HUD's
HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People

Second Revision January 2008

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Office of Community Planning and Development

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Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

Many communities have long understood the need to count, describe, and understand the homeless people who do not use shelters and are typically found on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or in other places not meant for human habitation. Unsheltered homeless people are an important subpopulation of homeless persons and their characteristics and needs must be accommodated within any strategy to reduce homelessness. Collecting good baseline data about this subpopulation is essential to understanding the causes of homelessness and to designing effective responses, and can be used as a basis for comparison in future years. Moreover, continued data collection at regular intervals is needed to track progress toward reducing homelessness.

This guide describes several methods for identifying, counting, and learning something about homeless people who are unlikely to be found in shelters or in other residential programs within a local homeless assistance network. Information about these approaches was gathered from communities throughout the country; examples of their methods are provided throughout the guide. The Department of Housing and Urban Development released the first edition of this guide in October 2004 and the second edition in September 2006. This updated version clarifies HUD standards for counting homeless persons moving forward.

The guide *does not* discuss how to collect data on homeless people who are housed in shelters or how to estimate local need for housing and services for homeless people. These topics are addressed separately by HUD in *A Guide to Counting Sheltered Homeless People* (Revised 2008) and *Calculating Unmet Need for Homeless Individuals and Families* (2006). Approaches to counting sheltered homeless people are also described in detail in Martha R. Burt's *Practical Methods for Counting the Homeless: A Manual for State and Local Jurisdictions*.[1] In addition, this guide *does not* discuss methods for counting people who are at risk of homelessness (i.e., families facing eviction or households living with friends or family).

The primary users of this guide are likely to be state and local government agencies, other organizations involved in Continuums of Care (CoCs), and regional councils of government. Others who may find it helpful include: state and local legislative bodies needing to allocate resources among several jurisdictions or programs; state and local service planners; and officials of agencies whose particular service focus (e.g., health, mental health, substance abuse) contributes to ending chronic homelessness.

This guide is part of HUD's larger technical assistance effort to help CoCs prepare annual Continuum of Care funding applications and meet Congressional directives on improving the quality of information on homelessness. Since 2003, the CoC application has required

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[1]   Martha R. Burt. *Practical Methods for Counting the Homeless: A Manual for State and Local Jurisdictions*. 2nd edition, June 1996, available from the Urban Institute Press [877-847-7377 or www.uipress.org].

Continuums to report the number of people who are homeless in the community at a particular time. In the past, some CoCs based these estimates on data that they themselves collected annually through a street and shelter count or by some other mechanism. However, many CoCs took national research findings or statistics from other jurisdictions and applied those findings to their own community – in essence, estimating a count without looking directly at local data, particularly data for homeless people who do not routinely use shelters.

In 2003, HUD encouraged CoCs to begin using a new Homeless Population and Subpopulations Chart to *collect* local data on the number and characteristics of unsheltered homeless people. HUD continued to request similar information in subsequent applications. The Homeless Population and Subpopulations Chart also became part of the Consolidated Plan in the section on homeless needs.

In future Continuum of Care applications, HUD will continue to require CoCs to report population and subpopulation information on the homeless people residing in their community. CoCs will also need to describe the methodology used to collect the reported data. These methods must conform to HUD's minimum standards for counting sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons. These standards are outlined in Chapter 2 of this document.

How to Use This Guide

If you are unfamiliar with the topic of counting unsheltered homeless people, we suggest that you read *Chapter 2* first. It provides basic information on: why it is important to count unsheltered people and what communities have learned to date from counting unsheltered persons; the challenges to counting homeless people who do not use shelters; and key HUD definitions and standards. The chapter ends by introducing the three approaches to collecting data on unsheltered homeless people that are covered in the guide.

If you have a general familiarity with the topic, you may want to turn directly to Chapters 3 and/or 4, which present "how-to" information on conducting counts. *Chapter 3* describes the steps involved in conducting counts of homeless people in public places (often referred to as street counts). If you are interested in public places counts, turn to page 17.

Chapter 4 describes counting and collecting information on unsheltered homeless people who use non-shelter services, either homeless-specific services, such as soup kitchens, or mainstream social services, such as Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) or Social Security. If you are interested in these "serviced-based" counts, turn to page 41.

Chapter 5 provides guidance for southwestern border states that face unique challenges counting unsheltered homeless persons. Although this section focuses on one region of the country, portions may also be useful for sparsely populated rural areas in general. If you are interested in learning more about counting along the southwestern border, turn to page 55.

Chapter 6 introduces new methods for assessing the quality of information collected through public places counts. These quality assurance techniques were first implemented in New York City in 2005. The plant-capture technique and next day survey are studies designed to understand and address the shortcomings of traditional methods for counting unsheltered homeless persons. If you are interested in learning more about techniques for estimating unsheltered homeless persons missed by street counts, turn to page 66.

Finally, ***Chapter 7*** presents examples of simple enumeration forms and detailed surveys that CoCs used for interviews in the past. The chapter also includes examples of the timelines two communities followed to prepare for their counts and provides contact information for the Continuums cited in this guide. To see this information, turn to page 95.

2. Counting Unsheltered Homeless People: The Basics

This chapter provides basic information on counting unsheltered homeless people. The chapter begins with a discussion about the scope of homelessness and the benefits of conducting counts. This is followed by a review of what has been learned to date from counting unsheltered persons and a discussion of recent changes in HUD's requirements for conducting street and other counts. The chapter ends by introducing the basic approaches to collecting data on unsheltered homeless people.

2.1 Defining the Scope of Homelessness

Defining the scope of homelessness has proven controversial since the issue first gained broad public attention during the 1980s. Public debate has revolved around how widely to view the scope of "residential instability" and how to target scarce resources to address it. In general, residential stability can be divided into two broad categories of people: those who are "literally homeless" and those who are "precariously housed."

- *Literally Homeless*. These include people who for various reasons have found it necessary to live in emergency shelters or transitional housing for some period of time. This category also includes unsheltered homeless people who sleep in places not meant for human habitation (for example, streets, parks, abandoned buildings, and subway tunnels) and who may also use shelters on an intermittent basis.

- *Precariously Housed*. These are people on the edge of becoming literally homeless who may be doubled up with friends and relatives or paying extremely high proportions of their resources for rent. The group is often characterized as being at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

The McKinney-Vento Act's homeless definition governs HUD's assistance programs. It specifically targets persons living in shelters or in places not meant for human habitation, but not people in precarious housing situations.

> ### HUD's Definition of Homelessness
>
> Continuums should keep HUD's definition of homelessness in mind as they plan their public places count. According to HUD, a person is considered homeless **only** when he/she resides in one of the places described below at the time of the count.
>
> An *unsheltered* homeless person resides in:
>
> - A place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, or on the street.
>
> A *sheltered* homeless person resides in:
>
> - An emergency shelter, including temporary emergency shelters only open during severe weather.
>
> - Transitional housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelters.

This document provides guidance on gathering information about unsheltered, literally homeless persons.

2.2   Why Count Unsheltered Homeless People?

Counting homeless people—or interviewing homeless people to learn as much as possible about their needs and patterns of homelessness—is never easy. So why do it? The obvious answer is that HUD wants "the numbers" and communities are required to provide this information in their annual HUD Continuum of Care application. But if that is the only reason you are counting—if the information will not be used for any local purposes—you will probably find it extremely hard to enlist the help needed to get a good count. Local stakeholders, particularly homeless assistance providers, but also mainstream service agencies, need to believe that they will gain something if they cooperate. And there can be lots in it for them, if you plan well and think through the numerous ways your community will be able to use the information collected during a homeless "street count."

The term "street count" is a shorthand way to refer to collecting information on your area's unsheltered homeless population. "Street" serves as a convenient term to refer to a wide variety of places not meant for human habitation. Although, one can gather information from unsheltered homeless people in ways other than searching outdoor places to find them. "Count" implies that the goal is to enumerate the total number of unsheltered homeless people. The sheer number of homeless people is clearly an important thing to learn from a count. However, since it takes a great deal of energy to organize and carry out a count, it is often worthwhile to include an interview component that will yield more useful information than the simple number can provide.

All of the CoC representatives interviewed for this guide emphasized the great value of collecting data on unsheltered homeless people – for planning, reporting, fundraising, and public education purposes – despite the time and energy that goes into the effort. Information about unsheltered homeless people is useful for: (1) service planning; (2) demonstrating a need for resources in the Continuum of Care application; (3) raising public awareness about the issue of homelessness; (4) accurately measuring and identifying the needs of populations that are the hardest to serve (chronically homeless); and (5) measuring performance in eliminating homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness.

Planning and Program Development

Collecting good data on the number, characteristics, and service needs of unsheltered homeless people is a critical component of local homeless planning and program development. Data collected on unsheltered homeless people can help individual service providers and CoCs:

- Justify requests for additional resources;

- Plan future services geared to unsheltered homeless people;

> Communities routinely collect information on unsheltered homeless people in order to learn:
> - How many homeless people do not use shelters;
> - Where in the community they live;
> - How many are chronically homeless;
> - What they need and will accept to end their homelessness; and
> - How to intervene with newly homeless people to prevent chronic homelessness.

- Allocate resources across jurisdictions, service providers, or programs for different subgroups of homeless people;

- Understand changes in trends among homeless populations; and

- Comply with reporting requirements from HUD, other funders, and local stakeholders.

> **Why Does HUD Require CoCs to Collect Data On Unsheltered Homeless People?**
>
> Like many local communities, HUD and Congress believe that understanding the size and characteristics of the entire homeless population in a community – not just people using shelters – is essential to the effective planning and provision of homeless assistance and prevention services. In particular, understanding the needs and characteristics of homeless people who do not use shelters, many of whom are chronically homeless, will help communities improve their outreach to this underserved population. In fact, conducting a street count is often the first step in engaging unsheltered homeless people in communities without established outreach services.

The Continuum of Care Application for McKinney-Vento Funds

New emphasis by HUD on the regular enumeration of chronic homelessness adds to the importance of estimating the true number of unsheltered homeless people and understanding their patterns of homelessness (see Section 2.2 for HUD's definition of chronic homelessness). Many chronically homeless people do not use shelters. In the past, many local jurisdictions only counted people in emergency shelter, transitional housing, or permanent supportive housing programs, and made no attempt to count "street people" or those that do not use shelters. The Continuum of Care application now requires CoCs to identify the extent of chronic homelessness within their boundaries. CoCs must report the number of chronically homeless people among people in emergency shelters *and* among the unsheltered homeless population, based on local data collected through "on the ground" counts.

Raising Public Awareness and Community Involvement

Many CoCs have found that counting homeless people on a regular basis is valuable for raising public awareness. Communities frequently deny the presence of homeless people. Your count can help dispel these misunderstandings, and also show your community who the homeless people *are*—usually some of "their own." Armed with accurate information about local homelessness, you

> "We have been doing our street count for 20 years now, and it has become a tradition in our community. It is always a lot of work, but I couldn't imagine not doing it." (Boston)

can begin to convince the community that it needs to participate in ending homelessness. In addition, street counts typically receive attention from the press, which CoCs can use to garner public support for homeless programs and services.

The counts also require a large number of volunteers who may have had little exposure to issues of homelessness. Volunteers may include students and young people who discover an interest in community service, community residents who become more understanding of homeless people in their neighborhoods, or key local stakeholders who may be in a position to mobilize funds for homeless programs. Some communities have even used the counts to build relationships between people who approach homelessness from very different perspectives – for example, by pairing a law enforcement official with a mental health advocate on a street count team – or to offer the chance for networking between service providers and potential funders.

2.3 What Have We Learned From Counting Unsheltered Homeless People?

HUD and other agencies have been funding research into the causes of homelessness and characteristics of homeless people for several decades. Much of what we know about homeless people, including people who do and do not use shelters, comes from the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC). The 1996 survey was

conducted in 76 urban and rural areas across the country that were statistically representative of the country as a whole. This section summarizes what we have learned to date about the characteristics and needs of unsheltered homeless people, as well as the challenges associated with counting and collecting information on them.

What Do We Mean By "People Who Do Not Use Shelters"?

In order to identify one type of literally homeless people, those who do not use shelters, and include their needs in a CoC's planning, the Continuum needs to find and learn about them. Some homeless people never or rarely sleep in a shelter. At a given point in time, this group could account for as many as one-quarter to one-third of the adults who are homeless. Over the course of a year, some of these homeless people will have used shelters occasionally, but their basic living pattern is to sleep elsewhere. For purposes of counting or estimating the number of "non-shelter users," we are looking at the pattern. One or a few nights of shelter use should not qualify a person as a "shelter user," just as spending a few nights on the street when a person regularly uses shelters should not mean that a person is classified as a "street person."

Another type of non-shelter sleep pattern is the person who, often with some type of public assistance, rents a hotel or motel room for two or even three weeks a month, but then moves to the streets until the next check arrives. While such a person is not technically homeless for half the month or more, the person is chronically homeless in that he or she has not had a stable residence perhaps for years and spends about half the year, year after year, on the streets. Any CoC intent on resolving chronic homelessness, or street homelessness, will have to consider people following this pattern.

Just because people do not sleep in shelters does not mean that they do not use any services. Many non-shelter services cater to homeless people who avoid the shelters. These services include street outreach teams, drop-in centers, Health Care for the Homeless networks, and both stationary (soup kitchens) and mobile (vans) food programs. One way to reach unsheltered homeless people for a count or survey is through their contacts with these service programs. In times of extreme weather, other facilities such as warming centers and temporary tent or armory shelters could also be included, and *not* counted as "shelters." There may also be pockets of homeless people known locally who do not connect to any services. In this case a special effort would be needed to cover those areas, often called "encampments." People living in RVs in parking lots along beaches are one example.

Chronic Homelessness, Disabilities, and People Who Do Not Use Shelters

Chronically homeless people will be found among homeless people that use shelters and those that do not. In two large cities that have Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), analysis of HMIS data indicates that about 15 percent of the people who use

emergency shelters take up about 50 percent of the bed-nights annually.[2] That is, they "live" in the emergency shelter system, often for years. Even communities whose emergency shelters allow no more than a seven-night stay per month will find significant numbers of people who have "lived" in the shelters for years, alternating between shelters and the streets. Because of their frequent homelessness and shelter use, many of these people will meet the definition of chronic homelessness if they are disabled (see definition below).

Chronically homeless people also comprise a high proportion of non-shelter users. Chronically homeless persons who do not use shelters regularly sleep outdoors, in abandoned buildings, at transportation hubs, in tent cities or shanty-type constructions, or in other places not meant for human habitation. Others with no home elsewhere may be living in cars, trucks, or RVs, parking where they will not be noticed. Still others may alternate between hotel or motel rooms when they can afford them and their cars or the streets when they cannot.

Definition of Chronic Homelessness

HUD's definition of chronic homelessness is:

> An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four (4) episodes of homelessness in the past three (3) years. To be considered chronically homeless, persons must have been sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation (e.g., living on the streets) and/or in emergency shelter during that time.
> (Continuum of Care application)

HUD's definition of an episode of homeless is:

> A separate, distinct, and sustained stay on the streets and/or in an emergency homeless shelter. (Continuum of Care application)

Note that HUD's definition of chronic homelessness *does not* include families. In addition, to be identified as chronically homeless, an individual must have a *disabling condition*, defined as follows:

> A diagnosable substance use disorder, serious mental illness, developmental disability, or chronic physical illness or disability, including the co-occurrence of two or more of these conditions. A disabling condition limits an individual's ability to work or perform one or more activities of daily living.

Chronically homeless people are more likely than other homeless people to have one or more disabilities. Serious mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, and chronic and acute physical illnesses are common and often co-occurring. Many people with serious mental illness are afraid of both shelters and street areas where other homeless people congregate. Instead, persons with serious mental illness are frequently found along major roads and transportation corridors at the fringes of downtown areas. Further, some people who are new to

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[2]   Culhane, D. and R. Kuhn. (1998). Patterns and Determinants of Public Shelter Utilization Among Homeless Adults in New York City and Philadelphia. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 17 (1) 23-43.

homelessness may not use shelters. It is important for local planning groups to understand the characteristics and disabilities of people who are newly homeless, especially those who may become chronically homeless if appropriate interventions are not available.

