routine data quality monitoring. An HMIS with sufficient data quality should be able to produce an accurate count of people in shelter on the night of the count. Data quality refers to the reliability and validity of client-level data collected in the HMIS. It is measured by the extent to which the client data in the system reflects actual information. The data quality is determined by assessing certain data characteristics such as timeliness, completeness, accuracy, and consistency. With good data quality, CoCs can "tell the story" of the population experiencing homelessness.

Many of the basic demographic characteristics of people in shelter typically can be readily obtained from HMIS since such data are part of the *Universal Data Standards* established by HUD and are expected to be collected and entered into HMIS for all people staying in a project that participates in HMIS. This includes information on age, gender, race, ethnicity, and veteran status. Other characteristics, such as serious mental illness are not Universal Data Elements, though HMIS-participating projects might collect such data.

CoCs should examine the data of HMIS-participating projects to determine:

1. How many clients are normally served each night
2. What data are collected for these clients
3. For what percent of total clients is data available

There are many advantages of using a CoC's HMIS to generate the sheltered count.

Advantages of Using HMIS	
Easy	An HMIS with sufficient data quality should be able to produce many of the basic demographic characteristics of people staying in shelter through the Universal Data Standards (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity, and veteran status).
Fast	Rather than conducting extensive manual surveys of homeless providers and clients, the PIT count process could be streamlined to consist primarily of asking providers to confirm that data entered into HMIS is accurate and up-to-date.
Efficient Deduplication	Apart from containing a readily available snapshot of the sheltered population, HMIS helps identify overlap between the sheltered and unsheltered counts. This helps ensure the PIT count is an accurate assessment of the unduplicated number of persons who are homeless.
Cost Effective	The time- and resource-saving benefits of using HMIS can be dramatic, especially for large CoCs or Balance of State CoCs that must collect data from many communities.
Data Quality Improvements	Leveraging HMIS as the source for PIT count data will encourage greater project participation and improved data quality year round, which will in turn make HMIS a more useful tool for planning and for reporting (e.g., completing HUD's Annual Performance Report and other reports to funders).

When and How HMIS can be Used

There are many ways to use HMIS to generate PIT count data on the sheltered homeless population, either alone or in combination with other data sources. The two most important factors for determining which option CoCs choose should be the HMIS coverage and data quality. This section begins by reviewing these two key concepts, and then presents a series of options for how HMIS may be used to report on the numbers and characteristics of the sheltered homeless population.

Can the CoC Use HMIS to Complete the Sheltered Count?	
Coverage —Does HMIS contain data for a high percentage of all sheltered people?	**Data Quality —For each person with an HMIS record, is the record complete and accurate?**
The CoC must determine which projects participate in HMIS and if they have complete and accurate data.	Complete data are essential for providing accurate information about homeless populations using HMIS. However, some programs in the CoC might not be collecting all of the required data elements, or might be collecting complete data for only a subset of clients.
The CoC should review historical data from each HMIS participating project to determine if all required data elements are being collected from a high percentage of clients.	
Is the CoC's HMIS data representative of the sheltered population? In generating the CoC's sheltered demographics, are certain sheltered populations or subpopulations covered at lower rates than others?	If the CoC is considering using HMIS for the PIT count, it must be able to identify those projects that are not collecting all of the required information and either encourage them to collect the necessary data for the purposes of the PIT count or develop an alternative data collection strategy.
	How frequently do projects enter data? How complete is the data? Do users collect and enter data consistently within projects and across projects?

If CoCs have a low number of applicable projects participating in the HMIS (low coverage) or low levels of data completeness for the data elements required to complete the PIT count reporting requirements, the CoCs should not rely solely on HMIS to generate their sheltered PIT count. CoCs may use HMIS data from HMIS-participating projects with high levels of data completeness. For projects that do not collect the necessary data elements in their HMIS, CoCs should survey clients at these projects to obtain all the required population and subpopulation characteristics. In these cases, CoCs may consider using HMIS to verify data collected from client surveys.

Process for Using HMIS for PIT Counts

There are several ways to use HMIS data to generate the PIT counts for the sheltered homeless population. Which option CoCs choose depends largely on the CoCs' HMIS coverage rate and the extent to which all of the data elements required to generate count and subpopulation information are being entered.

Steps to Prepare the HMIS for the PIT Count

Monitoring and improving data quality must be an ongoing collaborative process that involves HMIS administrators, CoC leads, and project management and staff. Regular communication and training should emphasize available data quality tools and how to use them appropriately to evaluate and improve HMIS data quality. Once data quality checks have been identified, CoC staff can begin working with HMIS users to correct existing errors in the HMIS data, improve data entry and quality control procedures on an ongoing basis, and understand how to interpret or modify that agency's data.

Below are some suggested steps to prepare the HMIS for the PIT count.

1. Generate data quality reports for each participating project.

2. Identify and correct any deficiencies in the data (e.g., have projects collect and enter missing data, correct obvious errors, ensure correct entry and exit dates).

3. Produce a system-level occupancy report that includes all projects for review. It might be useful to break out the report by project type and household type to determine whether sufficient data are collected for extrapolation purposes. It might also be helpful to examine bed inventory and utilization information for projects on the night of the count. For many CoCs, this is a standard off-the-shelf report provided by the HMIS vendor. Consider contacting the HMIS vendor to see if this type of report is available for use.

4. Generate a data quality report that provides the percentage of records with missing or nonresponsive (Don't Know or Refused) values in HMIS data elements used for the count and subpopulation information.

5. Hold regular count meetings involving the HMIS administrator for the CoC and the PIT count committee to help address these issues and finalize the CoC's PIT count plan.

Once the HMIS-based data are finalized, they must be merged with the other data collected for the count if extrapolation or project/client surveys were used. Refer to Chapter 6, *After the Count*, for more information on steps to take after the count is complete.

4.3 Supplementing HMIS Data Using Project and Client Surveys to Gather Data about Sheltered Homeless Persons

Some CoCs might not have sufficient coverage rates or data completeness in their HMIS to use it as the primary data source for the sheltered PIT count. In such cases, CoCs must use project- or client-level surveys to gather data about number and characteristics of their sheltered homeless population.

These survey options may be used to gather data for people living in emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects:

1. **Project-level surveys:** Project staff complete a single survey that includes a count of *all* households and persons residing in their facility on the night of the count, as well as the number of people with each population and subpopulation characteristic (e.g., gender, race, serious mental illness). While this type of *project data collection* involves one survey form per project that includes an aggregate count of all people served and their characteristics, the data must be obtained directly from clients as part of routine project intake and assessment or through supplemental data collection completed by project staff. Data included on a project survey must be consistent with HUD's PIT count data collection guidance, meaning persons counted as having a particular characteristic (e.g., substance use disorder) should meet the qualifications for the characteristic as described in HUD guidance. To ensure consistency, projects completing a single project survey must be encouraged to include the same data elements in their intake/assessment procedures that the CoC is using in client surveys.

2. **Client-level surveys:** Individual client surveys are collected for all or a random sample of sheltered persons on the night of the count. Project staff or PIT count enumerators complete individual surveys for each client using case management records (i.e., data already collected from clients during intake/assessment) or interviews with clients to obtain a count of people with each characteristic.

3. CoCs may also use project or client surveys in combination with data from their HMIS. Project- or client-level surveys may be used with either a census or sampling approach to data collection (see Chapter 2, *Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology*, for more information on choosing a methodology).

Project-Level Surveys

To obtain a count of sheltered homeless people and aggregate population and subpopulation information from each project, CoCs must:

- Identify all emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects to include in the sheltered count. These should be the same projects identified by the CoC and included on the HIC, excluding Permanent Housing projects (Permanent Supportive Housing and Rapid Re-housing).

- Identify the Con Plan jurisdictions within the CoC's geographic area when selecting projects for the sheltered count.

- CoCs can look at the geocode of projects to determine which Con Plan jurisdiction they are located in. A geocode is the 6-digit number that corresponds to a particular geographic location within a CoC. Most CoCs have multiple geographic areas and therefore multiple geocodes. HUD provides an updated list of all its geocodes annually. Each facility in the HIC can have only one geocode listed in the "Geocode" column of the HIC. The geocode indicates the geographic location of the (physical) facility where

housing is provided. The geocode used should be associated with the county geocode if there is no geocode available for the city in which a facility is located.

- Conduct outreach to the projects to solicit their participation in the count.

  ➢ It is important to communicate to projects that the sheltered portion of the PIT count is essential to completing the annual CoC application; that it helps to identify needs and gaps in services; and that it ultimately generates resources for homeless persons in the community. Project staff who are informed and prepared for the count will help to facilitate an orderly and effective process.

- Prepare for project data collection by creating and distributing survey instruments and other materials.

- Provide support and training to project staff before and during the count.

  ➢ The CoC should offer a brief interactive training session on the data collection protocols and forms. Demonstrating the use of the forms with trainees will make the training more effective. This training should review the purpose and timing of the count; explain the data that must be collected; and the privacy and security measures that must be observed to protect the PIT count data. The training should be offered more than once to accommodate providers' schedules. One of the training sessions could be conducted during a regularly scheduled CoC meeting.

- Collect sheltered count data.

In addition to establishing *what* information will be collected through the project survey, CoCs also must consider *how* the data will be collected by answering the following questions:

What Survey Instrument Should CoCs Use?

- Will the CoC send the survey form to projects with the request for them to complete it and return it after the night of the count (either by fax or email)?

- Will the CoC staff call the projects to complete the survey form over the phone?

- Should the CoC set up a web-based survey, so project staff can enter the information online, which could minimize late data entry by the CoC?

Data may be collected after the night of the PIT count (not to exceed 7 days) as long as the project provider can verify that the individual or household was homeless and staying at its facility on the night of the count.