Challenges to Counting People Who Do Not Use Shelters

Many challenges face a CoC as it attempts to find out about people who do not use shelters. None of these challenges is insurmountable. Each will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, in relation to different enumeration methods. All relate in one way or another to the primary challenges: how to find unsheltered people who do not use shelter and how to account for those who are difficult to find. The main issues, addressed in Chapters 3 and 4, include:

- Where to focus the count (in public places, service locations, or a combination of the two);

- When to conduct the count (day or night) and over how long a time period;

- Whom to count (that is, how to determine whether the people observed meet federal or local definitions of homelessness);

- Whether to conduct interviews to supplement the count, and, if so, whether to interview all or a sample of the people counted;

- How to avoid counting the same person twice or to correct for possible double counting once the count is complete; and

- How to present the results of the count in a way that is useful to local service providers and other stakeholders, meets the CoC's reporting needs, and addresses potential criticisms of the count.

CoCs that operate in rural or suburban areas that do not have many homeless-specific services or that cover a large geographic territory (such as a state or balance of state) face added challenges in collecting data on their unsheltered homeless populations. First, it may be difficult to determine where to look for unsheltered homeless people. Second, even if such locations can be identified, the distance and the potential remoteness of the sites may raise other challenges. Third, if the area does not have a lot of homeless service providers, as is the case in many suburban and rural areas, the staff and volunteer resources available to organize and conduct the count may be a limiting factor.

Some communities may be reluctant to participate in data collection because they believe there are no, or very few, unsheltered homeless people or chronically homeless people in their communities. This is especially true in communities where there is a policy of providing homeless people a bus ticket to the nearest city. However, at least one of the rural CoCs we interviewed for this guide noted that a major benefit of conducting a count of unsheltered homeless people was that it dispelled the myth that such people did not exist in the community.

HUD recognizes the difficulty of collecting information on unsheltered homeless people in rural areas, places with few homeless resources, and across large geographic areas. In part, the decision to require point-in-time counts every other year as a minimum standard recognizes the significant effort required to collect this data. However, just as it is important to learn about homeless people who do not use shelters as well as those who do, it is also important to learn about unsheltered homeless people outside of urban areas where they may be even more "hidden." Conducting a count also provides an opportunity to begin to engage this group of unsheltered homeless people. This guide presents several methods for collecting data on unsheltered homeless people that are intended to be useful for communities in which a standard street count may not be feasible.

2.4   HUD Standards for Counting Homeless People

Before discussing the methods that CoCs use to count unsheltered homeless people in their jurisdictions, the following section presents recent changes in HUD requirements in this area.

Requirements for Point-in-Time Counts of Sheltered and Unsheltered Homeless People

The Continuum of Care application for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act funding requires CoCs to produce statistically reliable, unduplicated counts or estimates of homeless persons in sheltered and unsheltered locations on a single night. The application also asks CoCs to identify the methods and data sources used to produce the count information. CoCs are awarded points for conducting a point-in-time count at least every two years during the last ten calendar days of January — January 22nd to 31st — *and* describing the methodology behind the count by completing questions in the Homeless Population and Subpopulations Data Sources and Methods Chart.

> **HUD STANDARD**
> **How Often Should CoCs Conduct a Count of Unsheltered Homeless People?**
>
> HUD requires that communities perform a point-in-time count every other year and requests that CoCs conduct a count annually if resources allow. In addition, HUD competitively evaluates the methods CoCs use to enumerate homeless persons. The numbers reported in the Homeless Population and Subpopulations Chart must be accurate and based on reliable methods.

HUD requires CoCs to report the number of sheltered and unsheltered homeless households in addition to the number of individuals in these households. The application also distinguishes between households with dependent children and households without dependent children.

CoCs count and report sheltered and unsheltered households and individuals according to the following categories:

1. The number of homeless households with dependent children;

    1a. The total number of persons in these households, including adults and children;

2. The number of homeless households without dependent children, including single individuals, unaccompanied youth, and other adult-only households, such as a married couple without children; and

    2a. The total number of persons in these households.

For *sheltered* homeless people, CoCs are instructed to count all adults, children, and unaccompanied youth residing in emergency shelters and transitional housing, including domestic violence shelters, residential programs for runaway/homeless youth, and any hotel/motel/apartment voucher arrangements paid by a public/private agency because the person is homeless. In addition to collecting a point-in-time count of homeless households and individuals in shelters, CoCs must collect information on the number of sheltered homeless adults considered to be: chronically homeless, seriously mentally ill, chronic substance abusers, veterans, persons with HIV/AIDS, and victims of domestic violence. CoCs must also count and report the number of unaccompanied youth.

> CoCs should categorize homeless persons as sheltered or unsheltered based on their whereabouts on the night of the point-in-time count. For example, a person sleeping in a temporary shelter on the night of the count should be counted as a sheltered homeless person even if he normally sleeps on the street.

For *unsheltered* homeless people, CoCs are instructed to count all adults, children, and unaccompanied youth sleeping in places not meant for human habitation, which include:

Streets, parks, alleys, parking ramps, parts of the highway system, transportation depots and other parts of transportation systems (e.g., subway tunnels, railroad cars), all-night commercial establishments (e.g., movie theaters, laundromats, restaurants), abandoned buildings, building roofs or stairwells, chicken coops and other farm outbuildings, caves, campgrounds, vehicles, and other similar places. (CoC application)

CoCs must also count or estimate the number of unsheltered homeless people who meet HUD's definition of chronic homelessness (see Section 2.3 to revisit this definition). Beginning in 2004, HUD requested that CoCs report only the number of unsheltered people actually counted at a particular point in time. In the past, many CoCs used unscientific "adjustment factors" to derive their counts of the unsheltered population – either multiplying the sheltered population by a certain factor as an alternative to doing a point-in-time

> **Extrapolation** is a technique for estimating the total number of unsheltered persons in your community based on the number of unsheltered persons that you have been able to observe and/or interview from your statistically reliable sample.

count, or using an adjustment factor to account for people not seen during the point-in-time count. HUD no longer allows CoCs to use such adjustment factors. Instead, CoCs can use one of two approaches. The first approach is simply to report the number of people counted. As an alternative, CoCs can use a statistically reliable sample and then extrapolate to arrive at an estimate of the number of unsheltered homeless persons. It is likely that CoCs will need expert advice to implement this approach.

The following box presents other pitfalls that CoCs should avoid in conducting and reporting their counts of unsheltered homeless people.

HUD STANDARD
Counting Unsheltered Homeless People: What NOT to Do

- **Do Not Make Unscientific "Adjustments":** Report the actual number of people counted during the point-in-time survey, not numbers adjusted to account for people who may not have been counted for one reason or another.

- **Do Not Base Your Numbers on Expert Opinion:** In the past, some CoCs have asked local experts, such as police and outreach providers, to estimate the number of unsheltered homeless people in the community rather than conducting a point-in-time count. In the future, HUD is asking CoCs to conduct a point-in-time count at least every other year, and not to rely on estimates from experts.

- **Be Careful About Overlapping Data from Multiple Counts:** Some CoCs have conducted multiple counts of unsheltered and sheltered homeless people in their communities, for example, a count of homeless youth, a count of homeless veterans, and a count of homeless people using services in addition to a shelter count. While HUD is not discouraging communities from collecting as much data as possible about homeless populations, CoCs should avoid double counting sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. This guide discusses several techniques to "unduplicate" data derived from different types of counts.

- **Be Rigorous in Applying Methods to Understand the Number of Hidden Homeless People in Your Community:** Estimating the number of 'hidden' homeless people, or those who are not visible during a street count, is a difficult endeavor. One method, the Next Day Study, is outlined in Chapter 6. Some communities have tried to use other techniques to understand how many hidden homeless people are living on private property by using Random Digit Dialing (RDD) telephone surveys. It can take significant resources to conduct a RDD survey with enough households to be confident about the results and the adjustment proposed to the street count. HUD encourages communities to carefully weigh the costs and benefits of such an approach. Any CoC using such a technique <u>must</u> describe the method(s) used, accurately report the confidence level and interval, and discuss how the community used the data to adjust the count.

> **Innovative Methods to Understand Who Has Been Missed During a Count**
>
> Recently, communities have started using innovative techniques to understand the number of visible homeless people who are missed during a street count. New York City uses statistically valid methods to estimate the number of persons not counted and to adjust the count. NYC's method is described in Chapter 6.

HMIS and the Future of Point-in-Time Counts

Some communities have wondered how the development of local Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS) will affect the need to collect point-in-time data on sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. An HMIS is an electronic database system used to record individual-level information on an ongoing basis about all homeless persons served through local CoCs. The extent to which homeless people are included in the HMIS depends on the extent to which a wide range of service providers participate in the system. As a first priority, HUD is encouraging all emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and homeless outreach services to persons sleeping on the street, regardless of funding sources, to participate in their local HMIS. The second priority is to include HUD-funded permanent supportive housing and the third priority is to incorporate homelessness prevention programs and Supportive Services Only programs funded through McKinney-Vento, as well as permanent housing programs that are not federally funded.

A community in which all providers of emergency and transitional housing for homeless people participate in HMIS may be able to use HMIS to conduct point-in-time counts of its *sheltered* homeless population because HMIS allows the CoC to generate a count of all people in the system on a given day. However, HMIS is ultimately a system for collecting data on homeless people who use services, so there will be a need for additional data collection on homeless people who do not use shelters or other services. Homeless people who do not use shelters also tend to be less likely to use other kinds of services, including outreach services. Although data collected by outreach providers and entered into HMIS will likely provide some information on this service-resistant population, not all communities have well-developed networks of outreach providers and not all unsheltered homeless people will interact with outreach providers. As a result, periodic efforts to count and collect data on unsheltered homeless people will continue to be very important even as HMIS develops.

2.5   Approaches to Collecting Data on Unsheltered Homeless People

There are three basic approaches covered in this guide that have been implemented by communities:

Direct counts of homeless people in places not meant for human habitation:

- Simple counts done in non-shelter locations.

- Counts with an interview component.

Screening for and interviewing unsheltered homeless people at service provider locations:

- Counts based on unsheltered homeless people using non-shelter homeless services (e.g., soup kitchens) and mainstream social service agencies.

Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Here we briefly introduce the options to be discussed in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Simple Street Counts

Many communities have organized a simple street count at one time or other, and a few communities have a long history of repeated street counts that date back two decades or more. Simple street counts are easy to understand, relatively easy to organize (especially after the first one), and the results are easy to summarize. The main shortcoming of simple street counts is that they invariably miss some people, which tempts organizers to "estimate" the population missed without a reliable basis to make that estimate. Further, simple street counts do not provide comprehensive, in-depth information. Because street counts tend to be done quickly with minimal interaction with the people counted, they are generally limited to collecting numbers and locations of unsheltered homeless people, although in some cases information on gender, race, and age may be collected.

Street Count with an Interview Component

A somewhat more advanced method is adding an interview component to a street count. Here the enumerators either interview everyone they count or interview every nth person to create a simple random sample of the people counted. Interviews give organizers more information about unsheltered homeless people. Without interview information communities will not be able to accomplish several things that HUD is requiring:

- Ensure people have not been counted twice; and

- Differentiate among people who are chronically homeless and those who are not.

Interviews can be used to obtain personal identifying information and to learn about recent shelter and service use patterns, both of which can help with obtaining an unduplicated count

of homeless persons in your community and other important types of estimates. For example, in lieu of a fully implemented HMIS, point-in-time interviews can help estimate the number of people who were homeless over the course of the year. Interviews can also tell you something about the person's homeless history and disability status, from which you can identify whether the person is chronically homeless, what services he or she uses, and what it would take to help the person to leave homelessness.

Screening and Interviewing Homeless People at Service Provider Locations

While the simple street count and the count with an interview component may be done without having any knowledge of the types of programs and services that assist unsheltered homeless people, they are likely to miss many unsheltered homeless people. An alternative to the street count is using service programs to help access homeless people who do not use shelters and who may not be readily found in public places. These programs would most likely include homeless-specific services such as Health Care for the Homeless networks, drop-in centers, street outreach teams, and soup kitchens and other food-related programs. The programs might also include those provided by mainstream agencies such as Social Security or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), health, mental health, substance abuse, community action, and other agencies that are likely to come into contact with homeless people in areas that have few or no homeless-specific programs.

3. Counts of Unsheltered Homeless People in Public Places

This chapter describes methods for counting unsheltered homeless people located in non-service locations – streets, parks, public buildings, parts of the transportation system, vehicles, and so on. The homeless people found in these areas are part of the group sometimes referred to as the "hidden homeless" or "street homeless" because they are not in easily accessed locations such as shelters. We refer to this approach as the "*public places*" method.

The methods below incorporate two dimensions: (1) the strategy for covering territory (known locations and/or covering every block) and (2) the intensity of data collection (counting, observation, and/or the use of interviewing). The public places count methodology can be tailored to suit your information needs, using your own combination of coverage and data collection strategies.

This chapter covers a wide range of topics related to designing and executing a public places count, including:

- Determining who should use the public places method;
- Deciding which type of public places method to use;
- Identifying locations to cover in the count;
- Selecting a date and time;
- Deciding who should conduct the count and providing training;
- Organizing the count;
- Determining who is homeless;
- Interviewing for supplemental information;
- Dealing with duplication; and
- Analyzing and reporting the data.

The final section of the chapter discusses the biases associated with a public places count and the feasibility and cost of employing this method.

3.1 Who Should Use the Public Places Method?

CoCs may want to consider using the public places method for counting and learning about unsheltered homeless people if they believe that many homeless people live in places not fit for human habitation and rarely use any type of homeless service. CoCs that use this approach should also be able to organize sufficiently to count and/or interview homeless

people in identified geographic areas within a brief period of time (typically a few hours, but generally less than 24 hours).

The public places method is most commonly used in urban areas, where the CoC can mobilize teams of volunteers to walk the streets at night and record information on every homeless person they see. However, the method can also be used in suburban or rural areas, where enumerators do not try to cover every square mile but rather focus on a limited number of locations where homeless people are believed to congregate. The method has also been used statewide, where each local jurisdiction conducts a public places count and reports back to the statewide 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. Many CoCs combine a public places count with counts and interviews at non-shelter service sites such as soup kitchens and social service agencies (this is the service-based approach described in Chapter 4). CoCs using this combined approach will have to use one or more methods for eliminating duplication, as well as think carefully about the timing of data collection in each type of location.

The CoCs cited in this guide that conduct a traditional public places count, either going block-by-block (complete coverage) or focusing on locations where homeless people are expected to congregate, include:

- Philadelphia (PA)
- Seattle/King County (WA)
- New York City (NY)[3]
- Boston (MA)
- McHenry County (IL).

The CoCs cited in this guide that combine a public places count with a service-based enumeration include:

- Washington Balance of State
- Pasadena (CA)
- Metro Atlanta (GA) Tri-Jurisdictional CoC
- Tallahassee (FL)
- Broward County (FL)
- Greater Grand Traverse Area (MI)

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3   New York City's 2003 count covered Manhattan only; the 2004 count was extended to Brooklyn and Staten Island; and, by 2005, the count covered all five boroughs.

- Long Beach (CA)

- Denver (CO).

3.2 Deciding Which Type of Public Places Method to Use

CoCs typically use one of three basic techniques to conduct public places counts.

Method 1.   A <u>count</u> and observation of homeless individuals and families living in public places that are not shelter or other service sites.

A count can be conducted at *known locations* (those areas where homeless people are expected to congregate) or can strive for *complete coverage*. Complete coverage means that every part of a specified geography, such as an entire city or a downtown area, is covered. Instead of going only to specific blocks or locations (e.g., the bus station), this approach sends teams of enumerators to canvass every street looking for homeless people and counting anyone who is found. The complete coverage approach requires more people to conduct the enumeration because the territory to be covered is

> Boston's annual count covers the entire city, while Philadelphia enumerators canvass every block of the city's downtown area and go to known locations in the outlying parts of the city.

generally much greater. It may also require more coordination so that teams of enumerators do not cross into each other's territories and inadvertently double count people. Further, the approach may include going into spaces such as abandoned buildings where people are out of public view.

Communities often pair the complete coverage of one geographic location with a count of homeless people at known locations in outlying areas. For example, a CoC may send enumerators up and down every street in a downtown area, and send groups to outlying parts of the city where homeless people are known to live and sleep.

> A basic count is the simplest of the public places data collection strategies. Even so, it takes considerable organization. Planning for and organizing the count involves:
>
> - Identifying known locations where one can expect to find homeless people, planning for complete coverage, or using a combination of the two approaches;
> - Picking a date and time for the count;
> - Recruiting and training people to conduct the count;
> - Planning for the deployment of people on the night of the count;
> - Establishing ground rules for who should be counted and what information obtained by observation will be recorded; and
> - Planning for the integration, analysis, and presentation of data after the count.

Method 2.   A count, observation, and <u>interview</u> of homeless individuals and families living in public places that are not shelter or other service sites.

Including an interview component supplements a basic count and allows a community to gather pertinent demographic and other information about unsheltered homeless people. Organizers follow the procedures for a basic count and observation, but also create a questionnaire used to interview every person or a sample of people encountered during the enumeration. An interviewing component is particularly useful in collecting demographic and service use data. It may also be necessary for communities that do not have well-developed outreach services and, therefore, have minimal information on unsheltered populations and subpopulations. Interviewing is also essential to "unduplicate" the results of a point-in-time count in which double counting may have occurred. It is important to note that such interviewing *does not need to take place at the same time as the count.* As will be discussed further below, many communities find that it is not feasible (or desirable) to attempt to interview people during a one-night count.

Repeated Counts – A New Variation on Public Places Counts

In its 2005 count, Houston/Harris County used a new approach to counting unsheltered homeless people. The County hired a local university to design the count; university staff recruited a team of enumerators from formerly homeless veterans and paid them to conduct the count five times. Until the final time, each successive attempt increased the count of homeless people as the team learned from experience and got better at finding people. Only when two successive counts came up with roughly the same numbers did they stop and declare the final number the right one.

Method 3.   A public spaces <u>sampling</u> method using high and low probabilities for designated geographic areas.

This method is used by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) in its annual count of unsheltered people as an alternative to complete coverage. Due to the sheer size of New York City and the impossibility of covering every street block, the count organizers divide the city into "study areas" of approximately three-tenths of a mile each. During extensive preparation for the count, each study area is 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 and a statistically valid sample of low-density areas. The purpose of selecting a statistically valid sample of low-density areas is to be able to limit the number of areas enumerators have to cover while allowing the data collected on the night of the count to be extrapolated to the entire city, by borough. Once the count is completed, the DHS uses extrapolation procedures to estimate the number of homeless people that would have been counted in the areas not visited by the enumerators, thereby generating a count for the City as a whole.

The methodology and statistical sampling procedures used in New York City's count are described in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7. 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. This needs to be done through a series of meetings over several months with a wide range of local stakeholders, including anyone with knowledge of where homeless people tend to be found. In this exercise, great attention must be paid to the time of day during which key informants actually observe the areas. Daytime and nighttime users 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 need to be revisited as close as possible to the day of the count to check for changes in the living and sleeping patterns of unsheltered homeless people.

HUD STANDARD
Statistically Valid Methodology

New York City's approach is recommended because it is based on a statistically valid methodology. HUD does not want CoCs using adjustment or inflation factors that do not have any statistical basis. If the New York approach is beyond the capabilities of your CoC, a straight count of known locations, even if it does not cover every place that unsheltered homeless people might stay, is perfectly acceptable. In the absence of a statistically valid methodology for extrapolating to non-covered areas, HUD wants CoCs to report on only those people actually seen on the night of the count.

Public Places Counts Are Not "One-Size-Fits-All" For Every Community

The methodology that your CoC selects for its count depends on a variety of factors, including the size and characteristics of the community and the resources available for the count. Generally speaking, it is advisable to perform a basic count and observation combined with an interview component (Method 2) for your first count. The interviews will provide baseline data on unsheltered homeless people, including chronically homeless people. The data will help your CoC to plan services and track progress in helping unsheltered homeless people and to complete the Continuum of Care Homeless Population and Subpopulation Chart of the CoC application. If your community already has good data on the characteristics of unsheltered homeless people (most often from outreach providers), a basic count and observation is probably sufficient for the point-in-time effort. It is important to note that the interview component does not have to be repeated every year, nor does it need to take place at the same time as the count. Once initial data are collected, you may be able to alternate the years in which you do a count, observation, and interview process (Method 2) with the years in which you do only a basic count (Method 1).

Tips from CoCs With Experience Conducting Public Places Counts

Unsheltered homeless counts are challenging to organize and complete, especially for communities that are conducting them for the first time. Over time, public places counts get easier and become an annual, semi-annual, or quarterly event that can be used to monitor changes in unsheltered homeless populations, as well as increase awareness of homelessness issues among government officials and the public. First-timers should remember some basic tenets:

- *Don't reinvent the wheel.* Chances are other communities of your size, geography, and resources have conducted a count. Talk with them about how they have conducted their public places count. If the methods are solid, consider using that community's approach as a blueprint for your first count.

- *Communicate with your community.* Begin the process of discussing an unsheltered homeless count with members of your Continuum and others in the community long before you begin the formal planning. Almost every community that conducts a successful public places count emphasizes the importance of participation and "buy-in" from different groups, including a variety of community groups, social service providers, advocacy groups, volunteer organizations, faith-based groups, police departments, universities, and business organizations.

- *Be prepared for media attention.* Not every count will receive media attention. However, it is important to think about the purpose of the count and the message you might want to convey to the media, if necessary. Several communities use their regular public places count to draw attention to the issue of homelessness. This can be an effective strategy to garner additional funding for homeless assistance programs, but can go awry if the message about the purpose of the count is inconsistent.

> The importance of involving a wide spectrum of community groups and stakeholders cannot be overstated. Organizing a politically neutral committee to oversee the planning and implementation of the count is ideal. This group should decide on key issues from the outset. Eight months before its first count in 2003, Pathways Community Network (Pathways), the count project manager for the Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional CoC, formed a nine-member Advisory Board to provide project oversight for the public places count that covered the city of Atlanta.

3.3 Identifying Locations to Cover in the Count

This task may be harder than it seems. Homeless people often move to and from locations depending on the time of day, season of the year, level of police harassment, and other factors. Usually there are obvious places that everyone agrees should be included in the count because homeless people are frequently there. But what about the places where one or two homeless people are occasionally seen? What about places where homeless people are often seen but are dangerous to search, such as abandoned buildings? How do you deal with

commercial establishments that are open all night, such as coffee shops, laundromats, or movie theatres, where a homeless person may rest? What about people sleeping in vehicles parked on the same block that you have identified as a known location?

Your Continuum will have to establish rules about what to do in each of these situations so that enumerators will know how to proceed on the day of the count. You should also try to identify other situations that will require a systemic response to ensure that your count proceeds smoothly, efficiently, and safely.

To identify the locations that should be covered, you must solicit input from a variety of sources during the design phase of the count. As you obtain this input, you will also be building relationships that can result in a more effective count with a broad base of participation. Informative partners may include, but are not limited to: outreach workers, previously or currently homeless individuals, shelter and non-shelter services staff, police, human services departments or organizations, business associations, community development organizations, and other community groups.

Once the input has been gathered a final list of locations must be identified, taking into consideration safety concerns and resource feasibility. You will need to decide, for example, whether to allow enumerators to enter abandoned buildings or actively look for and count people sleeping in cars. In addition, you will need to develop guidelines that enumerators can follow for counting and/or interviewing in:

> In Philadelphia, enumerators cover public transportation stations, but do not include subway tunnels because of serious safety concerns. Teams only cover underground public transportation areas where radios or cell phones function.

- Parks
- Alleys
- Parking ramps
- Public transportation systems
- Campgrounds
- Encampments, shantytowns, and tent cities
- Under overpasses and bridges
- Commercial establishments.

The key to a successful and accurate count is to ensure, to the best of your ability, that such decisions are implemented in a consistent manner throughout the public places count, from the training for enumerators to the description of your methodology in a final report or grant application.

Examples of Locations Covered in Public Places Counts

- In Tallahassee, enumerators cover known locations on the street and encampments in the woods, but not abandoned buildings due to safety concerns. Enumerators ask each interviewed person to identify additional locations where homeless people may be living or sleeping, as well as names of potential interviewees (known as the "snowball" technique).

- The Pasadena CoC tries to count every known location where homeless people live or congregate, including a street, park, car, abandoned building, all-night commercial establishment, other private property, or freeway overpass. Pasadena's outreach team updates the map of known locations as needed and prior to the count. In 2007, members of the outreach team visited locations where homeless people were found in the past and looked for evidence of current activity. If the site showed signs of recent use, the location was included in the street count.

- In Seattle/King County, the count focuses on publicly accessible areas and includes those people sleeping on the street or in alleys, doorways, cars, and makeshift shelters. Enumerators perform the count primarily on foot, but drive through some locations, such as large parking lots, in suburban and rural areas. They do count people living in densely vegetated areas in parks and under freeways and bridges, but do not canvass abandoned buildings or private property. In 2007, the CoC included the local "night owl" buses in the count. Teams of two enumerators were assigned to each late night route, boarding the buses at a downtown Seattle location and riding each for an entire round trip.

- The Washington Balance of State CoC is composed mainly of rural counties. Each county organizes and performs its own count during a selected 24-hour period based on the instructions and technical assistance provided by the CoC. The CoC requests that counties enumerate in known locations and emphasizes safety concerns. Counties can determine which locations or encampments are included in the count. Enumerators in some counties cover locations in state parks, public and private forests, and other rural areas with tent encampments.

- In McHenry County (IL), interviews with homeless individuals assist in identifying tent encampments in the weeks leading up to the count.

Maintaining Consistency from Year to Year

Maintaining consistency from year to year in the geographic areas covered is important. Communities typically identify the coverage area and then divide the area into "sections" or "study areas" that are assigned to a team of enumerators. Enumerators should be able to canvass the study area in a few hours even if a large number of homeless people are encountered. Some CoCs also try to draw the study area boundaries to take advantage of existing barriers, such as railroad tracks and highways (making it less likely that a homeless person will cross from one area to the next during the time frame of the count), while others

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draw the study areas to coincide with Census boundaries to enable comparison with Census data. Where the same locations are canvassed year after year, keeping the boundaries of study areas consistent from year to year can help with collecting and comparing data over time. Your community can always add new study areas if the coverage of your count expands.

3.4 Selecting a Date and Time

Picking a Date

HUD requires that every Continuum conduct their public places count during the last ten calendar days of January — between January 22nd and January 31st. This timeframe provides consistency to the national data HUD receives from CoCs and, in most regions of the country, is the time of the year when shelter use peaks due to cold weather. Because it is easier to count people in shelters than on the street or in other places not meant for human habitation, conducting the count on a night when the shelters are most full will lead to the most accurate count. Conducting the count during the end of the month will also capture people who cycle on and off the street, using public benefits until they run out to rent a room at the beginning of the month.

Another reason HUD selected the last ten days of January for the point-in-time count is because HUD's SuperNOFA is published earlier each year. The January timeframe ensures that CoCs have enough time to compile data and report the information in their CoC applications. CoCs can seek a waiver of this requirement only if the community has a long-standing tradition of conducting the point-in-time count on another winter day.

Counting and interviewing people sleeping in public places during the winter months may lead to a more realistic picture of chronically unsheltered homeless people, those most resistant to using services. Winter is also the season when the public is most concerned about the ability of homeless people to survive. 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.

> Some CoCs conduct two or more public places counts during the course of the year to better understand seasonal variations. Philadelphia, for example, does four counts and McHenry County (IL) conducts two.

In addition to seasonal variations, conducting the count during the last ten days in January addresses several other factors that may impact a public places count. These include:

The time of the month. Depending on the date of your locality's monthly dispersal of income benefits, the number and composition of the unsheltered population can change. For example, in Philadelphia in 2003, the quarterly street counts took place on the third Wednesday of the month in order to identify persons who may have been temporarily housed at the beginning of the month (due to some type of public assistance income) but spent the rest of the month on the street.

The day of the week. To facilitate the identification of homeless people, pick a day of the week with less pedestrian traffic. For example, in 2003, Boston purposefully chose a Monday night. Your Continuum should also ensure that there are no special events occurring during the count that may draw large numbers of people to your area.

Picking a date can be contentious. Several CoCs reported that selecting a date for the count can be challenging. Although HUD's timeframe (the last ten days in January) will alleviate some of the debate, no date will be absolutely perfect for everyone in the community. In addition, you will not be able to anticipate every contingency, especially the weather. The best way to choose a day for the count is to consult with a wide range of local stakeholders during the early stages of planning.

Picking a Time

Counts of homeless people sleeping in public places generally take place late at night (from midnight until 4:00 am) or start very early in the morning (often beginning before 4:00 am). The best practice is to conduct the public places count of unsheltered homeless people on the same night as the count of people in shelters *and* when the shelters are closed (i.e., in the middle of the night). This is called a one-night 'blitz' approach and the goal is to minimize the risk of double counting homeless persons.

Circumstances may limit a community's ability to complete the public places count in one night. This may occur if a CoC has relatively few people available to conduct the count; if the count covers a large geographic area; or if the CoC chooses to combine its public places count with a service-based count (described in Chapter 4), which typically takes place during the day. These circumstances suggest that there may be valid reasons to conduct the count over more than one night. However, once the count extends beyond the one-night 'blitz' approach, CoCs must have a way of dealing with the double counting that is likely to occur (see Section 3.9 *Dealing with Duplication*). CoCs should also ask 'screener' questions to determine if a person is homeless or not (see Section 3.7 *Determining Who is Homeless: Enumerator Judgment vs. Screener Questions*), especially if the count lasts through the night and into the day.

> **Conducting the Count in "Waves" to Cover a Large Terrain with Limited Resources**
>
> In order to cover two counties plus the City of Atlanta in a single night with a limited number of experienced enumerators, the Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional CoC conducted its public places count in two waves. Atlanta's homeless shelters begin releasing clients as early as 4:00 am, so it was imperative to complete the count of unsheltered homeless people in areas around the shelters early in the night. As a result, the first wave of the count began at 1:00 am and was focused on parts of the jurisdiction with the highest concentration of homeless people and a significant number of homeless shelters.   The enumeration teams were then redeployed around 4:45 am to cover less dense, outlying areas.

3.5 Deciding Who Should Conduct the Count and Providing Training

Conducting a street count is a big task. In most communities, homeless outreach staff provide the foundation for conducting a public places count because of their working knowledge of homeless individuals in the area, experience providing services to those on the streets, and availability to conduct the actual count. Other communities, like Washington, DC, primarily use outreach workers, but most need to enlist additional help. Further assistance can come from city departments (e.g., human services or police departments), social service organizations, or community volunteers.

Using Formerly Homeless People To Help With A Public Places Count

Several CoCs rely on input and assistance from currently or formerly homeless people when planning, organizing, and implementing a count. When recruiting homeless individuals, your community should be sensitive to any shelter restrictions that may limit participation, such as program curfews or other requirements. Homeless people are an indispensable resource to a successful public places count and should be incorporated in the count process. Currently or formerly homeless people can assist a public places count by:

Helping to identify known locations in advance of the count. Homeless people are a vital resource as your community tries to target known locations where unsheltered populations are living. Even if facility curfews prevent many currently homeless individuals from participating on the night of the count, it is wise to solicit their input during the planning process.

Participating in the count. Several Continuums recruit and encourage the participation of homeless individuals on the night of the count. Homeless individuals may either participate as volunteers or be paid.

Using Police Officers to Help With a Public Places Count

Police departments can be a valuable resource for a public places count. Police officers can provide accurate information about known locations where homeless people live and sleep, and can also assist with the data collection and interviewing process. Uniformed police officers are especially valuable in accompanying enumerators and surveying areas that are notoriously unsafe (e.g., abandoned buildings and alleys).