When creating a survey instrument for the sheltered count, CoCs must ensure that the survey form includes all of the required data necessary to produce the population and subpopulation counts as outlined in the most recent *Notice for Housing Inventory Count (HIC) and Point-in-Time (PIT) Data Collection for Continuum of Care (CoC) Program and the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) Program.* CoCs may use the sample sheltered PIT count survey instrument developed to ensure compliance with HUD requirements or they may create their own survey to collect additional information. The sample survey is available online on the **HUD EXCHANGE HIC and PIT resource page.**

Client-Level Data Collection

Many of the steps that CoCs take in preparing for project data collection also apply to client level data collection, which include:

- Identifying projects and conducting outreach

- Developing and distributing count materials

- Collecting the data entry instruments after the night of the PIT count

In addition to the above tasks, CoCs must undertake additional steps for client-level data collection.

CoCs should first decide whether to collect client-level data for all sheltered homeless people or for a representative sample of clients. For PIT count purposes, a sample may be random or non-random (see discussion of methodology approaches in Chapter 2, *Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology*, for more information). For large CoCs, interviewing every sheltered client or having staff complete a survey for every sheltered client might not be feasible. Regardless of when interviews take place, information should only be collected from those individuals or families staying in the facility on the night of the count.

Devising a sampling strategy and a plan for client demographic data

If CoCs decide to conduct interviews with a sample of sheltered homeless people, they should devise a sampling strategy that provides instructions for selecting interview subjects from a representative subset of the sheltered homeless people that are counted. An adequate sampling strategy should include a random sample of persons sheltered based on both project type (emergency shelter, Safe Haven, or transitional housing) and household type (households with at least one adult and one child, households without children, and households with only children). When weighting population estimates that are based on a sample, accuracy generally improves when CoCs divide providers into project-type groups based on the type of services they provide, and the household and subpopulation types the CoCs serve, taking into consideration same or similar client populations including victims of domestic violence and veterans.

The two main approaches to sampling for client interviews are described below.

1. **Select a random sample of homeless people at each project.** In this approach, CoCs interview every "nth" person that is served at a particular shelter (e.g., every third or fifth person). At an emergency shelter, it is usually best to use a roster of clients for the night. At a transitional housing project, it might be more practical to use a list of rooms to ensure randomness. The CoC PIT count committee should alert project staff in advance of enumerators visiting the project, to ensure the project is ready to participate. Often, the window for surveying will be limited due to designated project hours, meal, and sleep times.

To determine how frequently the survey should be administered, CoCs must first make estimates of the following: the total sheltered homeless population at each project; how large an interview sample is required for the types of analyses the CoCs hope to conduct (see *Appendix A: Choosing the Sample Size for the PIT Count* for more information about developing the appropriate sample size); and what level of resources are available to devote to conducting the interviews.

- If a CoC is interested in the overall characteristics of the sheltered homeless population, a randomly selected sample size of at least 200 is required.

- If a CoC is interested in estimating a specific subpopulation (e.g., veterans, people with HIV/AIDS), the sample must be large enough that at least 50 people in each subpopulation are interviewed across all projects in the CoC.

- If the total homeless population or subpopulations are lower than these minimum thresholds, everyone must be surveyed.

When selecting a random sample, it is important to achieve a high response rate (the number of people who complete the survey as a percentage of the people targeted for the survey). Generally, CoCs should target a response rate of 80 percent or higher. CoCs can consider offering incentives to homeless people for participating in the count to ensure a high response rate.

2. **Select a sample of emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects from within the CoC and interview all clients in a given provider-household type.** This approach involves interviewing clients at a sample of projects by constructing a "stratified" sample that reflects the broader populations the CoC desires information about. In essence, stratification means that the CoC would divide the projects into groups that serve particular subpopulations or project types, such as shelters that serve victims of domestic violence or shelters that serve primarily persons with chronic substance abuse, then sample a subset of projects in each of these groups. The CoC must then interview all clients who are staying in the projects selected for the sample on the night of the PIT count.

More detailed information on sampling strategies is available as part of the online toolkit on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page.**

4.4 Developing a Survey Instrument to Conduct Interviews or Collect Administrative Data

The survey instrument for the sheltered count must include questions for gathering information about all of the required population and subpopulation data for all persons living in emergency shelter, Safe Haven, and transitional housing projects. To the maximum extent practicable, CoCs should use the same survey instrument for their entire count. If a CoCs count involves multiple count methods that require different surveys due to the nature of the method, then CoCs should use the same questions as much as practicable. It is important that a standardized survey instrument be used to collect data from all participating agencies. For an example, refer to the sample sheltered survey available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT resource page**. After ensuring that the survey incorporates all of HUD's data collection requirements, CoCs can consider whether it would be valuable to add additional data elements for their own purposes.

Once the survey instrument is chosen, CoCs must decide how to collect the client-level survey data. This may be done via client interviews, by reviewing case management records, or based on provider knowledge. If the information is gathered through administrative records, it is important to confirm that this information is current and accurate and not in violation of what the homeless person consented to disclose when providing the data.

5. EXECUTING THE UNSHELTERED COUNT

CoCs must conduct an unsheltered count to determine the number and characteristics of unsheltered homeless people located in their CoCs. If feasible, HUD encourages CoCs to conduct an annual unsheltered count. This chapter identifies the requirements for the unsheltered count and provides guidance on when and how to use different available data sources to generate an accurate unsheltered PIT count, including:

- The CoC geography to be included within the count

- The different methodologies for conducting an unsheltered count

- Strategies for including unsheltered youth, veterans, and chronically homeless persons in the unsheltered count

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Standard No. 1:

CoCs are responsible for planning and conducting, at least biennially, a PIT count of homeless persons within the geographic area that meets HUD's requirements.

Standard No. 9:

CoCs must account for and report on all unsheltered homeless people residing in the CoC's geography through a census (complete coverage) or one or more sampling and extrapolation methods that are consistent with HUD standards and guidance. HUD will evaluate the nature and basis for estimation and extrapolation of CoCs' unsheltered count in the annual CoC Program Competition.

Standard No. 11:

CoCs must be able to verify that the unsheltered homeless people identified in the count are unsheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at

24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

5.1 Selecting Geography for the Count

CoCs must first determine if they can cover their entire jurisdiction in the unsheltered count or whether they must select a sample of geographic areas to cover. As discussed in Chapter 2, *Choosing the Right PIT Count Methodology*, in determining the geography for the unsheltered count, CoCs should take into consideration:

- The size of the jurisdiction

- The Con Plan jurisdictions within the geographic area

- The number of volunteers available to assist with the count and interviews

- The potential difficulties associated with covering broad geographic areas that might contain few or no service agencies focused on serving homeless people

Standard No. 10:

CoCs may exclude geographic areas where the CoC has determined that there are no unsheltered homeless people, including areas that are uninhabitable (e.g., deserts). CoCs must document the criteria and decision-making process used to identify and exclude specific geographic areas.

In some CoCs, there might be geographic areas that CoCs are not required to incorporate into the count. These might include deserts, dense forests, and other remote locations that are uninhabitable by people. In making the decision to exclude some geography, it is important that CoCs discuss these regions with people knowledgeable about the areas, and then document the decision making process that is used to decide if a specific area will not be included in the PIT count. CoCs should provide a summary of this decision making process in the HDX when they submit their PIT count data. For example, if a CoC has included a suburb in its count for several years, but has never observed any homeless people nor received reports of any homeless people in that area, the CoC may choose to exclude this area from the next unsheltered count. The CoC would document this decision in its PIT count submission by explaining that this area was excluded because no homeless people had been observed there during the last several counts and no evidence existed to suggest unsheltered people might be there on the night of the count.

For some CoCs with limited resources, it might not be feasible to count homeless persons throughout the jurisdiction. In these instances, it might be practical to divide the jurisdiction into smaller geographic areas. These CoCs should then identify and count homeless persons in a representative sample of these smaller areas to obtain a reliable unsheltered count. These CoCs should divide the jurisdiction into areas such that each area is similar in terms of expected number of homeless persons. To achieve this, the CoCs might be required to identify areas where it expects to find a sizeable number of unsheltered homeless persons and areas where it expects to find very few. The CoCs should then then take separate samples of each of these types of areas.[3] This way the selected areas sufficiently represent the areas that were not selected. Depending on the size of the CoC and the density of the homeless population, the area might be a census tract (which are typically around 1,500 households) or might be a

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[3] If there is an area where the community knows there are no homeless persons, such as a desert area or gated community, this decision should be documented and these areas should be excluded from the count as the CoC has already determined there are no homeless persons in these areas.

smaller geographic area, such as a single block. Refer to *Appendix B: Guidance for Sampling a Subset of Geography for the Unsheltered Count* for more information.

Once the geography for the count is identified, CoCs must also determine whether to collect the required information from all persons encountered or a sample of persons encountered during the count. If the count is not covering the entire geography of the CoC, the CoCs must supplement with sampling methods that represent the larger community in order to account for required population and subpopulation information. Enumerators may either:

- Interview everyone they count; or

- Interview every "nth" person found or every person found in order of encounter until the maximum number of surveys required for that map area is completed to create a random sample of persons counted (e.g., every third or fifth person). Often, count organizers work with a statistician to determine how many completed surveys in each area are optimal to create a random sample. Section 5.6 and *Appendix A: Choosing a Sample Size for the PIT Count* provide more information about sampling.

5.2 Methods for Conducting Unsheltered Count

There are two approved methods that CoCs may use for conducting their unsheltered PIT count:

1. Night of count

2. Service-based (post-night) counts

Both methods have advantages and disadvantages and CoCs might decide to use a combination of both of these approaches. Ultimately, CoCs must decide which method or combination of methods is most appropriate for obtaining an accurate count of homeless people. When combining methods, CoCs must conduct a basic interview with **everyone counted** during both the night of the count and service-based counts. This must be done in order to avoid double counting people who might have been counted during the night of the PIT count and who also are encountered at one of the targeted service-based locations.

Both approved methods involve face-to-face interactions with homeless persons. HUD prohibits CoCs from using any counting method that does not involve some direct interaction with homeless persons to determine their demographic and other characteristics on the night designated for the count and/or during service-based counts following the night of the count.

The key difference in terms of timing between the night of the count and the service-based approach is that the service-based counts typically occur during the day rather than at night and may take place over more than a single day in the week following the night of the count. CoCs may conduct a service-based count from between 1 and 7 days, but it must not exceed 7 days, after the designated count night. The period of time over which the count is conducted depends on:

- The size of the CoC's jurisdiction relative to the number of staff and volunteer resources that can be deployed

- The types of service locations being targeted

- The frequency with which homeless people access services at the survey locations

It is permissible for CoCs to conduct its count over multiple nights; however, CoCs that choose this approach must ensure that they have a strong plan to deduplicate the count. For example, a large Balance of State CoC with many rural areas might conduct nighttime counts over a 3-day

period to make sure that all known locations are counted. However, CoCs conducting counts over multiple nights must use surveys that include questions asking about where interviewees slept on the designated count night and ask whether the person has already been counted as part of that year's count. CoCs approved by HUD to conduct a night of the count approach without a survey should avoid counting adjacent areas on different nights if people who are unsheltered often travel between these areas (i.e., suburban areas located next to a larger urban area). A deduplication plan must ensure there is no overlap in counting areas and should be developed based on the CoCs' counting methodology. Refer to Chapter 3, *Section 3.1 Developing a PIT Count Plan*, for more information on selecting the date and time of the unsheltered count.

5.3 The Night of Count Method

The **night of the count** method (sometimes known as a "street count") is a count of people who are unsheltered on the night designated for the count. This method includes counting people who are staying in public or private places not designated for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including cars, parks, abandoned buildings, buses or train stations, airports, or camping grounds during the hours between sunset and sunrise. CoCs often select a specific time period (e.g., 3 a.m. to 7 a.m.) when people who are homeless are typically either in shelter or in unsheltered locations for the night.

The night of the count method incorporates two dimensions: (1) the strategy for covering territory (complete coverage, known locations, or a random sample of areas); and (2) the intensity of data collection (counting, interviewing, and observation). This method may be tailored to suit a CoC's needs by using a combination of coverage and data collection strategies and may be combined with service-based counts (described later in the section).

> Many CoCs combine a night of the count with a service-based count (described later in this chapter). CoCs using this combined approach must use one or more methods for eliminating duplication, as well as think carefully about the timing of data collection in each type of location.

To successfully execute a night of the count method, CoCs must pay particular attention to:

- Assembling a large number of volunteers necessary to ensure adequate coverage of the geography selected for canvassing
- Developing maps for enumerators to identify the specific geography they are responsible for covering within a brief period of time (typically a few hours) to decrease the potential for double counting
- Providing adequate training to volunteers on a variety of issues (see section 3.8 of this guide for additional details on training volunteers)

Which Counting Approach Makes the Most Sense for CoCs?

To determine which type of night of the count approach to use, CoCs must first identify the entire geography they cover and which areas will be included and excluded.

There are three options CoCs may use to implement a night of the count methodology. The options differ based on the geography CoCs intend to include in the count.

1. Complete coverage count
2. Known locations count
3. Random sample of areas count

Complete Coverage

Strategy 1: Conducting a complete coverage count during the night of the count.

A complete coverage count allows CoCs to obtain the most complete and accurate count of people who are unsheltered on the night of the count. However, while conducting a complete coverage count, CoCs might not also be able to obtain all of the demographic characteristics of unsheltered people required to meet HUD's data collection and reporting requirements. It is challenging to determine when and how to incorporate the interview component that allows a community to gather the pertinent information into a complete coverage night of the count approach. However, CoCs are not required to conduct such interviews *at the same time as the count.* Many communities find that it is not feasible (or desirable) to attempt to interview all persons counted during a 1-night count. CoCs often must complete the basic count within a short period of time, before significant movement by unsheltered persons to other locations occurs. A time-consuming interview process might not be practical within a short period of time, particularly for CoCs with larger unsheltered homeless populations. In addition, interviewing during early morning or late evening hours is viewed by many CoC staff as disruptive and discourteous and potentially dangerous. The exception to this is when nighttime counts are conducted after the night of the count. Such nighttime counts must include interviews to determine whether people were unsheltered on the night of the count, not just on the night they were encountered.

If CoCs are not able to conduct interviews at the same time as the night of the count, a statistically relevant sampling method should be used to provide a valid and reliable basis to determine demographic characteristics of all persons counted. One way to conduct interviews to sample from would be to couple a complete coverage approach with a service-based count. The demographic characteristics collected from the smaller interview sample could then be applied to the total universe of homeless people counted using the complete coverage approach.

Using Observations When an Interview is not Possible

When conducting a street count, there are situations in which it might not be possible for enumerators to interview a person in an unsheltered location. It might not be safe to approach someone in an abandoned building or someone who is sleeping. In these instances, it might be necessary to count a person and determine some of his or her characteristics based on observations. An observation tool may be used in these instances to record some characteristics that can be observed by the enumerator. For example, it may be possible to determine a person's gender, but not his or her veteran status. Sometimes even gender is difficult to record, if for instance a sleeping person is wrapped in blankets or inside a cardboard box. When recording observations, it is important to record as much information as practicable about the physical location where the person is observed (e.g., the street name, any landmarks), as well as the person's physical description (e.g., clothes, personal belongings) to assist with deduplication.

Known Locations

Strategy 2: Conducting a count in specific geographic locations where unsheltered people are known to congregate or sleep overnight.

This method involves identifying the specific geographic locations that will be visited by enumerators on the night of the count. CoCs should use an informed and reasonable basis for identifying known locations where unsheltered people are likely to be residing on the night of the count. CoCs should conduct reconnaissance to determine the known locations to be included in the count or talk with knowledgeable people in their CoCs about the locations where homeless people typically gather. This information gathering should also include at what time of day or night enumerators are most likely to find people experiencing homelessness who are not easily identified.

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Planning Your PIT Count*, broad-based participation from stakeholders will assist CoCs with building relationships that can ultimately result in a more effective count, increased coverage, and additional volunteers. Knowledgeable partners are not limited to, but can include:

- Outreach workers
- Law enforcement (e.g., police, sheriff, park rangers)
- Homeless or previously homeless individuals
- Emergency shelter staff
- Drop-in centers or day shelters
- Homeless youth providers
- 211 operators
- Faith-based organizations
- Mental health staff
- Detox program staff
- Food banks, feeding programs, or soup kitchens
- Local businesses and chambers of commerce
- Community development organizations
- Other community groups, particularly those that focus on specific homeless subpopulations (e.g., youth, veterans, Native Americans)

Once input has been gathered a final list of locations must be identified, taking into consideration safety concerns and resources. For example, the PIT count committee must decide whether to allow enumerators to enter abandoned buildings or whether to actively look for people sleeping in cars. In addition, CoCs should develop guidelines for enumerators regarding how to count or interview persons residing in:

Counting People in Residing in Institutional Settings in the PIT Count

Persons residing in institutional settings on the night of the PIT count, such as detox facilities, jails, and acute crisis or treatment centers should not be counted as homeless for HUD reporting purposes. HUD's definition of "literally" homeless does not include people "living" in health care facilities, foster care, corrections programs, and institutions. Some CoCs might choose to send count enumerators to local emergency rooms to see if any persons who are homeless are using the facility to keep warm or for emergency medical care and are not otherwise admitted or going to be admitted for an overnight stay in the hospital. CoCs surveying homeless peoples in these locations should include screening questions to determine where the person was staying on the designated PIT count night.

- Parks (local, state and federal)

- Alleys

- Parking ramps

- Public transportation systems

- High crime areas

- Campgrounds

- Makeshift shelters, shantytowns, and tent cities

- Under overpasses and bridges

- Water control systems

- Libraries

- Emergency rooms if the persons are not being admitted or seeking overnight care; and

- 24-hour commercial establishments (i.e., laundromats, convenience stores, coffee shops)

Random Sample of Areas

Strategy 3: A random sampling method using high and low probabilities for designated geographic areas–or "known locations"–where people who are unsheltered might be on the night of the count.

This method requires extensive preparation for the count. Due to the sheer size of some areas and the impossibility of covering every street or block in every community within a CoC geography, the PIT count planning committee may divide the area into "study areas." The CoC study areas may be classified as low or high density based on the number of homeless people expected to be found in that area. On the night of the count, enumerators visit every high-density area as well as a statistically valid sample of low-density areas. The purpose of selecting a statistically valid sample of low-density areas is to limit the number of areas enumerators have to cover while allowing the data collected on the night of the count to be weighted to represent all similar geographic locations in the population from which the sample was selected. *Appendix A: Choosing a Sample Size for the PIT Count* provides additional information about determining the appropriate sample size when conducting a count based on a sampling method. Once the count is completed, the number of homel-ess people that would have been counted in the areas not visited by the enumerators is estimated based on the information from the areas that were visited, thereby generating a count for the CoC as a whole.

Although this method requires a fair amount of statistical sophistication, what is most challenging is determining whether each study area is a low- or high-density area. One approach to determining whether a study area is low- or high-density is to hold a series of meetings over several months with a wide range of local stakeholders, including anyone with knowledge of where homeless people tend to congregate, for the purpose of analyzing previous unsheltered count results. During these meetings, CoCs should emphasize to participants the hours and the date on which the street count will be conducted, as there are often major locational changes based on these factors.