However, the use of police officers must be considered very carefully. Because homeless individuals may have criminal records, be engaged in illegal activities, or have had negative experiences with the police, they may be less forthcoming with information or avoid being counted if they know that police are involved in the count. The participation of police officers could be particularly detrimental for data collection on unaccompanied homeless youth.

How Currently or Formerly Homeless People Have Assisted With Public Places Counts

Long Beach, CA – During the 2003 count, formerly or currently homeless individuals were included on each of 63 teams covering the city. After the public places count, formerly homeless individuals were hired and trained to conduct comprehensive surveys with a subset of the sheltered and unsheltered people counted during the enumeration.

Atlanta, GA – Currently homeless individuals were recruited from various transitional housing programs in the Tri-jurisdictional area to serve as guides for the public places count. Recruits frequently originated from the Veterans Affairs Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program. The count incorporated about 100 homeless persons, each paired with a community or service provider volunteer on the night of the count. Recruits were paid $10 per hour to participate in a "dry run" of the public places count and conduct surveys of a sample of homeless individuals following the count, and received $100 for the night of the count. Due to their experience living on the street, CWT enumerators were assigned to downtown Atlanta areas and homeless encampments outside the central city.

McHenry County, IL – The outreach worker in charge of enumerating unsheltered homeless individuals in this rural area enlisted the help of two previously homeless individuals to assist in identifying known locations and to help count and interview people during visits to the tent communities. The locations were kept confidential.

Using Volunteers to Help With a Public Places Count

While some communities are able to conduct the count by just using staff from local service providers and outreach organizations, most Continuums recruit community volunteers to assist with the point-in-time data collection. Communities rely on volunteers for several reasons. First, volunteers contribute to the overall capacity of the count and allow a greater geographic area to be covered. Second, many communities consciously view the event as an opportunity to educate the public about homeless issues and to bring people from diverse backgrounds together to work on a common task. In Long Beach, CA, the enumeration teams include a previously or currently homeless individual, a representative from a social service provider, and a community member.

Communities recruit volunteers from a variety of sources and typically provide training. CoCs recommend recruiting enough volunteers to send teams of two or more people to canvass study areas (for safety reasons do not send people out alone). Below is a discussion of where to find volunteers, what to expect of them, when to recruit them, and what kind of training they may need.

Recruiting Methods

Communities use an array of methods to recruit volunteers for public places counts, including:

- Posting notices at government or non-profit agencies;

- Mailing or e-mailing invitations to key individuals and agencies;

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

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

Recruiting Volunteers

Boston - The City of Boston has a base of approximately 200 volunteers who participate regularly. Six weeks prior to the count, organizers send a mailing to all homeless services providers and past volunteers and e-mail all city employees to recruit for the upcoming enumeration. Several weeks are spent gathering responses and organizing volunteers into teams with team leaders. Team leaders are individuals who have experience working with homeless populations, while other members of the team are a mix of inexperienced and seasoned volunteers.

Seattle/King County - The Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless begins organizing its network of volunteers two months prior to the public places count. The CoCs is split into eight count areas, each encompassing one to three municipalities. With support from the Coalition for training and organization, partner agencies in each area are responsible for recruiting volunteers. Volunteers are organized into teams and each team has a trained leader. In Seattle, the largest area, more than 50 teams are organized by leaders who are experienced enumerators, and who often work or volunteer for local organizations that serve homeless people. All team leaders receive two hours of training during the weeks before the count and are instructed to preview their assigned count area during the day. About a month before the count, the Coalition also sends personal letters inviting the governor, the mayor, city council members, county representatives, and other elected officials to participate. These letters request a response by a specific date (about a week before the count), which gives count organizers enough time to train and place these officials on appropriate enumeration teams.

All appeals to volunteers should describe the time involved in volunteering, the necessity of and the duration of training, any risks to volunteers, and the safety measures that are in place. The notice or invitation should also describe the value of the information that will be gained from their efforts.

Volunteers may be recruited among:

- Members of local coalitions for homeless people

- People who work with homeless people in soup kitchens, shelters, and other services

- Formerly or currently homeless individuals

- State or city workers in agencies that may have some experience or interest in homelessness, such as human services, health, or housing agencies

- Human service professionals, who have had some involvement in providing social services, particularly to homeless persons

- Community service volunteer organizations such as AmeriCorps and Volunteers of America

- Churches and other religious organizations

- College or university students

- Neighborhood associations

- Business associations

How Far in Advance to Recruit
The timing of your volunteer recruitment effort will depend on the method you use for recruiting; whether the study has been done before; and how much time you need to schedule training (in general, the more training, the more lead time needed). In addition, CoCs in rural areas may find it more difficult to recruit volunteers due to the dispersed nature of service providers and community residents, as well as perceived safety risks associated with going into isolated or wooded areas. Recruiting appropriate volunteers in rural areas may require the CoC to use multiple recruitment methods (e.g., mailings, newspaper advertisements, and telephone calls to key agencies) and to start the recruitment process early. See Chapter 5 for more techniques on recruiting volunteers in rural areas.

Training
Training enumerators is important to produce an accurate count of unsheltered homeless people. All participants must know the ground rules, how to record information on the enumerations forms, where to report results, what to do in case of trouble, and other procedures for the count. Pairing a new volunteer with one who has done the count before is a good idea, but training is desirable for everyone each time your Continuum conducts the public places count. Training is especially important for new volunteers and also serves as a reminder to "old hands" of the count procedures. The training should alert everyone to any procedural changes from one year to the next.

> When training volunteers it is important to be clear about who will and will not be counted. Be sure to include these procedures in any report or grant application you prepare about your enumeration.

It is essential to specify carefully who should be counted and what information is to be obtained by observation. Counts typically exclude people in uniforms (e.g., security guards, police, building maintenance people), people engaged in commercial transactions (often drugs and prostitution, but also delivering newspapers or other goods), and obviously non-homeless people (e.g., people leaving a bar at 2:00 am). During the training, you should present and review the protocol for every public place location, such as parks, alleys, parking ramps, and abandoned buildings. You should also 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 done counts for many years using the same cadre of experienced enumerators may opt to require training only for team leaders. Boston and Seattle only conduct training for team leaders who, in turn, provide informal training to new volunteers immediately before and during the count. If the training is only required for team leaders, it can take place on a separate day and run for a few hours. 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 gathered consistently. Other CoCs require that all volunteers attend training prior to each count (e.g., New York City, Broward County). In order to ensure that the training requirement does not detract from participation in the count, training for all volunteers usually takes place immediately before the count and is usually brief (approximately one hour).

Here are examples of training approaches adopted in two communities:

- *Washington Balance of State:* Due to the decentralized nature of this CoC's public places count, CoC staff provide technical assistance to counties in the form of paper instructions, regional and on-site training, and telephone consultation and support.

- *Broward County:* Prior to the count, all volunteers participate in several hours of training. These trainings include guidance on how to use the survey instrument, safety protocols, emergency contacts, and instructions on the locations that volunteers should visit during the count.

3.6   Organizing the Count

A point-in-time count of public places requires some basic logistics planning. This section reviews preparation activities, including preparation timetables, pre-count advertising, and pre-testing areas.

Planning for the Night of the Count

Organizers will need to plan ahead to determine procedures for the night of the count. This means:

- Dividing the count locations up into "sections" or "study areas" that a team of enumerators can reasonably cover during the time of the count;

- Determining the relative safety of the different sections and assigning locations to the appropriately sized and experienced groups of enumerators;

- Deciding whether to cover the sections by foot or by car;

- Making maps of the sections so enumerators know where they are to go;

- Establishing some method of communication (typically cell phones, radios, or walkie-talkies) and arranging for the necessary equipment;

> If possible, budget for food and drink. Your volunteers will appreciate coffee, other warm beverages, sandwiches, doughnuts, and other forms of sustenance. In Seattle/King County, volunteers share a breakfast after the count donated by the Board of Directors of one of the Coalition member organizations.

- Arranging for additional on-call outreach in case unsheltered people request services and providing enumerators with homeless services resource guides to distribute when information is requested;

- Preparing a one- to two-page summary of enumeration procedures to distribute to volunteers; and

- Creating and reproducing sufficient copies of the sheets on which enumerators record their counts and observations.

Additional Tips for a Successful Count

Supply your enumerators with wallet-sized homeless services resource guides to distribute to homeless people if requested. In 2003, the United Way in Atlanta provided nearly 1,000 resource guides, which included a fold-out map with service providers' locations, eligibility requirements, and hours of operation.

Equip enumerators with necessary supplies, including:
- Flashlights (with fresh batteries!);
- Replacement batteries;
- A method of communication (cell phone, radio) and central number to call;
- Clip boards;
- A sufficient number of tally sheets; and
- Pens and pencils.

Finally, be sure to plan for unexpected occurrences on the night of the count and to have enough staff to deal with problems. For example, you need to have contingency plans in place if team leaders or volunteers do not show up.

Preparation Timetables for Public Places Counts

The preparation for a first-time count will require more advanced notice, time, and effort. The good news is that it gets easier, you can streamline your process each time you do a count, and much of the investment of time and energy will facilitate an easier planning process in subsequent years. Experienced CoCs usually start planning two to three months before the count, while CoCs planning a count for the first time may take six months to a year to plan the effort. Chapter 7 provides examples of preparation timelines for Boston and Atlanta in 2003.

Pre-count Advertising

In most cases, it is a good idea to inform both the homeless people in your community and the general public that the count is taking place. Some CoCs have expressed concern about advertising the count too widely because unsheltered homeless people may choose to move away or hide on the night of the count. Although these concerns may be valid in some cases, in general it is good practice to provide homeless people with some advance warning, particularly since the count is likely to take place when they are sleeping and therefore in a position of particular vulnerability.

- *Tallahassee:* A few days before the count, the organizers visit known locations (streets and wooded areas) and introduce themselves to any homeless people living in the area. The purpose of the visit is two-fold: to inform homeless people about the rationale behind the count and to ensure that enumerators are able to locate the sites during the count.

- *Pasadena:* Outreach workers distribute a handout to the homeless people in shelters and soup kitchens to provide advance warning. The handout explains why it is important for homeless people to participate in the count.

- *Washington Balance of State:* Service providers talk to homeless people about the count in advance. In several counties, newspaper articles inform the public about the enumerations.

Using Outreach Workers to Advertise the Count

Informing and educating unsheltered homeless people about the public places count helps to prevent widespread avoidance of the enumerators. Asking outreach workers to talk with their clients about the public places count about a week prior to the event is probably the best way to notify people who live in public places.

If your community does not have regular outreach workers, consider visiting the count sites prior to the date of the count. Be sure to emphasize that the count gathers information to improve homeless services and, if appropriate, is anonymous or confidential.

Pre-screening and Pre-testing Sites

Pre-screening or pre-testing the selected study areas will produce better enumeration results. Pre-screening will alert organizers to any problems or issues in each study area, including hidden locations that enumerators might overlook and differing patterns of use between the day or night. Pre-screening also provides an opportunity for organizers to clarify

> **Pre-screening** involves visiting each study area to better understand the site and identify any special characteristics that enumerators should consider on the night of the count. **Pre-testing** is a "dry-run" of a point-in-time count in a sample of study areas. A pre-test can help organizers identify and resolve procedural issues or other problems prior to the count.

confusing study area boundaries and characteristics: which parts of the street; how far down the street; whether to cross the street or go down the adjacent alley; whether to count people inside commercial establishments; and not to count people who are clearly visible but are across a street that forms the boundary with another count area.

A few communities also carry out a pre-test, or a "dry-run," on a subset of sites prior to the count. CoCs performing a count for the first time often conduct pre-tests. A pre-test helps determine if the procedures, materials, and training that you plan to use on the night of the count are sufficient or if you need to make alterations. Pre-testing should occur far enough in advance of the count for communities to make any needed adjustments.

> ### Conducting a Pre-Test in Atlanta
>
> A few weeks prior to its first count the metropolitan Atlanta CoC conducted a pre-test in a sample of census block groups to ensure the methods, training, and materials were appropriate and sufficient to generate an accurate count. As a result of problems encountered during the pre-test, organizers decided to release enumerators in two waves, one at 1:00 am and the second at approximately 4:45 am. The purpose of the change was two-fold: to avoid double counting individuals who had stayed in shelters the night before, but were released to the streets very early in the morning; and to ensure the coverage of all the study areas with a limited number of enumerators.

Safety Concerns

Safety issues are serious concerns for rural and urban areas. In rural areas, the remote locations of encampments may raise unique safety concerns for enumerators if problems arise – for example, no cellular phone or radio reception or being a great distance from the nearest police station. In urban areas, abandoned buildings may be structurally unsafe or havens for illicit activities. The most experienced individuals, generally outreach or other paid staff, should conduct the enumeration at potentially dangerous sites. Organizers should also consider using police escorts – carefully weighing the pros and cons of such an action.

A Note on Abandoned Buildings

Counting homeless people in abandoned buildings is problematic for many reasons, especially safety concerns. Continuums deal with this issue in a variety of ways:

- Prior to the count, Atlanta, GA identifies dangerous areas, particularly those with abandoned buildings or encampments known to be centers for drug or other illegal activities. These areas are assigned to trained, formerly homeless employees who are sometimes accompanied by police officers.

- A study conducted in Houston, TX used a sampling method to determine how many homeless people were living in abandoned buildings. The City of Houston maintained a roster of "habitable abandoned buildings." Using this list, researchers were able to develop a sample of such buildings and send enumerators to these structures to complete interviews. The study determined that approximately one-fourth of all sampled abandoned buildings served as a "home" for at least one person, many of whom were part of particularly vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied youth or the seriously mentally ill.

3.7 Determining Who Is Homeless: Enumerator Judgment vs. Screener Questions

An enumerator cannot assume that everyone encountered in a public place between 12:00 am and 4:00 am is homeless. While the only way to definitively determine an individual's homeless status is to conduct a brief interview, many communities rely on the observational judgment of enumerators. For many Continuums, a key decision is whether to conduct the count based on enumerator observation or to also ask "screener" questions to determine the housing status of each person counted.

Enumeration by Observation/Judgment

Some communities perform a count and collect basic information via observation. Philadelphia, Seattle, and Boston take this approach. In Philadelphia, enumerators are instructed to assume that individuals are homeless if they are sleeping or panhandling on the street during the count (from 12:00 am to 3:00 am). In Seattle/King County, enumerators are told to observe and tally individuals by activity, for example, sleeping or "walking with no destination." (A copy of Seattle's tally sheet is provided in Chapter 7.) Boston's tally sheet asks enumerators to assess their level of confidence in their observations by asking whether the person counted is "definitely" or "possibly" homeless. In Philadelphia, Seattle, Boston, and many other communities, volunteers are specifically instructed not to wake people up. Many CoCs do not want to disturb homeless individuals or make any person feel vulnerable or unsafe.

Enumeration by Screening

For its count of unsheltered homeless people, New York City used a brief set of screening questions to determine who was homeless. Enumerators asked all people who were awake if they had a place to live or a place they considered home and, if so, what type of place the "home" was. To avoid double counting, enumerators also asked each person whether anyone else had asked them the same questions that night. Enumerators then used their judgment to fill out information about the person's gender, approximate age, race, and to record any distinguishing identifiers such as unusual facial hair, scars, tattoos, or clothing. This information was used to help ensure that the same person was not counted twice. At the end of the screening interview, if a person was determined to be homeless, enumerators were instructed to offer transportation to a shelter. The Department of Homeless Services had vans prepared to transport homeless individuals to shelter throughout the night. Enumerators also recorded people believed to be homeless but who did not answer the screening questions because they were sleeping.

> Once a count departs from the one-night 'blitz' approach, interviews are required to unduplicate and screen for homelessness, especially if interviews with unsheltered homeless persons take place at night and during the following day. See section 3.9 for guidance on dealing with duplication.

Other communities require enumerators to ask screener questions to find out where the person slept the previous night and whether it is the place they regularly stay. Screener questions are necessary to conduct a count of unsheltered homeless people using the service-based approach and are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. Examples of surveys containing screener questions, including New York's form, are provided in Chapter 7.