CoCs that use this method should pay close attention to the time of day during which enumerators actually observe the areas. Daytime and nighttime observations often differ

dramatically and studies relying on daytime observations often find no one present when they visit in the middle of the night. Once each area is assigned a preliminary density (high or low), the designations must be revisited as close as practicable to the night of the count to check for changes in the living and sleeping patterns of people who are unsheltered and adjust the sampling plan as necessary based on the most up-to-date observations.

Considerations for Adopting a Night of the Count Approach

The use of a night of the count approach, as opposed to a combined approach that also includes a service-based count, can raise concerns of bias. Some biases and issues to consider in using a night of the count approach include:

- **A known locations count** will be biased to the extent that the list of known locations might miss areas where homeless people live or gather, thereby resulting in an undercount. This selection or exclusion of certain areas results in bias against the people who might have been found in those locations. The complete enumeration of a geographical area corrects for some biases inherent in the known locations approach. If CoCs do not attempt a complete enumeration, a known locations approach may be supplemented by a random sample of areas that are not known locations or service-based locations, but have not otherwise been excluded from the geography to include in the count by the CoCs (i.e., identified by the CoCs as an area or areas with no homeless persons).

- The exclusion of different types of places (e.g., cars, abandoned buildings) might also result in an undercount.

- **Timing** is crucial to accurately implement a night of the count approach. Double counting might result from counts that exceed a few hours, unless CoCs have a method for eliminating duplication. When a count must extend longer than a few hours or even a few days, it is necessary to conduct interviews and use unique identifying information to deduplicate results. HUD requires that counts conducted during periods other than the night of the count include an interview to identify whether a person was unsheltered on the night of the count and to allow for deduplication.

Count Approach Considerations for CoCs of Different Size and Geographies

CoCs of various sizes and encompassing varying geographies can successfully use a night of the count method for their unsheltered PIT count.

- **Urban CoCs:** CoCs often segment their geography into census tracts or block groups to identify areas to include in the count. Based on the expected number of staff and volunteers available, large urban CoCs often conduct random sample of area counts and/or known location counts. Medium and small urban CoCs often conduct complete coverage or known locations counts.

- **Suburban or rural CoCs:** In suburban and rural areas enumerators typically do not attempt to conduct a complete coverage count, though they might do so in certain areas (e.g., a large state campground). Often, suburban and rural CoCs focus on a limited number of known locations where homeless people are believed to congregate and might conduct a random sample count of high and low concentration areas.

- **Balance of State or statewide CoCs:** Balance of State or statewide CoCs cover large geographic areas and must be thoughtful about where and how to conduct a count of people who are unsheltered. In many states, local providers and other PIT count volunteers assist in conducting a count of people who are unsheltered in their jurisdiction and report back to the CoC. The key for large areas or CoCs that have a significant number of locations where homeless people gather is having an adequate number of staff and volunteers to conduct the count.

5.4 Conducting Service-Based Counts

The service-based counting method is based on the understanding that while many homeless people choose not to stay in shelters, people can and do access other community services, public facilities (e.g., libraries), or private establishments (e.g., convenience stores and bookstores) that are open to the public and offer food, amenities, and respite. This method focuses on conducting interviews with users of non-shelter services and locations frequented by people who are homeless. In addition, canvassing and conducting interviews at service locations provided by mainstream agencies that are likely to come into contact with homeless people, particularly in jurisdictions that have few or no homeless-specific programs, will assist in gaining a more accurate count and pattern of service usage.

The major difference between a night of the count approach and a service-based approach is that it cannot be assumed that everyone encountered is homeless. Some people who use services targeted for homeless people and most people who use mainstream social services are not homeless or were not homeless and unsheltered on the night of the count, according to HUD's definition. To gather information necessary to determine homeless status, it is essential to ask detailed questions related to living situation on the night of the count of everyone contacted during a service-based count.

> **Length of Service-Based Counts**
>
> Service-based counts can extend beyond 1 day, since it is likely that homeless people will not access these services on a daily basis. Service-based counts must not extend beyond 7 days after the CoC's designated count night.

In addition to determining homeless status, the use of this method requires the ability to determine whether the individual or family has already been counted by another organization, or at an earlier date. To deduplicate the count, CoCs must collect enough information about the homeless persons during the interview process to ensure the same person was not interviewed and counted twice. HUD requires that the survey instruments used in service-based allow for deduplication.

The main limitation of a service-based count methodology is that, unless it is coupled with a street count, it is likely to miss unsheltered homeless people who do not use any services. Thus, HUD strongly recommends that service-based counts only be used to supplement night of the count approaches.

The timing of a service-based count might differ from a night of the count approach. The type of service provider participating in the service-based count could affect how long it will take to complete data collection. CoCs should ensure that service-based counts take place during a time when key service providers in the community are seeing clients (i.e., if a count is conducted on a single day, try not to pick a day when a major soup kitchen is closed or a health care center is not seeing patients). If CoCs are able to conduct interviews at service sites that homeless people access frequently, such as soup kitchens and food pantries, the timeframe might be short since a substantial proportion of people who are unsheltered might access these services in the course of a day. People who are homeless might not access mainstream social service agencies–such as TANF and Social Security offices–as often, and a longer data collection period might be necessary. However, the period of data collection must not extend beyond 7 days after the night designated for the count.

Who Should Use the Service-Based Method?

The service-based method may be used in a variety of CoCs. Many cities, suburban areas, rural areas, and entire states have used this method. It may, and frequently is, used in combination with the night of count approach and HMIS data collection methods.

CoCs might find the service-based count methodology useful:

- To learn about unsheltered homeless people who might not be found in a night of count, such as people living in their cars, abandoned buildings, and other hidden locations

- When a known location count might not be feasible due to the size or topography of the jurisdiction

Targeting Service-Based Locations

One of the first steps in applying this method is identifying the service providers and agencies to target for the CoCs' data collection effort.

> **Conducting a Service-Based Count in Suburban and Rural Areas**
>
> Many suburban and rural communities do not have extensive homeless services. In such places, the count is usually focused on mainstream human service agencies that are used by homeless and non-homeless people. These agencies could include county social service offices that provide TANF and food stamp assistance, community action agencies, health care clinics, and public housing agencies.

Service providers that focus on the needs of homeless people, such as soup kitchens and emergency food programs, might be the most efficient way to gain access to homeless people that do not use shelters. Soup kitchens and other programs that serve prepared meals to be eaten on the premises are primarily located in small to large urban areas. By contrast, food pantries or food shelves, which distribute bags or boxes of uncooked food or vouchers to be traded for food, are found in both urban and rural settings. Many of these emergency food programs are on local or statewide lists of organizations that receive surplus commodities through the U.S. Department of Agriculture or support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Other common locations where CoCs have conducted service-based counts and surveys of unsheltered homeless people include:

- Access centers

- Outreach programs (outreach is a service program and could be handled as a "service site"– even though outreach workers are mobile they might be included in a service-based approach)

- Soup kitchens, food pantries, and clothing programs

- Day shelters, and drop-in and warming centers

- Community Action Agencies and Community Action Partnership (CAP) agencies

- Health Care for the Homeless sites, public health departments, community health clinics, and hospital emergency rooms

- Social human service agencies (e.g., welfare offices)

- Housing offices

- Day labor sites

- Youth drop-in centers

- Employment centers and libraries

- Churches and other religious institutions that provide homeless services

The general approach to conducting a service-based count is:

1. Identify the service delivery sites that unsheltered homeless people are likely to use.

2. Gain the cooperation and participation of identified sites.

3. Design the survey with the cooperation and participation of key stakeholders.

4. Identify an agreed upon time period for data collection.

5. Develop and conduct training for enumerators.

6. Conduct the interviews, including the collection of demographic information required for HUD reporting purposes and anything else specified by the CoC to be used for local planning purposes. Service provider staff or volunteers conduct interviews of people using the service over a specified period of time. Every person requesting services during the established period is screened for homelessness. The initial interview consists of screener questions to determine whether the person was homeless and unsheltered on the night of the count and whether he or she has already completed a survey.

7. Identify the process and timeline for collecting completed surveys.

Should CoCs Use HMIS Data to Generate an Unsheltered Count?

HMIS data may include information from unsheltered as well as sheltered homeless people, if outreach programs, food programs, and other nonresidential programs that serve homeless people enter information on their users into HMIS, as happens in some CoCs. As with HMIS data from shelter providers, the data entered by these programs might not include all the data necessary for the PIT count.

If a CoC is using HMIS for its unsheltered count, the CoC must ensure that data on persons appearing in outreach or other homeless assistance projects represents people who were unsheltered on the night of the count. Street outreach providers may continue to assist clients after they find temporary housing, and, in some instances, after they move into shelter or permanent housing. Therefore, people being served by street outreach and appearing in HMIS at a given point in time might not all be unsheltered. The same issues will probably apply to data in HMIS with respect to clients of other non-shelter programs. In most CoCs, HMIS data has limited utility for the PIT count of people who are unsheltered for these reasons. In addition, most CoCs do not have HMIS data that represents and covers the entire CoC jurisdiction, which must be included in the unsheltered PIT count.

Using Screening Questions to Avoid Double Counting

Whether the count takes place in a single day or over multiple days, CoCs must have a strategy for eliminating double counting (see Chapter 6, *After the PIT Count*, for more information on deduplication techniques).

Screening questions are a series of questions designed to determine if persons interviewed were homeless per HUD's definition on the night of the count (as stated in Standard Nos. 7 and 11), whether they have already completed a survey form, and if previously interviewed, where that occurred. Screening is necessary since many people use

non-shelter homeless services and most people who use mainstream social services do not meet HUD's definition of homeless (as stated in Standard Nos. 7 and 11). Refer to the PIT count survey instruments available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT Guidance** page for example screener questions.