3.8   Interviewing for Supplemental Information

If your CoC does not have access to reliable demographic, service use, and needs data on the unsheltered homeless population in your community, you may want to conduct interviews as part of the public places enumeration, especially if it is your CoC's first count. Interviews can provide additional information about service use patterns, as well as disability and demographic information that can be used to better understand the needs of homeless people and complete portions of the CoC application. Conducting a survey, however, will require additional effort and resources. An interview form must be developed, interviewers need to be trained in its use, and ground rules should be established to identify whom to approach.

A particular challenge of incorporating interviews into a public places count is determining how and when to conduct the interviews. Moreover, CoCs often need to complete the basic count within a short period of time (before significant movement occurs among the unsheltered homeless population). A time-consuming interview process is often not practical within that kind of timeframe. Most important, interviewing during early morning or late evening hours is

viewed by many CoC staff as disruptive and discourteous. Because the use of interviews is required in the service-based approach, interviewing methods are covered in detail in Chapter 4.

To avoid time-consuming interviews during the count, you could consider distributing meal tickets or another incentive during the count. The incentive can be redeemed the next day after the individual completes an interview. A central location or multiple sites could be made available for the interviews. The Census Bureau implemented this strategy successfully during data collection for the 1996 National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients.

If you decide to conduct interviews during the point-in-time count, you may want to consider a sampling strategy that allows you to interview a subset of the people counted. In order to construct a statistically representative sample, it is helpful to know about the characteristics of the unsheltered homeless people in your community – age, gender, household type, ethnicity – and the locations where distinctive segments of the population live. You may be able to get some of this information from local outreach providers. If this is the case, you could construct a purposive sample (with some statistical help from a consultant or local university) that reflects the broader populations you want to survey.

Most CoCs will not have 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 interview every *n*th person encountered in each location. For example, you may decide to interview every 5th or every 10th person that you count. To determine what the interval should be, you will need to make some estimates in advance about:

- How many total people you are likely to encounter;

- How large an interview sample you need for the types of analyses you want to conduct; and

- What level of resources you have to devote to conducting the interviews.

The number of interviews you need to complete is affected by the types of analyses you want to conduct as well as the size of your unsheltered homeless population. Do you just want to find out about the overall characteristics of the unsheltered homeless population? Or do you want to focus on answering questions about the characteristics of a subpopulation, for example, the severely mentally ill? To understand the general characteristics of the unsheltered homeless people in your community, choose a sample size based on the known or estimated size of the population:

- If your community has a small population of unsheltered homeless people (200 people or fewer) you should conduct interviews with at least half of those you encounter.

- If your community's unsheltered homeless population is larger than 200 people, you should complete at least 100 interviews.

If you want to better understand the characteristics of a subpopulation, you need to conduct interviews with enough individuals to be able to generalize the results. At minimum, you should interview 30 to 50 individuals categorized in the subpopulation you are curious about. If the subpopulation is fewer than 30 people, you should interview each individual.

There is no standard rule of thumb for determining the appropriate sample size for a survey. The more complicated or detailed your questions become, the greater the likelihood that you will need to consult an expert who knows about sampling.

3.9   Dealing with Duplication

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, you will underestimate the size of the population; if some population members are counted more than once, you will overestimate the size of the population. In both situations you will misrepresent the characteristics of the homeless people in your community.

Conducting your public places and shelter count on the same night addresses some of the problems of duplication. If your CoC begins and ends the public places count after shelters close and before significant movement occurs among unsheltered populations (i.e., late at night), you reduce the chances that some homeless persons are counted twice. This approach also assumes that the boundaries between count areas are clear and enumerators understand not to count people they can see, but who are not in their area. By contrast, duplication is much more of a problem if the count extends beyond one night or takes place during the day at service locations used by homeless people that may or may not use shelter. (For this reason, duplication is primarily discussed in Chapter 4 in the context of the service-based approach.)

At a minimum, count organizers should always assign enumeration teams to particular geographic areas and should ensure that the boundaries for each team are clearly specified with maps and verbal or written instructions. Using existing boundaries such as railroad tracks, creeks, and highways helps reduce the likelihood that homeless people will move from one area to another while the count is ongoing. Nevertheless, even a one-night public places count risks some duplication if enumerators stray into each other's study areas or all-night transit systems allow homeless people to move around with relative ease. Some CoCs ask enumerators to record information on their tally sheets that may help flag cases where someone has been counted twice. For example, in New York City enumerators asked each person encountered (assuming the person was not asleep) whether he or she had been surveyed already that night, and recorded the person's gender, approximate age, and ethnicity, as well as the location and time of the encounter and any unusual physical characteristics. If a person reported more than one interview, analysts reviewed the other tally sheets to see if anyone matching that person's description was counted. In 2003, only 10 unsheltered people were interviewed twice out of the 594 individuals interviewed.

3.10 Biases, Feasibility, and Cost

Biases

The use of a one-night (point-in-time) count, as opposed to a count that occurs over a longer period of time, can raise concerns of bias. A point-in-time enumeration is simply one picture or "snap shot" of a homeless population on one night during the year, which may or may not be representative of the population on average. Communities should be careful about the conclusions they draw from point-in-time counts and be aware of the assumptions behind this methodology. While a public places count is certainly subject to seasonal and other variations, it is currently the most feasible method for gathering important information on homeless individuals and families. Even with the increased use of Homelessness Management Information Systems (HMIS), public places counts are needed to gather information on those individuals who never come into contact with the homeless service providers that contribute data to the HMIS.

Here are some other biases and issues to consider in using a public places count:

- A <u>known</u> <u>locations</u> approach will be biased to the extent that the list of known locations may 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. Decisions to exclude particular types of locations, such as vehicles or abandoned buildings, also results in biases and, ultimately, an undercount.

- <u>Complete</u> <u>coverage</u> of a geographical area corrects for some biases inherent in the known locations approach, however, the exclusion of different types of places (cars, etc.) may also result in an undercount.

- <u>Timing</u> is crucial to an accurate public places count. Double counting may result from counts that exceed a few hours, unless you have a method for eliminating duplication. When a count must extend longer than a few hours or even take place over a couple of days, it is important to conduct interviews and use unique identifying information to unduplicate results (see Chapter 4).

- Information collected through <u>interviews</u> of unsheltered homeless people is self-reported; that is, the information is provided by the homeless individual. Self-reported data collection is not the same as tracking the person's service use or clinical diagnoses. Although self-reporting is problematic, particularly for individuals with serious mental illnesses, it can provide valuable information about the characteristics, disabilities, and service needs of unsheltered homeless persons.

Feasibility and Cost

A primary concern for every community planning a public places count is cost. The public places counts conducted by communities contacted for this guide were either coordinated by CoC staff or outside consultants, and range from expensive ($150,000) to less expensive efforts ($500). It is feasible to conduct a fairly reliable public places count with a limited budget by making significant use of volunteers. Unquestionably, staff time and energy will be necessary to design, plan, and implement the public places count. The payoff is having better information with which to target limited resources for service planning purposes and to document local needs in funding applications. Communities fund and implement counts using multiple approaches, including:

- Several large CoCs do not have a separate budget for the count, relying solely on staff and volunteer efforts. The two staff members from New York's Department of Homeless Services who organized New York City's 2003 street count estimate that they spent 100 percent of their time preparing for the count in the month leading up to it. One staff member worked full-time the month after the count to complete the data analysis.

- In 2003, the Director of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission devoted 35 to 40 percent of her time on the count for two weeks in advance, and 100 percent of her time the week of the count. In addition, the count required the equivalent of one full-time staff person for a full six weeks.

- The Washington Balance of State CoC spent approximately $4,000 on its 2007 multi-jurisdictional count.

- Atlanta conducted its first count and survey of sheltered and unsheltered populations in 2003. Pathways Community Network, (Pathways), the project manager for the Tri-Jurisdictional CoC's count, chose to hire a research consulting company to help develop the methodology, manage the logistics of the count, and write the report. Pathways directly supervised the consultant, while a nine-member Advisory Board made up of subject matter experts and one homeless service provider was actively involved in project oversight and the setting of policies and procedures. The total cost for the study was approximately $120,000. This included: $48,000 in consultant fees; $32,000 in direct expenses (e.g., paying for homeless enumerators and surveyors, supplies for the night of the count, and printing); and $40,000 in in-kind contributions from CoC agencies and other contributors.

  In 2007, the total cost for the Tri-Jurisdictional CoC's point-in-time count was approximately $80,000. Without the in-kind support of local non-profits and community volunteers, it is estimated the count would have cost over $100,000.

- Long Beach, CA conducted its first count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people in 2003. The CoC hired a consulting firm to assist in designing and managing the count with a final cost of approximately $150,000 (which also included an in-depth assessment and 10-year planning process).

4.   Counts Based on Use of Non-Shelter Services

This chapter describes a strategy for collecting data on unsheltered homeless people based on their use of non-shelter services such as soup kitchens, food pantries, Health Care for the Homeless facilities, outreach programs, and mainstream social service agencies. This approach is based on the notion that many homeless people who do not use shelters will nevertheless use other services occasionally, particularly food programs, in order to survive. This group of homeless people includes those living in "hidden" places such as cars, abandoned buildings, and subway tunnels, i.e., those who may not be easily found during a traditional public places count.

This chapter provides information about:

- Who should use the service-based method;

- Targeting service providers and sites for the survey;

- Selecting a time period for data collection;

- Gaining the cooperation of participating agencies;

- Using screeners and interviewing for essential and supplemental information;

- Dealing with duplication; and

- Biases, feasibility, and cost issues.

One of the key differences between this "service-based" approach and the one-night public places counts described in Chapter 3 is that you cannot rely on simple observation or enumerator judgment to determine whether the people you are counting are homeless. Many people who use services targeted for homeless people, such as soup kitchens, and most people who use mainstream social services will not be homeless according to HUD's definition. As a result, it is essential to ask screener questions of everyone encountered through this method. This chapter includes a section on using screener questions to determine who meets the federal definition of homelessness.

A second key difference between the service-based approach and the one-night counts is that you cannot rely on enumerator observation or judgment to determine whether the person has already been counted by another organization, or at an earlier date by the same agency. To unduplicate you need interview information. If you are trying to achieve a complete census and interview everyone you determine to be homeless, you need to collect personal identifying information that allows you to check for, and eliminate, duplication. The use of client information to unduplicate also applies to counts that include an interviewing component for a sample of persons.

The service-based approach generally works as follows:

- First, the CoC agrees upon a list of providers and service delivery sites that unsheltered homeless people are likely to use. It is usually most efficient to focus on non-shelter service locations that serve and target homeless people, such as soup kitchens, food programs, and specialized health care services. However, many suburban and rural communities do not have extensive homeless services. In such places, the count is usually focused on mainstream social service agencies that are used by homeless and non-homeless people. These agencies may include TANF, community action, health, and public housing agencies, to name a few.

- Second, once the service locations have been identified, service providers (often with the assistance of volunteers) are asked to conduct interviews of people using the service over a given period of time. Every person requesting services during the established period is screened for homelessness. The initial interview consists of screener questions to determine the person's homeless status.

- Finally, additional questions inquiring about the person's household composition, history of homelessness, and use of services are administered to persons identified as being homeless.

The box on the following page describes the service-based approach taken by the Kentucky Balance of State CoC in its 2001 count and survey of unsheltered homeless people.

Much of the information covered in the previous chapter on preparing to conduct a count, advertising the count, developing survey instruments, and training, is also applicable for the service-based approach. This chapter focuses on differences between counts based on use of services and counts of people in public places.

4.1   Who Should Use the Service-Based Method?

As with the public places count, the service-based approach can work in a number of local circumstances. This method can also be combined with a block-by-block count or a count of known locations. In particular, the service-based approach may be a good option for:

- CoCs interested in learning about unsheltered homeless people who may not be found in a simple street count, such as people living in cars, abandoned buildings, and other hidden locations often not covered in such counts; and/or

- CoCs for which a block-by-block count or count based on known locations may not be feasible due to the size or topography of the jurisdiction.

The service-based approach has been used successfully in cities, suburban areas, rural areas, and across entire states. As described below, the types of services targeted for survey – either non-shelter homeless services such as soup kitchens or mainstream social service agencies such as welfare or Social Security offices – will depend on two factors. First, the prevalence of these types of services within the CoC. Second, in the case of mainstream social services, the extent to which homeless people are likely to access these services on a regular or semi-regular basis.

Kentucky's Use of the Service-Based Approach to Collect Data on Unsheltered Homeless People Across the State

Beginning in February 2001, the Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) undertook a 10-week survey of 118 of Kentucky's 120 counties (excluding Jefferson and Fayette Counties, which are separate CoCs). Because the state is largely rural and does not have homeless-specific providers in most areas, the primary strategy was to conduct a survey of homeless people accessing a range of social services.

KHC worked through 15 local CoC planning boards to recruit service providers and mainstream agencies to participate in the survey. Service provider and agency staff were instructed to administer the survey to everyone who accessed their service over the 10-week study period. The survey was designed to determine whether the respondent was homeless and took about 10 minutes to complete. Agencies and service providers mailed their completed surveys to a central location for coding and data entry.

The survey was conducted over an extended period because KHC knew that unsheltered homeless people, particularly in rural areas, access services infrequently. The study was originally planned for eight weeks. In some localities, however, data collection got off to a slow start, so KHC extended the survey period by two weeks to be sure to capture as many homeless people as possible. KHC ultimately received 1,703 completed surveys (including non-homeless people and homeless people living in shelters) from 71 counties.

Researchers used information from the survey to unduplicate or eliminate surveys completed by the same person at different times. They were able to construct a point-in-time count from data collected over the 10-week period by asking each person interviewed whether they had been homeless on the survey's first day. Everyone who was homeless on that day was included in the point-in-time statistic, whether the interview took place on that day or not. Thus Kentucky obtained both a point-in-time number and an estimate of how many people became homeless during the 10-week period.

4.2   Targeting Service Providers and Sites for the Survey

One of the first steps in applying this method is identifying the service providers and agencies to target for your data collection effort. To the extent that they exist in your community, providers that focus on the needs of homeless people, such as soup kitchens and emergency food programs, may 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 an urban phenomenon. 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 that receive surplus commodities through the U.S. Department of Agriculture or support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Your state may already do some type of hunger survey of these programs, and you could piggyback on that effort to learn more about the homeless people who use these services.

Several CoCs interviewed for this study, including those that cover large geographic, urban, suburban, or rural areas, have tried to include a broader range of service providers in their data collection efforts. For example, the metropolitan Denver CoC, which covers a seven-county area, encourages each county to include any organization or agency that interacts with homeless people in the point-in-time survey of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. In 2003, unsheltered homeless people were interviewed at food programs, day shelters, homeless treatment facilities, hospital emergency rooms, County Department of Human Services offices, and work programs.

CoCs have conducted counts and surveys of unsheltered homeless people at the following service locations:

- Outreach programs (Remember that outreach **is a service program** and can be handled as a "service site." Even though outreach workers are mobile they can 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 centers, and hospital emergency rooms

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

- Housing offices

- Day labor sites

- Employment centers and libraries

- Churches and other religious institutions that provide homeless services

- Schools

- Detoxification and psychiatric or addiction treatment facilities*

- Jails* and police stations

> * Caution: In surveying people in institutional settings, it is important to remember that HUD's definition of homelessness does not include people "living" in health care facilities, foster care or other youth facilities, and corrections programs and institutions. CoCs surveying homeless people in such locations generally include questions to determine if the person was literally homeless on the night designated for the point-in-time count, how long the person expects to stay at the facility, and whether they will have housing upon discharge.

With such a broad list of service providers and agencies that could potentially be included in a data collection effort, narrowing down the list of entities for participation in the service-based count can be challenging. The first step is to assemble a data collection planning committee that includes representatives from homeless service providers, the local hunger coalition, and mainstream social service agencies. If police stations and emergency rooms are possible survey locations, law enforcement agencies and hospital administrators should be included as well. It is not necessary to include agencies that may serve only a few homeless people each year.