5.5 Creating an Interviewing Sample

If CoCs decide to conduct interviews during the count, they might want to consider implementing a sampling strategy where they interview a subset of the people counted. In order to construct a statistically representative sample, it is helpful to know ahead of time the characteristics of the unsheltered homeless people in the community (e.g., age, gender, household type, race, and ethnicity) and the locations where distinctive segments of the population might be found. CoCs might be able to obtain some of this information from local outreach providers. If this is the case, the CoCs could construct a non-random sample (with some statistical help from a consultant or local university) that reflects the broader populations.

Most CoCs will not have access to this kind of detailed information about the unsheltered homeless people in the community. In the absence of detailed information, the best approach is to systematically attempt to interview every person encountered in each known location or study area to complete the required number of surveys. For example, a CoC might decide to interview 10 to 20 percent of the expected number of people who are homeless in the study area (see *Appendix A: Choosing the Sample Size for the PIT Count* for more information about deriving the appropriate sample size). To determine what the percentage should be, CoCs must make some estimates in advance about:

- How many total people will likely be encountered

- How large an interview sample is required for the types of analyses the CoC intends to conduct

- What resources are available to devote to conducting the interviews

The number of interviews CoCs must complete is affected by the types of analyses the CoCs intend to conduct as well as the size of the unsheltered homeless population. To understand the general demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, household type) of unsheltered homeless people in the CoCs, the CoCs must choose a sample size based on the known or estimated size of the population. CoCs can use their historical count data and other sources of data as a basis for determining their sample size.

- If a CoC has a relatively small population of unsheltered homeless people (400 people or fewer), it should conduct interviews with at least half of these people who are encountered.

- If a CoC's unsheltered homeless population is larger than 400 people, it should complete at least 200 interviews.

- If a CoC intends to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of specific subpopulations (e.g., veterans, persons with serious mental illness), it must conduct interviews with enough individuals to be able to generalize the results. At minimum, 50 individuals should be interviewed and categorized in each subpopulation of interest.

- If the subpopulation is fewer than 50 people, a CoC should interview each individual.

There is no set standard for determining the appropriate sample size for a survey. The more complicated or detailed the questions become, the greater the likelihood that CoCs must consult an expert who knows about sampling.

To randomly sample unsheltered homeless people to interview, the most straightforward method is for CoCs to conduct a systematic sample by interviewing one-out-of-every-nth person counted. For example, if a CoC intends to interview one-out-of-every three people counted, the enumerators should be instructed to interview the first person they count and then every third person thereafter. This means the enumerators would interview the first, fourth, seventh, and so on, person that they count.

5.6 Administering Unsheltered Surveys

Generally, CoCs rely on some combination of service provider staff, outreach workers, and volunteers to conduct the unsheltered PIT count and administer the surveys. It is usually recommended that the people conducting the interviews have some experience either with homelessness issues or with data collection.

Regardless of who administers the survey, CoCs should provide thorough training to the interviewers (see section 3.8 for more guidance on training volunteers). Some CoCs have found it effective to use current or formerly homeless people to conduct the interviews because it increases the comfort level of the person being interviewed and could lead to better response rates.

5.7 Strategies for Counting Unsheltered Youth, Veterans, and the Chronically Homeless

Special strategies must be employed by CoCs to address the unique data collection needs of unsheltered homeless youth, veterans, and persons experiencing chronic homelessness. This section proposes some strategies the CoCs can use to improve the collection of information for these special subpopulations.

Homeless Youth

HUD has required CoCs to count sheltered homeless youth for several years and has required that CoCs count unsheltered youth since 2013. For the unsheltered count, CoCs should include persons, including homeless youth, who meet the definition as stated in Standard No. 11.

Standard No. 11:

CoCs must be able to verify that the unsheltered homeless people identified in the count are unsheltered on the night designated for the count, as defined at 24 CFR 578.3 of the **Homeless Definition Final Rule**:

> "An individual or family with a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground."

Youth who are not in the situations defined above on the night designated for the count should not be included in the unsheltered PIT count data submitted to HUD. However, youth who are homeless by another federal definition, including youth who are be doubled-up or couch surfing, on the night designated for the count, may still be counted for CoC planning purposes, just not reported to HUD as part of the unsheltered PIT count. CoCs should ensure the PIT count methodology is capable of distinguishing the specific living situation and age categories (under age 18 and ages 18 to 24) of youth encountered during the count.

CoCs have encountered numerous challenges with identifying and counting unsheltered homeless youth.

> **Including Youth in Sheltered Count**
>
> In their sheltered PIT counts, CoCs should **NOT report data collected on** homeless youth who are in foster care, are wards of the state, or are otherwise under government custody or supervision on the night designated for the count.

- The definition of "homeless youth" differs between state, local, and federal agencies. Agencies in CoCs might serve different segments of the youth population that do not correspond to federal definitions. The people planning the CoCs' counts must decide how to appropriately capture the full range of youth (through age 24), which has profound implications for where the enumerators look for youth.

- Homeless youth might congregate in various areas and at various times of day than older persons experiencing homelessness. Most homeless youth do not use homeless service agencies designed for adults, such as shelters and food lines, for fear of trouble or abuse by adult homeless persons. As a result, methods used to reach and count homeless adults are less likely to accurately capture unsheltered youth.

- Many youth who are on their own do not want to be found. Unsheltered youth might hide from providers and police during the count or might be reluctant to identify themselves as homeless and unsheltered. They are often fleeing abuse, have a fear of being placed in foster care or the juvenile justice system, or might be avoiding or unaware of available services. In addition, shelters are frequently required by law to turn youth over to police or social service agencies, especially if they are under age 18. CoCs that count unaccompanied children and youth under the age of 18 should consult with local justice, child welfare, and other social services officials to develop a protocol for interviewing these children and youth and connecting them to appropriate services in the community. CoCs should consider whether questions asked of youth should be stated differently than questions asked of homeless adults.

- Many youth in situations that would qualify as "homeless" under federal definitions do not think of themselves as homeless and, therefore, even if contacted during a PIT count, would not respond in a way that would result in them being included in the count. Among these are youth who "couch-surf" among family or friends when and if they can, but who periodically spend the night in unsheltered locations or "crash-pads" in abandoned buildings, cars, or other out-of-the-way places. Youth who are in un-sheltered locations on the night of the count should be included in CoCs' PIT counts.

The circumstances outlined above suggest that CoCs might consider using census counting strategies or special sampling, particularly if using a survey with questions unique to homeless youth, to reach and include youth who are homeless on the night of the PIT count. In spite of the challenges with collecting accurate youth PIT count data, current PIT

count strategies represent an opportunity to gather baseline data on the numbers of homeless youth in a community. In addition to using the PIT count to enumerate youth, many communities use the unsheltered count as an opportunity to mobilize and obtain data on homeless youth characteristics and needs that, while not reported to HUD, can provide CoCs and their partners with rich information to inform and improve its youth services.

As CoCs determine the appropriate unsheltered count methodology they should consider how that strategy will impact the unsheltered youth enumeration. For example, if a CoC chooses to count known locations for a night of the count approach, it should consider whether those known locations include places where homeless youth congregate. To ensure that all homeless youth are included in their PIT count, CoCs should develop specific strategies to effectively address the limitations with counting homeless youth, including: [4]

- **Collaborate with local school district homeless liaisons.** Schools can be important partners for PIT counts. Local school districts should be contacted to help conduct outreach and increase awareness about the count. Schools liaisons have crucial insights about how best to access and communicate with homeless youth, and can be important resources for spreading information about events and organizations associated with the CoCs' PIT counts. CoCs should also collaborate with the local school district homeless liaisons to help identify all homeless children who are unsheltered or staying in a shelter on the night designated for the count are included in the PIT count. Since schools use a more expansive homeless definition than HUD's definition used for the PIT count, it is important to confirm that only children and youth meeting the HUD definition are included in the PIT count results reported to HUD.

- **Recruit currently or formerly homeless youth to assist with the count.** For the unsheltered count, communities that have successful strategies for conducting counts of unsheltered youth often enlist homeless or formerly homeless teenagers and young adults to assist with the count. Before the count, these youth can assist in identifying where unaccompanied youth might be staying or congregating. They can also provide input on survey design, provide assistance to outreach efforts on the night of the count, and engage homeless children and youth in the PIT count process.

- **Engage organizations serving homeless youth.** Identify and engage all stakeholders that might encounter or serve unaccompanied, homeless youth age 24 or under to participate in local PIT count planning meetings. Key providers include:
  - Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs
  - Youth shelters
  - Youth drop-in centers
  - Street outreach teams
  - Youth-focused transitional housing programs
  - Faith-based organizations and youth groups
  - Local churches that serve hot meals
  - Health clinics–youth-based and adult, including mobile health outreach
  - Local middle schools, high schools, and alternative education programs
  - Youth employment programs
  - Food banks

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[4] Pergamit, M., Cunningham, M., Burt, M., Lee, P., Howell, B., Bertumen, K. (2013). *Counting Homeless Youth: Promising Practices from the YouthCount! Initiative.* The Urban Institute: Washington, DC.

- ➢ LGBTQ service providers
- ➢ Libraries
- ➢ Recreation centers

- **Identify locations where homeless youth congregate.** Get input from youth and youth providers to identify locations, or "hot spots," which might include:

  - ➢ Abandoned buildings
  - ➢ High traffic urban areas (i.e., nightclubs, tattoo parlors, record stores, arcades)
  - ➢ Pizza places, soda shops, etc. near high schools
  - ➢ Parks
  - ➢ Malls
  - ➢ Fast food restaurants
  - ➢ LGBTQ friendly gathering spots (school support groups, bookstores, coffee houses identified by LGBTQ service providers and youth)
  - ➢ Encampments inside and outside of urban areas

- **Hold magnet events.** Develop special events located at easily accessible and non-threatening locations that include activities, food, or other appropriate incentives that might draw in youth who do not typically use shelters and services and are difficult to locate on the streets.