CoCs that cover several counties have found it helpful to designate local coordinators in each county to identify the service locations at which to conduct the survey and, ultimately, to manage the data collection effort. In Denver, for example, the CoC assigned a lead person in each of seven counties to coordinate data collection efforts in that area. These leaders were instructed to contact every provider of homeless services in the county, as well as every agency that works with homeless people, to encourage their participation in the survey.

For Kentucky's 2001 count, the Kentucky Housing Corporation worked through 15 local CoC planning boards to survey homeless people accessing services in 118 counties. The planning boards were responsible for identifying survey locations, recruiting agencies to participate, and coordinating the completion of the surveys.

Combining Service-Based Enumeration with Counts in Public Places

As mentioned above, CoCs frequently use the service-based approach in combination with a block-by-block street count or a count based on known locations. In such cases, interviews occur at service agencies, while at the same time outreach workers or volunteer enumerators conduct the survey outdoors. It is important to remember when combining methods that you must conduct a basic interview with *everyone* counted in both outdoor and service locations

to avoid double counting people who may sleep on the street but receive meals from one or more food programs during the day.

4.3   Selecting a Time Period for Data Collection

As discussed in Chapter 3, HUD requires that the single date chosen for the point-in-time count fall within the last ten calendar days in January — between January 22nd and January 31st. CoCs can seek a waiver of this requirement only if the community has a long-standing tradition of conducting their point-in-time count on another winter day. Service-based interviewing can extend beyond that particular day as long as individuals and families are asked about their homeless status on the night selected for the point-in-time count.

> **HUD STANDARD**
> CoCs must conduct a point-in-time count every other year, during the last ten days of January. When using the service-based method, CoCs should ask about homelessness on the night of the date selected for the count.

The key difference in terms of timing between the street or public places count described in Chapter 3 and the service-based approach described here is that service-based counts occur during the day rather than at night and will most likely take place over more than a single day. The period of time over which the count is conducted depends on:

> CoCs should ensure that service-based counts take place during a time when key service providers in the community are seeing clients (i.e., try not to pick a day when a major soup kitchen is closed or a health care center is not seeing patients).

- 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; and

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

Large CoCs such as Pasadena, CA conduct their surveys over several days because it is not feasible to cover the entire jurisdiction in a 24-hour period. However, other CoCs that use a service-based approach, such as the City of Tallahassee, the Denver metropolitan area, and the Washington Balance of State have been able to complete their counts within a single night and day.

The type of service provider participating in the service-based count also affects how long it will take to complete data collection. If the CoC is able to conduct interviews at service sites that homeless

> Whether the count takes place in a single day or over multiple days, you will need to have a strategy for eliminating double counting. Interviews are *always* required for the service-based method because people may use multiple services in a given day and may be counted both in the shelter count and in the service-based counts. (See Section 4.7, Dealing with Duplication.)

people access frequently, such as soup kitchens and food pantries, the timeframe may be short since a substantial proportion of the unsheltered homeless population will access these services in the course of a day. Homeless people do not access mainstream social service agencies – such as TANF and Social Security offices – as often, and a longer data collection period may be necessary.

An extended data collection period is often necessary in rural areas or areas with few homeless-specific services. In such communities, homeless persons may access services infrequently, especially service-resistant persons. To address this problem, the Kentucky Balance of State CoC, which relied heavily on mainstream service providers for its service-based count, conducted interviews over two and a half months (see description in Section 4.1). The long data collection period gave Kentucky the opportunity to capture information on many homeless people who do not access homeless-specific or mainstream service programs regularly.

Obtaining a Point-in-Time Estimate from Data Collected Over Several Days or Weeks

To derive the point-in-time estimate required by HUD, you need to include a question that asks people where they were staying on the night designated for your point-in-time count. This date is typically the night before the first day of your data collection effort. For example, if you began surveying people on January 27th, everyone interviewed on the 27th would be asked where they spent the previous night in order to determine whether they meet HUD's definition of homelessness. People interviewed after the 27th would be asked where they spent the night of the 26th in order to collect comparable data. Only people determined to be homeless on the night of the 26th would be included in your point-in-time count, although the interviews with people who became homeless after that date would undoubtedly provide useful information on patterns of homelessness and service needs. See Chapter 7 for examples of these kinds of questions used in Kentucky and Denver.

> **HUD STANDARD**
>
> **Deriving a Point-in-Time Estimate from Service-Based Data**
>
> To fulfill the requirements of the CoC application, communities that use the service-based method to enumerate unsheltered homeless people must have a way to calculate a point-in-time total. CoCs should designate one night to gather information for the point-in-time count. Usually the night before the first day of data collection and the same night as the sheltered count works best. A survey question should ask about the individual's or family's housing situation on the night selected for the point-in-time count regardless of when the interview takes place.

4.4 Training

Chapter 3 discussed who should conduct the count and the level of training required to conduct the count. This information applies to service-based counts as well. However, the level of training needed will typically be higher than that required for a simple count, since

service-based enumerations require interviews and typically rely on a combination of service provider staff, outreach workers, and volunteers. Service providers, especially mainstream service providers such as TANF agencies, do not normally ask their clients about homelessness and housing needs. As a result, mainstream providers will need instructions on conducting the interviews and a clear and simple survey form. Volunteers will similarly require considerable training. You will also have to develop procedures for the providers and volunteers to report the results. For CoCs covering a large geographic area, local coordinators can play a critical role in assembling completed survey forms and making sure that the forms are being completed correctly.

Several CoCs that conduct service-based counts across a large geographic area have invested considerable resources in making the training accessible to all of the individuals and organizations participating in the data collection effort. For example, the metropolitan Denver CoC conducts a training session of approximately two hours in each of the seven counties and an additional session for anyone who was not able to attend the session in their county. The training is generally attended by the Executive Director of each participating organization, as well as several caseworkers if the organization is large.

The Kentucky Housing Corporation (KHC) provided three training sessions in different parts of the state for the 15 local CoC planning boards that coordinated the survey effort. The sessions were used to review the survey instrument and research methodology, discuss the importance of accurate and reliable data collection, and provide an opportunity for "interview practice sessions." After completing the training, local coordinators explained the survey procedures to the participating service agencies in their communities. KHC, through its subcontractor, Morehead State University, also provided a toll-free number that service agencies could call during the 10-week study period with questions about the survey instrument and procedures.

4.5   Gaining the Cooperation of Participating Agencies

Encouraging participation from service agencies and ensuring that the survey is administered correctly and consistently can be a major challenge. This is particularly true if the data collection is happening over a large area with multiple jurisdictions. In Kentucky, the local CoC planning boards were offered a "research assistance award" of up to $1,000 based on the level of participation they elicited from local service agencies in the 2001 statewide survey. Nonetheless, it was difficult to convince some agencies to conduct the survey over the full two-month study period. Some agencies waited until the end of the study period to begin conducting surveys, which resulted in an incomplete picture of their service population. The delays prompted KHC to extend the study period by two weeks. Ultimately, KHC determined that the strategy of providing an incentive payment to local CoC planning boards was only partly successful. KHC concluded that a better approach might have been to pay service agencies a small incentive payment ($5 to $10) for each survey completed. One of the lead KHC staff people who worked on the project also suggested that the person who

is managing the data collection should contact local coordinators and individual agencies regularly to make sure that they are implementing the survey correctly.

The Florida Coalition for the Homeless has encouraged the 28 CoCs in the state to use a standard methodology for conducting local counts. The methodology involves a survey conducted over a 24-hour period in all places where homeless people may be found, including shelters and transitional housing facilities, soup kitchens and other non-shelter homeless providers, mainstream service agencies, and outdoor locations. The survey is administered by trained volunteers and provider agencies, and self-administered by homeless people. The Florida Coalition has encouraged local CoCs to use this methodology by publishing a survey instrument and a detailed training guide on how to use the instrument and how to organize the count. The survey and the training guide are available on the web at http://www.flacoalitionhomeless.com/serviceproviders.htm. The Coalition has also tried to be responsive to local needs. Although local CoCs are strongly discouraged from eliminating any questions from the survey instrument, they are free to add questions to better understand the nature of homelessness in their communities. The Coalition has also created a series of optional modules to the survey for in-depth data collection on mental health, substance abuse, and disability issues. The core survey includes screener questions and gathers identifying information to de-duplicate.

The Denver metropolitan CoC also struggled to garner the full participation of local service agencies in its count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people across seven counties. Provider participation was particularly challenging the first year the CoC conducted the count (1998), because service agencies did not have a sense of what kind of information the effort would produce and how it would benefit them. The CoC found that producing a detailed report on the survey findings and distributing that report to every participating agency was helpful in ensuring cooperation with the count in subsequent years. According to the CoC representative who led the survey effort, local agencies were able use the report in a variety of ways: to answer questions from the media, to prepare internal and Board reports, and to prepare grant applications.

> The Denver CoC makes the de-identified, raw data collected through its survey available to anyone who wants to use it and will run special cross-tabulations upon request, including the survey findings at a particular service location.

The Denver CoC also makes the de-identified, raw data collected through the survey available to anyone who wants to use it and will run specialized cross-tabulations of the data upon request. The Denver CoC can also produce reports of the survey findings at a particular service location. The CoC representative said that making the survey results widely accessible has been a key factor in gaining the active participation of a wide range of local agencies and service providers.

4.6 Using Screeners and Interviewing for Essential and Supplemental Information

As described in Chapter 3, screeners are a series of questions designed to determine if someone is homeless. The service-based method requires that *every person counted* be screened to establish if they meet HUD's definition of homelessness, as well as any local variations on that definition. Screening is necessary since many people who use non-shelter homeless services and most people who use mainstream social services are not homeless.

Screener questions can be used to exclude people you do not want to interview (the interviewer can be instructed to stop the interview if the screener criteria are not fulfilled) and to sort the interviews once they are completed. Screeners typically include several questions that identify where a person is currently living (including different types of housing, institutional settings, and places not meant for human habitation) and how long they intend to stay there. Some interviews also ask people directly whether they are homeless or whether they have a permanent place to stay. Other examples of screener questions can be found in the interview guides reproduced in Chapter 7.

> **A Series of Screener Questions**
>
> - Tonight, do you have some place that you consider to be your home or the place where you live?
> - Is that a room, an apartment, a house, a shelter, or a spot in some public place?
>
> (From New York City's 2006 public places count)

Most CoCs that use the service-based approach supplement the screener with a full interview. Indeed, this is one of the main benefits of the service-based approach. Interviews present an opportunity to learn about the person's recent shelter and service use patterns, his/her history of homelessness, and subpopulation characteristics CoCs can include interview questions that inquire about disabilities, domestic violence, substance abuse, or health-related issues to gather the information required for the Homeless Population and Subpopulation Chart in HUD's CoC application. Subpopulation information is required for sheltered homeless people and is optional for unsheltered homeless people, except for chronically homeless information.

> **HUD STANDARD**
>
> **HUD Changes in CoC Application Requirements**
>
> In 2007, HUD began requiring that CoCs report the number of homeless households with and without dependent children and the number of people in each type of household. See Section 2.4 HUD Standards for Counting Homeless People for details. The implication of this change is that CoCs must collect and report information on the number of households without dependent children in addition to the number of people in these households. Households without dependent children include single individuals, unaccompanied youth, and other adult-only households, such as couples without children.

Interviews also offer an opportunity to estimate the number of unsheltered homeless people who meet HUD's definition of chronic homelessness, which is a required element of the CoC application. In order to determine whether a person is chronically homeless, the interview must ask about the length of time the person has been continuously homeless, how many times the person has been homeless in the past three years, and whether the person has a disabling condition (see the definition of chronic homelessness in Chapter 2, Section 2.2). There is some debate among homeless service providers about how to determine accurately whether someone has a disabling condition. The survey forms reproduced in Chapter 7 provide examples of how three CoCs have collected this information. In brief:

- The metropolitan Denver CoC asks:
  Have you ever received, or are you currently receiving treatment or services for any of the conditions below:

  - Severe mental illness
  - Chronic drug abuse
  - HIV/AIDS related illnesses
  - Chronic alcohol abuse
  - Tuberculosis
  - Other physical condition
  - Not applicable, haven't received any services

- The Kentucky statewide survey asks:

  Are you aware of any physical illness/disabilities that you have?

  Are you aware of any mental illness that you have?

- The Florida Coalition for the Homeless' 2007 Core Survey Instrument asks:

  Do you have a disabling condition?

  What type of disabling condition do you have?

  - Physical
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Mental health
  - Drug or alcohol addiction
  - Other

> CoCs generally use the same set of interview questions to collect information about sheltered and unsheltered homeless populations.

Ideally, the interviews should be brief – no longer than 15 to 20 minutes. If you need more information to eliminate duplication you can interview a sample of people in depth to learn more about service needs and other issues (see discussion of sampling in Chapter 3, Section 3.8). When developing the interview questions, it is helpful to enlist advice from currently or formerly homeless people. The Greater Grand Traverse Area CoC found the input of homeless individuals very helpful in designing its survey of unsheltered homeless people in public places and service locations.

After designing the survey instrument, you will need to develop a detailed set of procedures to guide the interview process. Two issues to consider are: who will administer the survey and how will you encourage unsheltered homeless people to participate.

Who will administer the survey?

Generally, CoCs rely on some combination of service provider staff, outreach workers, and volunteers to conduct the interviews. 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, the CoC should provide thorough training so that the interviewers understand what the questions mean, how to ask them, how to record the responses, and how to deal with refusals, incoherent answers, and other potential areas of confusion. Some CoCs have found it effective to use currently or formerly homeless people to conduct the interviews because it increases the comfort level of the person being interviewed and leads to more authentic responses. If you have access to a group of homeless individuals who are willing to help with the interviews, either on a volunteer or paid basis, for example through the VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program, this may be a great approach. However, training will be important for anyone not accustomed to doing this kind of data collection.

In some cases, CoCs allow homeless people to complete the surveys themselves, with assistance from volunteers as needed. Other CoCs allow service providers to answer questions on behalf of a client if they have information about that person. These methods are likely to result in less accurate information and lower participation rates in the survey, but give some CoCs a greater degree of flexibility on how the information is obtained. Flexibility in data collection methods is particularly important if the CoC is trying to collect information over a large geographic area and through a wide range of service providers.

How will you encourage unsheltered homeless people to participate?

Your CoC will need to consider how you are going to encourage people to participate in the interview process. Although every survey must deal with refusals to particular questions, the goal is to maximize participation in the full survey and, at the very least, collect enough information from each person determine an individual's homeless status and unduplicate.

A number of communities offer an incentive to encourage participation in the survey. For example, the Tallahassee CoC provides gift bags with toiletries and other essentials to encourage participation. The interview takes 15 to 20 minutes and multiple gift bags are given to anyone who requests more than one in order to reduce the likelihood that people will deliberately try to be interviewed more than once. McHenry County, IL asks three or four questions in a one- to five-minute interview process and offers food coupons as an incentive.

> In Seattle, a local agency encourages unsheltered youth to come forward during the count by hosting a youth "sleep-over" with a night of food, movies, and games.

4.7   Dealing with Duplication

Duplication is a major challenge with all homeless counts. Duplicate counting is especially likely to occur if people may have been counted at different locations on different days. If you conduct interviews at service agencies such as soup kitchens, Health Care for the Homeless sites, or drop-in centers, you are virtually certain to count some people more than once because many homeless people use these services each day. On the other hand, in restricting the timeframe for data collection, you may miss significant numbers of people, especially in areas with relatively few or no homeless assistance providers.

In order to ensure an unduplicated count you must review personal identifying information collected through interviews. 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 looking at the actual questionnaires, but it is usually easier to first enter interview information into a database, such as an HMIS. 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, you should eliminate, to the best of your ability, any unsheltered people counted or interviewed twice.

In the absence of personal identifying information, it is possible to use other information collected through interviews 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 they were interviewed. The survey 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 your CoC gives out incentives after interviews, such as bags of necessities or meal cards, you could ask the person if they have received the incentive to help them remember the interview. Although not as reliable as personal identifying information, these approaches will help you unduplicate.

4.8   Biases, Feasibility, and Cost

Biases

The main bias with the service-based approach is that, unless it is coupled with a count of public places, it is likely to miss unsheltered homeless people who do not use any services. The approach will also overestimate the number of people meeting HUD's definition of homelessness without a series of good screener questions.

The potential advantage of the service-based approach is that it allows the CoC to collect more information on the characteristics, service uses, and needs of unsheltered service-using homeless people than a basic public places count without interviews. It is also likely to provide a better estimate (though still an undercount) of the number of unsheltered homeless people in a community, since many people try to hide at night for their own safety and may deliberately avoid the count.

Feasibility

The service-based approach can be conducted using volunteers with relative ease. Using volunteers in fact may be the best approach since some non-shelter service providers may not be accustomed to, or comfortable with, collecting information from their clients. As discussed in the previous section, the most important statistical issue that you will face with this method is that you must include strategies to unduplicate within and across services. Key procedural issues to solve are: gaining the cooperation of service agencies; establishing a schedule for interviewing and screening procedures; determining the incentive, if any, for completing interviews (payment, gift, voucher); and finding private space for conducting the interview (if needed).

Cost

The more comprehensive your survey, the more expensive data collection becomes. The service-based approach tends to be more expensive than a simple public places count because you need to invest in gaining the participation of numerous service agencies, training staff and volunteers, and administering screener questions and interviews.

Service-based approaches also increase the level of data analysis. Given all the information collected on each person counted, it may not be possible to use a program like Excel or Access to analyze the data. Instead, you may need to use specialized statistical software such as SPSS, SAS, or STATA. If your CoC does not have someone with expertise in one of these programs, you may want to partner with a local university that may be able to provide technical assistance at low cost. Alternatively, several CoCs have contracted with private vendors for data entry and analysis.

In 2003, the Denver metropolitan CoC hired a data entry contractor to enter and unduplicate the more than 10,000 surveys collected through its point-in-time count of shelters, non-shelter service locations, and public places. The cost was approximately $15,000 and was paid for through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from several of the participating counties. Kentucky hired Morehead State University to coordinate the data collection and analysis for its 2001 statewide survey of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people. The cost of Morehead's services was approximately $75,000.

5. Counting Homeless People in Southwestern Border Areas or Colonías

Obtaining a count of unsheltered homeless persons is never easy. It is even more challenging in areas with widely dispersed populations, few or no homeless-specific services, and vast stretches of countryside in which people can live in situations not meant for habitation without being seen. The counties along the Mexican border in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California are such cases and present their own challenges to anyone trying to count homeless people. These challenges include how to learn about and handle undocumented people, including those who are settled in the county and those who are just coming across the border and heading north; migrant workers; and people living in areas known collectively as *colonías*, and in permanent and semi-permanent encampments in national and state forests, other parklands, private lands, and other outdoor areas.

This chapter is based on interviews conducted with border communities in early 2006. The chapter first addresses a number of issues that border communities must understand before undertaking a count. While many of the issues that border communities face are similar to any other community, particularly rural areas, cultural and climate differences warrant explicit guidance.

5.1 Special Issues for Mexican Border Communities

This section addresses three topics that are partially covered in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 on counting unsheltered people, but that pose some special dilemmas in the border counties of the southwestern United States. These are applicable definitions, the timing of the count, and the need and desire for assistance.

Definitions of Homelessness

There have always been controversies about how to count people living in extremely overcrowded conditions or in structures such as school buses, chicken coops, and half-finished construction in urban and rural communities. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 include some assistance with these circumstances. Chapter 2 provides general definitions to help distinguish between literal homelessness and people who are precariously housed. Section 7.6 outlines additional information about the spectrum of residential instability, from those living in conventional housing with no risk of homelessness, to unstable or precariously housed persons who are at risk of homelessness, to literally homeless persons. Much of this section is applicable to border communities and readers should see this section for further guidance about how to handle these circumstances.

Colonías

Colonías, according to federal definitions, are areas beyond municipal boundaries where people have constructed more or less permanent dwellings but have no water, sewer, electrical, or other utility infrastructure. Often people "own" the land on which they have constructed their residences through a contract for deed, on which they pay monthly until the purchase price is reached. Dwellings range from complete houses to trailers to shacks assembled from discarded construction and other materials. Occupants are overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking recent legal immigrants or undocumented workers, but may just as well be families whose residence in the area predates U. S. acquisition of the territory that is now Texas (1845), California (1850), New Mexico (1912), and Arizona (1912).

Literal homelessness, in the HUD sense, exists in the *colonías,* alongside people living in stable if less than ideal conditions. People sleep outside, in tents, in abandoned school buses, in tool sheds, in their cars (whether on the streets or on private property), and in other circumstances clearly not meant for habitation. Although there will be difficulties in finding and counting these people, as discussed below, there is no issue of *whether* to include them in a homeless count—they should be counted.

Housing Quality

In rural areas, the borderline between substandard but stable housing and completely unacceptable living conditions that would merit the definition of "homeless" has always been hard to draw. For instance, a trailer, however isolated and without utilities, is a structure meant for human habitation. Whether on "the back 40" or in a trailer park, a person occupying such a trailer would be considered housed, especially if the trailer was situated in its current location with the intent that it be occupied, occupancy has continued for years, the occupants want to be there and are there with permission, and people in the community know the occupants.

If, however, the trailer was simply abandoned on its site and people are occupying it temporarily and without permission, they are probably literally homeless. Substitute an unreconstructed school bus for the trailer—that is, a school bus that has not been stripped and remade as a dwelling—and the occupants are definitely literally homeless. There would be no difference between the school bus in a rural area and squatting in an abandoned building or living in an abandoned car on the streets of a city—both are situations of literal homelessness.

Some of the same fine distinctions must be made with rural houses, some of which have been occupied for generations but do not have indoor plumbing, running water, or electricity. They may even be in terrible physical condition, with holes in the floor or in walls. They are still homes, and the people in them still housed, just as they would be in cities if they lived in buildings where the landlord does not keep the premises in good working order.

On the other hand, people living in chicken coops, barns, or other outbuildings that have not been converted for human habitation, even with permission and even if they pay rent to the

owners, should be counted as homeless. They are living in structures that are not and were not meant for human habitation, and that is the criterion set by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act for considering someone homeless.

Likewise, people living in an abandoned building are homeless, whether that building is a six-story tenement in New York City or a dilapidated house in a small southwest town, on an abandoned farm or ranch, or in a mining "ghost town." If the owners have abandoned the property and the people staying there are squatters, they should be counted as literally homeless.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding poses another challenge for homeless enumerators. How much crowding is too much—so much that at least some of the people living in such extreme conditions might be considered homeless? Some dwellings in *colonías* house four or five families—perhaps as many as 20 people. But some one-bedroom apartments in New York City and Los Angeles house as many as 30 single immigrant men or women, who work in shifts and rotate through mattresses on the floor as one group returns from work and another group leaves. However awful the conditions, people in both very overcrowded circumstances would not be considered homeless as long as they can reasonably count on being able to continue as they now are.

Overcrowding and Culture

Along the Mexican border one will most likely encounter the Hispanic cultural orientation toward not leaving people to sleep on the streets—they will bring them inside, certainly if they are family however distant, and even possibly if they are strangers who need a place to stay. In communities not given to this hospitality, the people thus housed would clearly be homeless, and most likely unsheltered. The question always arises in these communities as to whether the people thus given house room should be counted as homeless.

Your community may decide to account for people living under these circumstances while you are doing your homeless count, but whether you should list them among the literally homeless or put them in the category of "high risk of homelessness" depends on the actual circumstances of their sleeping arrangements.

- If a person actually sleeps outside, in his or her car, in a tent, or in an outbuilding, that person *is homeless*, even if he or she has access to the house at all times, joins in meals, and hangs out in and around the house.

- If the person sleeps in the house, even if on a mattress on the floor, that person *is not homeless* in HUD's sense of literal homelessness. But that person is *certainly* at risk for literal homelessness, and could be counted as such and reported to the larger community as part of a group of people that the community may want to assist.

Timing

HUD has specified the last ten calendar days of January as the period during which it requires Continuums of Care (CoCs) to conduct their one night point-in-time counts. This time period is designated for three main reasons. First, it is the period of greatest environmental threat to unsheltered homeless people in the northern parts of the country, and therefore the period during which communities might want to be particularly alert to the risks of unsheltered homelessness. Second, *because* the weather increases homeless risk during this period, fewer homeless people are likely to stay exposed on the streets, and more might be expected to be in shelters, making them easier to count. Lastly, HUD wants to reduce the chance for gross duplicate counting at the national level by having communities enumerate at roughly the same time of year. It may certainly be true that some homeless people migrate depending on the weather, and thus, will leave northern communities in the winter, leaving fewer, and presumably "natives," to be counted.

However, the situation is reversed in southern and southwestern communities, the latter of which are the focus of this chapter. Winter is the least environmentally threatening—people die of the heat in the summer, but many actually come into these areas in the winter because it is so easy to live outside there. Thus the potential population of homeless people may actually increase in the winter in southwestern border communities, and finding and counting people becomes significantly *more* difficult.

For southern communities to derive as much benefit from a count of homeless people as northern communities do, they should be counting in July. However, that might result in southern and northern communities counting the same people but at different times of the year. The advantage of a January count for everyone is strictly at the federal level—a single time period increases the odds of being able to add up the counts from all communities and not worry too much about duplicate counting. This gets everyone "on the same page," counting at about the same time, using the same (HUD) definition of homelessness, and covering approximately the same range of sheltered and unsheltered locations.

The issue of a homeless count's timing is intertwined with the issue of whether the people to be counted as homeless actually need help, which we address next. Once we have discussed both of these elements, this guidance will offer some suggestions about how to address this issue of timing.

Need and Desire for Assistance

Are there people who ostensibly meet the definition of literal homelessness, but whom a community might want to leave out of its homeless count? In the southwestern border counties, the answer to this question is probably "yes." These people include border crossers, migrant workers, and "snowbirds." Each are discussed below.

Border Crossers

Some border counties have asked whether they should consider themselves responsible for searching their deserts for people illegally crossing the border. The basic answer to this is "no." People are not homeless when in the process of crossing the U.S. border illegally. Nor are they homeless while in transit across your county as they move away from the border itself. We say this based on four expectations: they are moving quickly through the county, they are illegal, they are not asking for help, and they do not want help. In addition, it would probably be dangerous to try to approach them. Some border crossers may be residing temporarily with family or friends in *colonías* or other communities, but their circumstances do not warrant including them in a homeless count either, unless their sleeping circumstances meet the criteria for literal homelessness. Remember, these are people who have crossed the border illegally in the *very recent* past—within the last week, two weeks at most. We are not talking about people who crossed ten years ago and have been living in your county ever since. Of course if a person who has entered the country illegally ends up staying in an emergency shelter, you *would* count that person as homeless and not worry about his or her legal status (HUD does not ask you to collect or report it).

Migrant Workers

By migrant workers we mean people, whether U. S. citizens, legal residents, or undocumented people, who are in the process of moving from place to place for seasonal work. The work will usually be agricultural, but could be other types of work. Migrant workers will be a counting issue for the communities that play temporary host to them *while they are on the move.* For the southwestern border counties, however, this is usually not the issue. These counties are actually the permanent winter *homes* of families who spend other seasons following work. These families may have many service issues, but in terms of counting and defining, they belong in the category of "migrant," not "homeless." When they are "home" for the winter, living in conventional dwellings that they own or rent and to which they can reliably return every year, they should not be counted as homeless.

Snowbirds

Some border communities, and probably some communities not so close to the Mexican border but still warm in the winter, experience the phenomenon of people who choose to spend their winters in warm weather locations. Obviously millions of Americans winter in southern and southwestern states where they live in owned or rented houses or apartments and would never qualify as homeless. There are also seasonal motor home communities that accommodate many people who return year after year for the winter months. A count enumerator is not concerned with any of these people.

Some southwestern border counties, however, play host to a different type of snowbird who does raise issues for enumerators. We give a specific example—The Slabs of Imperial County, California—because it illustrates the very difficult decisions that some communities will have to make in deciding whom to count.

> RoadsideAmerica.com, self-described as "your online guide to offbeat tourist attractions," describes "The Slabs" or "The Niland Slabs" as "a WWII-era Marine facility where squatters and seasonal snowbirds live in RVs and vehicles among the concrete remnants," and opines "a great place to spend the winter."

> The Slabs appears to be a genuine encampment of people who choose to live "off the grid," some permanently and some seasonally. To the extent that people living at The Slabs reside in types of dwellings that are meant for habitation (i.e., motor homes or RVs) and are there by choice, they should not be considered homeless.

Several conditions would have to be met before someone sleeping in a place like The Slabs would be considered homeless. These include sleeping outdoors, in abandoned vehicles, or other places not meant for habitation, and being willing to accept alternative housing if offered (i.e., they are not there by choice). You may also want to make a judgment as to whether they have the capacity to make decisions about their own well-being, or whether they are so severely mentally ill or impaired in their judgment that they would qualify for intervention by adult protective services. If they are severely impaired, they might qualify as either at-risk or literally homeless, depending on their sleeping arrangements. In deciding whether to include such areas in a counting effort, knowledgeable local people should be able to estimate the likelihood of finding literally homeless people in such encampments, and weigh that against the difficulties of surveying the area and the likely resistance of residents to intrusion. If the decision is to try to count in such areas, the payoff will likely be greatest if you can gain entrée by going with a "local" who can vouch for you and persuade people to talk with you.

If you have indicators that at least some people *would* accept help if available, then it becomes more important to count those areas. For instance, even on The Slabs, some agencies distribute food baskets and there are many ready takers. In other border counties, staff members of mainstream service agencies such as mental health and health providers indicate that people are asking for help, including help to find housing. Churches also usually know when there are people in need of housing, at least in their immediate neighborhoods. Count planners should tap all these sources of information in determining what areas to include in a homeless search.

5.2   Organizing the Count

Refer to Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of this guide for general guidance on counting unsheltered homeless people. This section addresses issues and options that are particularly relevant to sparsely populated areas and areas where entrée to certain communities is difficult to achieve.

Who Can Help Increase the Count's Accuracy?

Police
Several people in border counties mentioned a number of ways that law enforcement personnel helped them achieve a more accurate count. First, they relied on law enforcement's knowledge of locations where homeless people could be found, whether in town or in the far-flung reaches of their rural counties. They worked with police and county sheriff's departments to identify locations, they went with police one or more times on days just *before* the count to be sure that homeless people were still using the site, and that they knew where the site was and how to access it. Once sites were mapped out, enumerators were assigned to specific places with which they were relatively familiar.

Second, some enumerators in border counties worked in teams with police on the night of the count. Those who did so felt they were more secure with police on the team than without, and were therefore able to approach some areas and count some people whom they otherwise would have skipped because they did not feel safe.

On the other hand, when the people one is seeking to count are undocumented and have ample reason to fear law enforcement, creating counting teams that include police may be less than helpful. The *colonías* areas are some of these places, where teams that include knowledgeable local people would be more help than police.

Knowledgeable Homeless and Formerly Homeless People
If you can find homeless or formerly homeless people who are familiar with the more remote locations where homeless people sleep and who are willing to help with the count, working with them can be extremely productive. They can provide the same types of information as the police, but perhaps about different parts of the homeless population. Thus they can help you fill out the map of where you will need to go on the night of the count. If they are willing to accompany enumerators on count night, even better. Some very successful counts (e.g., Houston/Harris County 2005, Pasadena, California, Appalachian counties in Kentucky) owe their success to the intense ways they included homeless and formerly homeless people in planning, counting, and interviewing.

People Who Know a Specific Community and Are Trusted by Residents
There are several sources of such people. Churches are an obvious place to start. Service agencies may have employees who grew up in or still live in a particularly remote or insular community. An outreach worker, *promotora*, or other link to a mainstream agency may be able to help. Also, some community action agencies may have good relations with some isolated communities where the agency is the only source of assistance with a variety of problems.