- **Use social media to raise awareness and outreach.** Data from studies indicates that even youth living on the street use social media. Social media can be used to spread the word about the count, including information about location and incentives, which could lead to a larger number of youth participating in the count.

- **Identify a lead homeless youth PIT count coordinator to facilitate data collection, engage other youth providers, and coordinate collection of data from locations where homeless youth congregate.**

- **Provide services, food, and incentives to youth being counted.** The incentive could be advertised as part of the general mobilization effort to attract youth to participate in the count. Observations and anecdotal evidence from Youth Count! partners suggest that the incentives work for many youth. Examples of incentives include two-way public transportation tickets, a credit card with $10 credit, a backpack filled with hygiene items and information about services, a $5 restaurant card, bag lunches, and/or providing food, movies, and games, and a warm, dry place to spend time with friends for the night.

- **Survey locations during multiple times throughout the day of the count.** Youth might not be visible on the street during school hours. Consider assessing count routes prior to the count to ensure that teams are in the right places at the right times. A location that is crowded in the morning might be empty only a few hours later. A CoC may choose to extend the hours of the count into the evening hours to reach youth during the time between when drop-in programs close for the day and when they retire for the night. CoCs choosing to do this must take the steps necessary to ensure people are not double counted. CoCs surveying an area multiple times throughout the day must use an interview that allows for deduplication.

CoCs must be creative and develop strategies to ensure that the unsheltered counts cover or systematically sample locations where unaccompanied homeless youth congregate. CoCs' efforts to overcome the challenges with counting youth, will likely result in promising practices that will improve the accuracy of the homeless youth data locally and nationally in future counts.

Because youth are often highly transient, and might be difficult to find on the night designated for the count, communities who desire a broader understanding of homeless youth might consider other ways to supplement their PIT count data. Some of the promising practices communities have used to gain a better understanding of their homeless youth population include more frequent PIT counts, conducting counts focused on youth that occur over longer periods than the CoCs' normal counting period, and implementing survey questions that identify homeless youth that meet other (non-HUD) definitions of homelessness for community planning purposes. Information on creative strategies and implementation of many of the recommendations cited above for improving how CoCs count unsheltered youth can be found in the Urban Institute's report, **Counting Homeless Youth: Promising Practices from the YouthCount! Initiative**. YouthCount! was an initiative that included nine CoCs from across the country that focused on improving counts of unaccompanied homeless youth for the 2013 HUD PIT Count.

Veterans

Conducting a PIT count of homeless veterans is challenging because a person's veteran status is not visibly discernible and identification will likely require enumerator interviews. Locating, counting, and interviewing unsheltered homeless veterans during the PIT count is a major challenge. Besides the logistical challenges involved in locating veterans, it is important to understand how to engage them and ask survey questions in the most effective way to successfully collect the required information. Because the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has housing and service programs targeting homeless veterans, it is critical that local VA staff are engaged and participate in both the sheltered and unsheltered PIT count. However, CoCs should be mindful that some veterans might not be eligible for VA services, so it is important that other partners, in addition to the VA, participate to identify and locate homeless veterans. Ultimately, combining CoC and VA knowledge and resources will result in a more thorough and accurate count. Below are some suggestions about specific ways local CoCs and VA can collaborate:

- Engage the local VA Medical Center, VA Vet Centers, or VA department staff that have experience screening and interviewing veterans to determine eligibility for VA homeless services, as well as those who provide services to homeless veterans or work on homeless issues to help plan and implement the count. Knowledgeable, experienced staff can help:

  ➢ **Locate unsheltered veterans.** VA Medical Centers and VA Vet Centers have homeless coordinators and outreach workers who regularly interact with veterans, including homeless veterans. These staff are knowledgeable about the locations where unsheltered homeless veterans live, sleep, and congregate and can identify the places that must be included in the unsheltered count. These individuals can also help make sure the roster of housing programs for homeless veterans is complete for the sheltered count and identify any other VA-funded service centers that should be involved, such as Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), VA Community Resource and Referral Centers (CRRCs), VA Vet Centers, and Women Veteran Programs.

  ➢ **Provide guidance on count and survey instruments.** VA staff can offer technical guidance to improve data accuracy.

- ➢ **Assist during the count.** Veteran homeless coordinators and outreach workers can form special teams to canvass encampments and other remote areas that might not have been included in previous counts. Their relationships with clients could also help homeless veterans feel more comfortable providing information.

- ➢ **Work with service providers, homeless and mainstream, who target veterans specifically.** These might include agencies that call themselves "veteran centers" but are not part of the VA. Lists of chartered and non-chartered agencies serving homeless and other veterans can be found nationally at the National Resource Directory for Veterans (**www.nrd.org**) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (**www.nchv.org**). In addition, every state has a Department of Veteran Affairs or equivalent office that might be able to provide a list of relevant service agencies by location.

- ➢ **Reach out to local Veteran Service Organizations (e.g., American Legion, Disabled American Veterans)** for their cooperation with the count. Especially in rural areas where there might not be many homeless service providers, Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) provide assistance to homeless veterans and their families. Some VSOs have funds that are set aside to assist these families with motel vouchers and utility payments.

- ➢ **Recruit homeless or formerly homeless veterans to be enumerators for the unsheltered count.** Homeless veterans can be an indispensable resource while planning and conducting a PIT count. Before the count, they can assist in identifying locations where unsheltered homeless veterans might be living. They can also participate in the count itself, as they might be able to gain the trust of homeless veterans more easily than other staff or volunteers and have more success completing surveys.

Refer to the sample survey instruments available on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT Guidance** page for example questions to determine veteran status.

Chronically Homeless

Accurate estimates of the number of chronically homeless persons and the proportion they represent of the overall homeless population are difficult to determine. The determination of chronic homelessness among the unsheltered homeless population requires responses to several questions that must be administered in a survey format. CoCs that use a night of the count method without sampling or interviewing have no way to determine whether the person being counted is chronically homeless. Many CoCs conduct their unsheltered counts late at night to better distinguish between individuals living on the street and those staying in shelter. Interviews might not be conducted, since individuals likely are sleeping at the time of the count, and volunteers are often instructed not to wake people out of respect. As a result, improved sampling techniques and clear instruction on what questions should be asked to determine chronic homeless status are required.

CoCs must use an approved counting methodology with valid sampling techniques as described within this guide. CoCs should refer to the most recent HUD regulations to review and confirm the definition of chronic homelessness. In order to determine chronic homeless status, CoCs must ask questions of all adults in households interviewed that provide answers to the above listed qualifications. Refer to the sample survey instruments available online on the **HUD Exchange HIC and PIT Guidance** page for example questions to determine chronic homeless status.

6. AFTER THE PIT COUNT

The PIT count is not over once the enumeration of homeless people is complete. It is important that CoCs adequately plan for the period after the count, including cleaning and compiling survey data, deduplicating data, accomplishing data entry, data submission, and data analysis. This chapter provides guidance and best practices on how to ensure your PIT count data are properly handled from data collection to data submission to HUD.

6.1 Collecting Completed Surveys

It is important that CoCs appropriately handle the PIT count surveys, whether collected via paper or electronically. This is the point during data collection when the survey information is most vulnerable. Completed paper surveys are often transported from each interviewer to one particular drop-off or central collection point. If the surveys completed by an interviewer are lost, that entire person's work is wasted and any personal identification information is at risk for potentially causing harm to the interviewed persons. For survey information collected electronically via a mobile application or other electronic means, it is important that the data is collected and stored using proper privacy protocols.

> **Standard No. 14:**
>
> CoCs are required to ensure that people conducting the PIT count, including project staff and community volunteers, are appropriately trained about count standards, data collection procedures, and protocols for privacy, security, and personal safety.

Below are some steps for collecting completed paper surveys and electronic survey data.

- Use the safest practical methods of getting the completed paper surveys from each interviewer to the drop-off or central collection point

- If practicable, it is a good idea for each interviewer to hand-deliver their completed work back to a central drop-off location

- For PIT counts extending over a larger area (such as Balance of State or statewide CoCs), developing a clear process for mailing and ensuring safe delivery of the completed surveys to a central location is important

- If CoCs are collecting electronic survey data via a mobile application or other electronic format, they should ensure that the data is properly encrypted and stored securely

- CoCs should consider limiting access to the electronic survey data to a few key people

It is a good idea to track and record survey arrival at the central data collection point, ensuring that all expected forms are accounted for. It is helpful to number all of the surveys before distribution to enumerators, so receipt of all surveys can be tracked.

6.2 Cleaning and Coding Surveys Before Data Entry

Once the PIT count is complete and all data are assembled at a central location, CoCs should focus on preparing all survey data collected for data entry and analysis.

Survey Review

Completed survey forms should be reviewed before data entry. The survey review process may be conducted by CoC staff, a team of volunteers, or by an outside vendor or research team. The purpose of reviewing survey forms is to clean the surveys to ensure that:

- It will be clear to whomever does the data entry which marks are actually answers and which are extraneous notes that someone might have made during the survey

- Responses that make no sense have been eliminated

- Correct interpretations have been made about such anomalies as transposed numbers and illegible responses

The review process could include these safeguards:

- Checking to see if the criteria for identifying a "homeless person" are met. Surveys completed by those who are in housing situations that do not meet the homeless criteria can be removed and not included for data entry or clearly coded to ensure that the individuals counted are not included in data reported to HUD.

- Placing a unique numeric identification number on each survey.

- Placing an agency identification number on each survey to correlate the survey with participating projects.

- Placing the geocode (of the project or of the location where an unsheltered homeless person was counted) on each survey to correlate the survey with a particular Con Plan jurisdiction.

- Destroying surveys that were not completed or are unreadable.

- Checking to make sure that all standard items at the beginning or end of the survey are completed. This might include the name of the project where the data was collected, the date and time of the interview, or the name or initials of the interviewer.

- Checking that every question eliciting one answer only has one answer.

- Checking to see if questions that should have been skipped were skipped, and crossing out those answers that should have been skipped.

Coding Responses

CoCs intending to use statistical software like SPSS or SAS should code their surveys by numbering all responses that will be analyzed. CoCs could pre-code their surveys to assist data entry workers in identifying the correct code for each response. Typically a master list or codebook is used to keep track of all the codes used in the survey, including the ones that appear on the questionnaire and any that might be added after data collection. For example:

Race

1. American Indian or Alaska Native
2. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
3. Asian
4. White
5. Black or African American
6. Don't Know
7. Refused

Age

1. Under Age 18
2. 18 to 24
3. Over 24

Once coding schemes have been developed, each response is assigned a numeric code, which is then entered into a database. It is important that the responses have a minimal number of categories, be as mutually exclusive as practicable, and have few responses left over as "other responses" that do not match HUD's data collection and reporting requirements.

Missing data must also be handled properly. When data analysis begins, it is important to distinguish between "zero," "I don't know," "refused" and no response. All statistical software can recognize missing value codes as those that should be excluded from calculations.

Data Entry and Cleaning

The next step is to enter data from the survey into a computer program, such as SPSS, SAS, Excel, or the CoCs' HMIS. CoCs could consider hiring an outside vendor, university, or researcher to assist with the data entry process. The exact procedure will depend on the particular brand of software that CoCs are using, but the basic task is the same. CoCs should enter each survey, one at a time, typing or scanning in the responses in order. If CoCs used a mobile application for electronic data collection, the data should be uploaded to begin analysis. A consistent data entry process should be outlined and followed to verify that the data are being entered accurately and to reduce any errors. A best practice is to run data entry quality checks on every 10th survey or enter data twice into two datasets and then compare and verify for accuracy. No matter how carefully the data has been entered, errors are likely to occur. This could mean incorrect coding, incorrect reading of written codes, improper sensing of blackened marks, missing data, and missed responses due to skip patterns.

Data cleaning is the process of finding and correcting data collection or data entry errors. Data cleaning may occur before or after the data entry process described above, but should happen before any analysis of the data occurs. To begin the data cleaning process, CoCs should identify and remove any incomplete and duplicate responses. A response should be excluded if the respondent did not complete enough of the survey form to be meaningful. For example, if the only item answered on the survey was the person's gender, then the respondent did not answer enough questions to assist with deduplication or to determine homeless status, and therefore this survey should be excluded from the analysis. Alternatively, if the respondent answered all the demographic and homeless questions but omitted their name or age, then the response should be included.

One of the first and most important steps in any data processing task is to verify that the data values are correct or, at the very least, conform to a set of rules. For example,

a variable called ETHNICITY might be expected to have only two values, (as well as values for missing, don't know, and refused); a variable representing age would be expected to be within reasonable limits. It is useful to run the PIT count data through a series of data checking operations, seeking to identify data entry errors and review the consistency of the data.

Screening Phase

Examine the data to check for different types of possible concerns described below:

1. **Lack of data.** Were all or most of the questions answered?

2. **Excess of data.** Are there duplicate responses?

3. **Suspect data.** Do the answers to some questions seem counterintuitive or extremely unlikely? To clarify suspect data, all of the respondent's answers should be reviewed to determine if the data makes sense in context.

- Sometimes the data must be reviewed as a cross section of different respondents' answers, to identify issues such as a skip pattern that was specified incorrectly.

- Are there values that are so far beyond the typical that they seem potentially erroneous?

- Are there patterns that imply that the respondent just checked boxes rather than providing actual honest answers? This might be particularly true for CoCs who had respondents complete the survey forms on their own.

When cleaning data take into consideration the following common issues:

- Missing data–Answers omitted by the respondent or skipped questions

- Errors–Typos or answers that indicate the question was misunderstood

4. **True extreme.** An answer that seems high but can be justified by other answers (e.g., the length of homelessness is 14 years, but the respondents age and Vietnam Veteran status along with a history of substance abuse makes the answer plausible).

5. **True normal.** A valid answer.

6. **Uncertain data.** Not sure if data are valid. CoC staff must make a judgment call on how to treat this data.

Cleanup Phase

Once the data have been screened, decisions on whether suspect data are valid or invalid must be made. Options for dealing with suspect data include:

1. **Leave data unchanged.** The most conservative course of action is to accept suspect data as a valid response and make no change to it. The larger the sample size, the less one suspect response will affect the count or analysis of count data; the smaller the sample size, the more difficult the decision.

2. **Correct the data.** If the respondent's original intent can be determined, then it might make sense to edit their answer. For instance, perhaps it is clear from other answers provided by the respondent what the valid response should have been.

3. **Delete the data.** The data seems illogical and the value is so far from the norm that it will affect the results. What to do? Delete just this response or delete the entire record? Decisions to discard data should be made with the intent to derive the most accurate count and should not be made with the intent to merely lower the CoC's count results.

However the data are adjusted, make sure to document in a survey report what steps were taken and how many responses were affected and for which questions.

There are basically two types of data cleaning checks that should be employed: code cleaning and contingency cleaning.

Code Cleaning or Data Range Checks

The first step in data cleaning is to go through each variable in turn, checking its frequency distribution to look for outliers or extreme values. For example, if a question has two possible answers "yes" and "no," these responses would be typically coded as a "1" for yes or a "2" for no. If there were responses in the data set of "3" or "4," they would be considered out of range and clearly erroneous since that is not a possible answer code. The electronic data and the hard copy of the surveys should be examined to clarify the problem, and the data set should be cleaned to reflect the correct response.

Some computer programs and statistical software packages check for these types of errors as the data are being entered. For example, if the user tried to enter a 3, for a question with only two possible responses, the computer might beep and refuse the code. Other computer programs are designed to test for illegitimate codes in completed data files and might run reports or provide other ways to check the files for coding errors after data entry is complete. Most data entry programs will NOT warn the user when unlikely (but possible) codes occur. For example, if a respondent's age is shown as 99, this could be true, but it could also be a mistake. The data must be reviewed carefully to detect this kind of mistake. No matter how experienced the data entry staff is with entering surveys results, some mistakes are inevitable. If 500 questionnaires have been returned, and each questionnaire has 100 variables, that is 50,000 data items. If only one percent of these are in error, there will be 500 errors to find.

Contingency Cleaning and Logic Checks

The second type of data cleaning is called contingency cleaning or logic checks. Data analysts should review each question and corresponding responses to ensure that the answers make sense given the question being asked. Contingency cleaning or logic checks are the process of checking that only those cases that should have data on a particular variable do in fact have such data. For example, the survey asks about veteran status. All adult respondents should have a response coded in the data. However, all unaccompanied youth age 17 and under should be coded as "no" not a veteran, since they are not eligible for military service.

6.3 Safeguarding and Storing Completed Surveys

> **Standard No. 13:**
>
> Surveys of people for the sheltered or unsheltered count must be administered in a manner that protects participant privacy and safety, as well as the safety of the persons completing the survey.

Sheltered and unsheltered PIT count surveys should be kept in a secure, locked, and safe place, such as a locked room or cabinet. Once all data are entered into a database, cleaned, verified, and submitted to HUD, completed surveys should be shredded and properly disposed of.

6.4 Deduplicating Data

Limiting duplication is a major challenge with all homeless counts. CoCs are responsible for ensuring that the methodologies they employ limit the possibilities of duplication and over counting. An accurate estimate of the size of a homeless population relies greatly on conducting an unduplicated count; that is, making sure that each person has been counted once and only once. If part of the population is missed, the count will underestimate the size of the population; if some population members are counted more than once, the count will overestimate the size of the population. In both situations the count will misrepresent the characteristics of the homeless people in the community. To ensure that CoCs are considering deduplication when planning and executing their PIT counts, HUD has developed the following standard.

> **Standard No. 12:**
>
> CoCs must ensure that during the PIT count homeless persons are only counted once. It is critical that the counting methods be coordinated to ensure that there is no double-counting. Therefore, CoCs must also collect sufficient information to be able to deduplicate the PIT count (i.e. ensure that the same homeless person was not counted more than once).

Finding and removing duplicate records that relate to the same person in the PIT count is an essential component in getting an accurate count of persons who are homeless within a community. Duplicate counting is especially likely to occur when there are opportunities to count people at various locations at different times or on different days (e.g., during a service-based count).

CoCs should use one or a combination of the following approaches to deduplicate their counts:

- Algorithms based on personal identifying information
- Screening approach

Algorithms Based on Personal Identifying Information

Personal identifying information collected through interviews is currently the best way to eliminate or reduce duplicate records. An individual's set of unique identifiers, such as date of birth, gender, portions of the first and last names, and social security number are used to check completed questionnaires to identify any duplicate records. This can be done by sorting and reviewing the actual questionnaires, but it is usually more easily done using HMIS or a statistical database program like SPSS, SAS, or Excel. Some programs, including local CoC HMIS systems, can run an algorithm on the basic demographic information collected *(name, date of birth, gender, social security number)* and

> **How Do I Know If Records Belong to the Same Client?**
>
> Check other identifying data elements, such as:
>
> • First name
>
> • Last name
>
> • DOB
>
> • Where they spent the night of the count
>
> • Veteran status

generate a unique PIN number for each individual counted, thereby allowing data analysts to more easily identify and eliminate duplicate records. This process might also involve human review to identify matches that are "close enough," accounting for such things as nicknames and missing information. After entering interview information, check for and eliminate duplicate records with the same set of names, birth dates, social security numbers, and other identifying information. Although achieving a perfect unduplicated count is nearly impossible, CoCs should eliminate any person counted or interviewed twice.

Survey ID	First Initial	Last Initial	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Veteran Status
1001	M	S	34	M	2	A
1002	P	J	41	M	2	Y
1003	S	A	52	M	1	N
1004	B	P	61	F	1	Y
1005	H	Q	25	M	3	N
1006	P	J	41	M	2	Y
1007	L	P	19	F	1	N
1008	A	C	58	M	4	N

Screening Approach

Information and responses collected through interviews could help to estimate how many people are likely to have been counted twice. The best way is to include a question that asks if the person has already been interviewed since data collection began and, if so, where or in what type of program he or she was interviewed. The interview used for this approach should also leave room where the interviewer can record general observations, such as the person's gender, approximate age, ethnicity, and any unusual physical characteristics. If a person reports more than one interview, CoC staff can review other interviews to see if a similar person was interviewed. In addition, if CoCs provide incentives after interviews, such as bags of necessities or meal cards, enumerators could ask people if they have received the incentive to help them remember the interview. Limitations of using this approach include:

• reliance on self-reported responses to screening question(s)

- difficulty in deduplicating data across information that might be reported in HMIS or provided by shelter projects

6.5 Interpreting the Results of a PIT Count

When CoCs are satisfied that the PIT count data are accurate, they should begin to think about the implications of the results. Keep in mind that PIT count data presents a different picture than longitudinal data (i.e., data collected over a period of time, such as 1 year). PIT count information offers a snapshot of people who are homeless on a single night and can be used to understand their characteristics and, more generally, might inform service planning, shelter utilization and gaps analyses. However, PIT count data has limited utility for under-standing the number or characteristics of people who experience homelessness over time. For instance, PIT counts over-represent homeless individuals and families who use shelters or transitional housing for long periods of time and under-represent people who cycle in and out of shelters and people who have a single, brief episode of homelessness. People who stay in shelters for shorter periods of time will be underrepresented compared to those that are long-term shelter users.

CoCs should also consider how the PIT count results reflect their plans to end homelessness. If the PIT count data indicates a decline in homelessness, this might be momentum to continue to implement steps outlined in their CoCs' plan. However, if the PIT count data shows an increase in homelessness, the CoCs should consider how to present these findings while continuing to encourage strategies to reduce homelessness in the community.

CoCs with a fully implemented HMIS should use HMIS data to examine longitudinal data to help to further analyze the characteristics and needs of persons using homeless assistance in the CoC geographic area.

6.6 Submitting Data into the HUD Homelessness Data Exchange

CoCs are required to submit their HIC and PIT count data via HUD's Homelessness Data Exchange (HDX) in the spring of each year as part of the annual CoC Program Competition. The HDX has several data validations built in to prevent erroneous data entry. CoCs should correct any validation errors detected by HDX and strive to improve their data clean-up in the future to avoid recurrence of those errors. HUD releases annual guidance documents before the submission deadline that outlines each year's data collection and submission requirements. CoCs should carefully review these guidance documents to ensure that they are aware of any updated data collection or data entry procedures before entering their HIC and PIT count data into the HDX.

Upon submission in HDX, HUD conducts a quality analysis of the PIT count data. HUD is often looking for large changes or inconsistencies within the data. HUD encourages CoCs to document in the "Notes" section of the HDX any anomalies in their data. When HUD has completed its review the data is compiled and reported as part of the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. HUD considers the data it publishes as the final approved HUD data and will use that data for all official use, including the annual CoC Program Competition.

6.7 Sharing PIT Count Data with Con Plan Jurisdictions

> ### Standard No. 4:
>
> All CoCs should consult and collaborate with all Con Plan jurisdictions in the geographical boundary of the CoC including those that do not have ESG funding, to assist the jurisdictions in submitting PIT count data that is relevant to completing their Con Plans.

Con Plan jurisdictions should be active participants during the PIT count process. After the count is conducted and the data has been cleaned, CoCs should provide Con Plan jurisdictions the data needed to complete their Con Plans.

> ### Standard No. 5:
>
> CoCs must provide PIT count data to the entity(ies) responsible for the Con Plan jurisdiction(s) associated with the CoC.

As community partners, CoCs should invite Con Plan jurisdictions to participate in a discussion of the PIT count results. A good practice is to highlight trends that are unique to particular Con Plan jurisdictions and to discuss potential gaps in housing and services targeted to homeless individuals and families. This kind of analysis is a valuable tool to inform Con Plan jurisdictions' homeless needs assessments and their decision making process for allocating and coordinating limited community resources.

6.8 Using PIT Count Data

PIT count data are a valuable resource. HUD strongly encourages communities to carefully analyze PIT count results and make changes to its homeless response system accordingly. PIT count data can be used directly to assist homeless people identified during the count. The unsheltered count data can be used to enhance outreach efforts, including improving the geographic coverage of outreach and addressing changes in the demographics of people living on the streets. PIT count data could also be used to ascertain whether clients found on the street are being sought out for housing opportunities, such as a public housing agency waitlist or a local Vulnerability Index registry. Lastly, the PIT count data could be used to convene a meeting to discuss assisting special populations identified during the count that might not currently be connected to services, such as veterans or youth.

CoCs should also use their PIT count data as a means of educating the public. Through PIT count data, CoCs can understand where homeless people congregate, the extent of homelessness, and the characteristics of people who are homeless. CoCs that use the PIT count for outreach are often able to document success stories. Sharing of these success stories, with the consent of the people involved, through local newspapers, social media, and other media outlets can dispel misconceptions about people who experience homelessness and engender support for the cause of preventing and ending homelessness in the CoC.

APPENDIX A: CHOOSING THE SAMPLE SIZE FOR THE PIT COUNT

Choosing the size of the sample, or the "n" (e.g., should you interview every third person or every fourth person), depends on both the number of homeless persons CoCs expect to count and the number of people the CoCs want to interview. To calculate the n, divide the number of homeless persons the CoCs expect to count by the number of interviews they want to complete. For example, if the CoC expects to count 800 homeless persons and wants to interview 400 people, then n =2 (800 divided by 400 equals 2) and the CoC would instruct enumerators to interview every other person they count (i.e., first, third, fifth etc.). If the CoC expects to count 800 homeless persons and wants to interview 200 people, the CoC would instruct the enumerators to interview every fourth person (800 divided by 200 equals 4). This calculation will not always result in a whole number and so CoCs will have to adjust the sampling interval appropriately.

For example, if the CoC expected to count 800 persons and wants to interview 300 persons, the sampling interval or n is equal to 2.67. In this case, one option is to adjust the sampling interval to the whole number 2, which will result in an expected number of interviews of 400 people rather than 300 people. A second option to come closer to the desired 300 interviews is to give about one-third of the enumerators a sampling interval of 2 (interview every other person) and the remaining enumerators a sampling interval of three (interview every third person) to come closer to 300 interviews. A third option is to give enumerators instructions to sometimes interview every second person and sometimes every third person to interview. This can be done by giving a list of which person to interview. For example, interview the first, fourth, seventh, ninth, twelfth … person to interview so that on average it is every 2.67 persons that they interview.

CoCs then must weigh the information gained from the interviews so that the characteristics are representative of people in their community. This step can be accomplished by giving every completed interview the weight of n, the sampling interval. For example, if the sampling interview is three for every counting team, simply multiply the responses (characteristics) of interviewed people with these characteristics by three to arrive at an estimate of the number of unsheltered homeless persons in the community with these characteristics. However, since each enumerator is not likely to interview exactly one-third of the people they encountered– either because they did not count the number of people that are an exact multiple of the sampling interval or because some people might have refused to answer interview questions – the estimates should be weighted by enumerator and then aggregated across teams. For example, one enumerator could have counted 25 unsheltered homeless persons and interviewed 9 people while another enumerator could have counted 50 unsheltered persons and interviewed only 12 people. The weight for each enumerator should be the number of people counted divided by the number of people interviewed. The weight for the interview responses from the counting team that interviewed 9 of the 25 people they counted should be 2.78 (25 divided by 9 equals 2.78) and the weight for the interview responses for the counting team that interviewed 12 of the 50 people counted should be 4.17 (50 divided by 12 equals 4.17).

APPENDIX B: GUIDANCE FOR SAMPLING A SUBSET OF GEOGRAPHY FOR THE UNSHELTERED COUNT

If CoCs divide their geography into areas with high- and low-expected number of homeless persons, they should consider selecting all (or most) of the high areas if that is a manageable number of areas given available resources. These high number areas are where it is expected that most homeless persons are located and will help to understand the size and characteristics of the people that are homeless. For the low homeless population areas, CoCs should select a large enough sample so that no single area that might have an unexpectedly high number of homeless persons that could influence the CoC's homeless estimates (i.e., to avoid overrepresentation).

For example, if you have 50 areas in the CoC and the PIT count committee decides to select a sample of 25 areas to count unsheltered homeless persons, the weight would be equal to two (50 divided by 25 equals 2). To obtain an estimate, the CoC should multiply the number of unsheltered homeless persons counted in the sample areas by the weight (two in this case) to arrive at the estimated number of unsheltered homeless persons in the entire CoC. If the CoC samples areas separately by whether it expects to find a high or low number of homeless persons, simply follow the weighting procedures described above for each type of area separately, then combine the two estimates. For example, if a CoC samples eight out of 10 areas where it expects a high number of homeless persons and 5 out of 10 areas where it anticipates finding a low number of homeless persons, the weight for the count in the high areas is 1.25 (10 divided by 8 equals 1.25) and the weight for the count in the low areas is 2.0 (10 divided by 5 equals 2).