Mainstream Service Providers

A number of border counties used mainstream service providers in different ways to improve their homeless counts. These mainstream providers included:

- Mental health agencies with outreach programs to *colonías* and other unincorporated areas;

- Federally qualified health centers with mobile health vans and/or outreach programs, including well-baby programs and *promotoras*;

- Visiting nurse programs that do home visits and become very familiar with remote communities;

- Food distribution programs run by a variety of organizations;

- School districts, particularly through homeless coordinators if the schools have them. School personnel should differentiate persons who are homeless by HUD's definition (see Section 2.1) from those whom the U.S. Department of Education includes in its definition of homeless children. The Department of Education uses a broader definition than HUD, and includes children and youth living in "doubled-up" accommodations and substandard housing, and children waiting foster care placement.

The ways these agencies contributed to improving homeless counts included identifying areas where it would be worthwhile to count, and actually assessing the number of people on their caseload they knew to be homeless and contributing this number to the count. These areas are small enough that service agencies know their caseloads intimately. Even if they did not see a client on the day of the count, they were still asked to report that client as homeless if they knew the client was homeless. They can also contribute information about characteristics and needs, as it is part of their business to know these things. As with schools, if you are getting information from mainstream service providers, be sure they understand and use HUD's definitions of homeless and chronically homeless.

Food Programs

Most people we interviewed mentioned the existence of one or more food programs in their county that made food available in outdoor locations such as parks, encampments outside of cities, or in *colonías*. They assumed that many of the people who came to get food were homeless, but none mentioned including these services as part of their counting approach. Yet in service-based enumerations, food programs have proven to be among the most productive of homeless people who would not have been identified or counted by other means. It is not clear why these counties do not use food programs—perhaps concerns about duplication are part of the reason. However, it would seem a useful thing for border counties to explore ways to include these programs in their counting efforts. Because they usually occur during the daytime, they also afford the opportunity to talk with program users, which could help determine a person's homeless status as well as gather other information about needs and characteristics.

If you are thinking about including food programs as sites for your homeless count, please note that you must make plans to deal with two things:

- Distinguishing between the homeless and non-homeless people using the program. A screener will do this for you, asking each person one or two simple questions about their housing (or lack of it), and

- Eliminating duplicate counting, because a person who uses a food program in the daytime may use a shelter at night, or sleep in a place where teams go at night to count. Chapter 4 describes a number of ways to deal with and eliminate duplication; you should refer to this section when planning your count.

Homeless-Specific and Faith-based Shelter Programs

In addition to emergency shelters and transitional housing programs that are part of Continuums of Care, people interviewed from border counties frequently mentioned the role of churches and other faith-based providers in helping homeless people. This was especially true for the *colonías* and other remote communities where few other agencies of any type operate. Churches in these areas arrange for housing for people without it and, within the range of their immediate community, are likely to know who is without housing and who has other needs. It was not clear whether these churches were enlisted in the homeless counts in border communities, but clearly they could be, either just on the night of the count or in the same way that counties incorporate agency caseloads into their counts.

One Night, Over Time, Repeat, or Hybrid?

As noted in Chapter 2, HUD has specified that communities must conduct a count at a single point in time. Most communities interpret this as "one night," and count both sheltered and unsheltered persons during a single night. Most, whether urban, suburban, or rural, large or small, use the technique of counting the people in shelters and other residential components of the Continuum of Care on the night in question and combining the result with people found by searching streets and other outdoor locations during the same time period. As discussed in Chapter 3, this approach is often favored because it seems to run the least risk of duplicate counting.

> Once a count departs from the one-night 'blitz' approach, interviews are required to unduplicate and screen for homelessness, especially if interviews with unsheltered homeless persons take place at night and during the following day.

Counting Approaches That Need Techniques for Unduplicating

Some communities interpret the timeframe for the count as "24 hours." However, once you depart from the "blitz" approach of counting only in the middle of the night, issues of duplication arise. If you try to count people during an entire 24-hour period, you will be dealing with the possibility that a person could be found in more than one location during

that period of time. For instance, you may have counted an individual at a shelter, again at a soup kitchen, and maybe even later at a warming center. To reduce or eliminate duplicate counting during a 24-hour period, you will need to use screener questions. Furthermore, if you count at daytime locations used by both homeless and non-homeless people, you will also have to use screener questions to identify who is homeless. A discussion about reducing or eliminating duplication and examples of screener questions is included in Sections 4.6 and 4.7.

Count Approaches in Border States and Rural Areas
Any count will miss people. But as the population density dwindles, the odds of missing homeless people go up when a count is restricted to one night. The tradeoff of extending the count to a longer period of time is that you have to do something to eliminate duplication. Approaches to unduplicating are described in Section 4.7. Below are three options for increasing the odds of including more homeless people in your count if they are in your community:

- **Over time.** This approach was used twice by Kentucky to conduct statewide counts in its extensive rural areas (all but 7 of the state's 120 counties are rural). It is described at some length in Chapter 4, so we describe only its highlights here. The count took place over a period of ten weeks. It included techniques for getting a point-in-time count (for the day the count started), and of unduplicating for people who might have been counted more than once. By asking people a series of questions it: (1) used a service-based enumeration approach with wide variety of mainstream service agencies as well as homeless-specific agencies where those existed, to identify clients as homeless; (2) supplemented the service-based enumeration with searches of outdoor locations guided by homeless or formerly homeless people; (3) gathered identifying information to construct an anonymous unique identifier to be used in unduplicating; (4) to obtain a one-night count to report to HUD, and also to learn how many people became homeless between the date the count began and the day it ended, the study established a person's homeless status on the first day of the count as well as on the day the person was counted; and (5) used a very short questionnaire to learn something about each homeless person counted.

- **Repeated.** In its 2005 count, Houston/Harris County used a new approach to counting unsheltered homeless people. It hired a local university to design the count; university staff created a team of enumerators from formerly homeless veterans and paid them to conduct the count five times. Until the final time, each successive attempt increased the count of homeless people as the team learned from experience and got better at finding people. Only when two successive counts came up with roughly the same numbers did they stop and declare the final number the right one.

- **Hybrid.** Several border counties used an approach that blended a simple one-night count with the equivalent of Kentucky's "over time" approach. They asked mainstream and outreach service providers to report everyone on their caseload who

was homeless, whether or not they had seen the person on the day of the count. They especially included service providers that had strong links and access to *colonías* and other remote areas. This tactic effectively includes people in the count as homeless who were in touch with the reporting agency some time recently, and are assumed still to be homeless because the agency is still working on their housing problem.

Everywhere, Populated Areas Only, or Encampments Only

Some cities are able to cover every block in their homeless counts. But that level of coverage is not realistic for most border counties. Some chose to do only incorporated areas, while others made an attempt to reach into unincorporated areas including *colonías,* state and national forests, and other remote areas. Even in incorporated areas, the approach is usually to pre-screen to identify areas where homeless people are known to congregate, and then go to those places on the night of the count. The same approach, which can be labeled "encampments only," can be used for both incorporated and unincorporated areas—that is, figuring out where you are likely to find homeless people, using information from all types of knowledgeable people, and only search those places on the night of the count. Several border counties used this approach. However, some chose not to do desert areas because without interviewing it would be impossible to tell whether people found there were homeless or not— the example given was that many people go out to those areas to use their all-terrain vehicles, you could see that they were there, but would not know if they were homeless.

Wherever you decide to go, it is important to search areas identified as likely to have homeless people *at the same time of day* that people are expected to be there. That is, if a place is identified as one where homeless people sleep at night, go there at night. There is no point going in the daytime, because people will not be there. If a place is known to have a lot of homeless people during the day, go there during the daytime. As there might also be non-homeless people present during the day, you will have to use a screener with questions that help you determine whether or not to count them as homeless and to obtain information to help you unduplicate. The need to interview and the time it takes is offset by the fact that you are much more likely to be able to find people during the day than at night, and they are much more likely to be willing to talk with you. Therefore your count will be more complete (and this guidance strongly advises you to interview at least a sample of people, so you get the information you need for program planning).

6. Using Plant-Capture and Next Day Studies to Improve Street Counts

This chapter reviews two research techniques to help CoCs assess the accuracy of their street count and begin to understand the proportion of 'hidden' homeless people that are being missed by the count. The two studies were implemented in 2005 in New York City. These are *optional* techniques and are not required by HUD.

Based on information submitted in 2005 Continuum of Care applications, HUD knows that a majority of communities (91 percent) are collecting point-in-time information on unsheltered homeless people through a public places or service-based count. While public places and service-based counts are the preferred way for communities to identify the size and characteristics of the unsheltered homeless persons residing in their community, the two methods inevitably present risks of undercounting or over estimating the number of homeless persons in a CoC.

An undercount of unsheltered homeless persons could occur during a public places count for two reasons: 1) when a portion of unsheltered homeless people are not visible to enumerators on the night of the count or 2) if enumerators are unable to accurately determine, either through observation or interview, which individuals in public places are homeless, thereby failing to include a portion of eligible people in the tally. In addition, during service-based counts and interviews, some people may not use services during the count or may not conform with HUD's definition of homelessness at the time of the count, but be considered homeless in the days prior to and immediately following the count.

In contrast to underestimating, communities could count the same unsheltered homeless person more than once, resulting in an inflation of the estimation. This could happen if an unsheltered homeless person moves from one location to another or if an individual completes more than one survey form during a point-in-time count. While CoCs should implement techniques to guard against such duplication, identifying information provided by some individuals may not be adequate to de-duplicate with confidence.

To address these methodological flaws, this chapter provides further information on two techniques that can help communities improve the accuracy of point-in-time public places counts. One, a "plant-capture" study, has been well-tested. It can be used to make adjustments to the results of a point-in-time count for those unsheltered homeless people who are inevitably missed. The other, a "next day" survey, is only at the pilot stage. It can be used to assess the adequacy of a sampling frame and how it might be expanded, and with further refinement and experience, might also contribute to adjustments in the findings of a point-in-time count.

A *plant-capture study* can determine how well enumerators count the unsheltered homeless people who are visible during a point-in-time street count. For this study, pairs of mock

homeless persons, or "plants," are systematically dispersed throughout a jurisdiction on the night of a point-in-time public places count. Researchers track how many of these "plants" are counted by enumeration teams. A *next day survey* can explore how likely it was that unsheltered homeless persons were in a location to be counted during a public places enumeration. In this approach, interviews are conducted with people using the non-shelter services that homeless persons typically use, such as soup kitchens, to understand where unsheltered homeless persons sleep in addition to the streets, parks, cars, and transportation hubs where the public places enumeration teams already count. Combined, these two techniques apply a quality assurance procedure that enables a CoC to estimate the unsheltered homeless persons who were missed in the public places count. Based on the results of a plant-capture study, CoCs could adjust the results of public places counts to more closely approximate the actual number of unsheltered homeless people living in the community. Based on the results of the next day survey, CoCs could choose to expand their sampling frame or adjust their count's outreach strategies.

The quality assurance techniques described in this guide were implemented in New York City during the March 2005 street count, known as the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE). In 2003, the NYC Department of Homeless Services began conducting the public places count of unsheltered homeless people and in 2004 the count expanded from Manhattan and the New York subway system[4] to include Brooklyn and Staten Island. All five boroughs and the subways were part of the 2005 HOPE which took place on the night of March 7 and the early morning of March 8, 2005.

Since 2003, DHS has used a public places sampling method as an alternative to a public places count with complete coverage. Due to the sheer size of New York City and the impossibility of covering every street block, the count organizers divide the city into "study areas" of approximately three-tenths of a mile each, including transportation hubs and subway stations. Each study area is classified as low- or high-density based on whether homeless people were expected to be found in that area at night. On the night of the count, enumerators visit every high-density area and a statistically valid sample of low-density areas between midnight and 4 a.m. Enumerators are trained to interview people who are awake to establish if they are homeless and to count and record observations for individuals who are asleep. By using a sampling strategy, DHS minimizes the number of areas enumerators have to cover while allowing the data collected on the night of the count to be extrapolated to the entire city.

With the support and cooperation of the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Dr. Kim Hopper at the Nathan Kline Institute (NKI) was the lead researcher for the implementation of the plant-capture study and Dr. Marybeth Shinn at New York University (NYU) was the lead researcher for the next day survey. The statistical team at NKI, led by Dr.

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[4] In addition to conducting interviews with and counts of people on subway platforms, enumerators count unsheltered people on subway lines by interviewing and counting those who remain on the train at the end of the line, which may be located outside of Manhattan.

Eugene Laska and Dr. Morris Meisner, devised the statistical design of the study based on previous work using plant-capture techniques to estimate homeless populations.[5] In addition, with the objective of understanding how these techniques could benefit other communities in conducting street counts, HUD provided financial support in addition to NKI, NYU, and DHS in-kind and financial contributions. HUD also used technical assistance resources to assess the techniques used in New York City and prepare this guidance for use by other communities.[6]

6.1   HOPE 2005 and Quality Assurance

The purpose of NYC's quality assurance study was twofold:

1. To determine how well the count and the resulting estimate reflected the actual number of unsheltered homeless people in NYC between 12:15 a.m. and 4 a.m. on March 8th; and

2. To correct for any shortfalls in the count in order to produce a better estimate of visible unsheltered homeless people in NYC during the count.

The study was implemented in two parts: a plant-capture study that took place on the night of the count and next day surveys that were conducted during the two days following the count.

Plant-Capture Study

On the night of the count, researchers from Nathan Kline Institute and New York University implemented the *Shadow Count 2005*. Approximately 120 mock homeless people or plants were placed in pairs at a random sample of sites that the City planned to visit with enumeration teams. By collecting data on whether or not the City's teams of enumerators counted the 59 pairs of plants, the researchers tried to simulate the overall success of HOPE in finding and counting unsheltered homeless people who were on the street, visible from the pathways in and around parks, in subway stations, or on subway trains. The plant-capture approach was first implemented by NKI for the Census Bureau in the 1990 S-Night count in four Census Districts in southern Manhattan.

Approximately 31 percent of plants (18 of the 59 pairs) were not interviewed or counted by HOPE enumerators. Several of the uncounted plants reported that enumerators were in the area but did not approach or interview them. In one of these situations, the enumerators thought the

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[5]   Laska, E.M. & Meisner, M. (1993) A plant-capture method for estimating the size of a population from a single sample, *Biometrics 49*, 209-220.

Martin, E., Laska, E., Hopper, K., Meisner, M., and Wanderling, J. Issues in the use of a plant-capture method for estimating the size of the street dwelling population, *Journal of Official Statistics* 13: 59-73, 1997.

[6]   HUD provided one-time funding to compensate the plants that participated in the study; Erin Wilson of Abt Associates Inc. and Dr. Martha Burt of the Urban Institute attended and observed the study on HUD's behalf and wrote this technical guidance.

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plants were on an undercover stakeout, but generally, especially in crowded public locations, enumerators seemed to make assumptions about who "looked" homeless in spite of the City instructing them to interview every person in the area during the count. It is impossible to know how often plants were not counted by enumerators because they did not "look" homeless, nor is it certain that some plants were not counted by visual inspection. Including all uncounted plants, the results of the plant-capture study estimated that an increase of 28.8 percent, or 1,036 persons, (with a .95 confidence interval or 3,594 to 4,630) should be applied to the City's estimate of unsheltered homeless people. When the researchers only included sites where enumerators never appeared – in other words, eliminating those instances when plants were not counted when enumerators were spotted in the area – an increase of 15 percent was warranted. After consulting with NKI and NYU, the City decided to adjust the count by the mid-point of 22.5 percent, adding 801 people to the original total of 3,594 unsheltered people.

Next Day Survey

The Next Day Survey was also used to evaluate the count. By visiting programs that are frequented by people who may not use shelters (for example, soup kitchens, outreach, mobile food vans, drop-in centers, and shelter intake centers), the next day survey was designed to learn where homeless people slept on the night of HOPE 2005 and, if they were not in shelters or private residences, whether they were visible and could have been counted by the City's enumerators following the rules the City established for the count.[7] The next day survey provided the City with information about areas and locations to incorporate into future enumerations. Also, if implemented with sufficient coverage and completeness, the results of a next day survey can contribute important knowledge about the proportion of homeless people that HOPE would have missed even if it had been executed perfectly. Thus the survey directly addresses the issue of the "hidden homeless" that often figures in criticisms of one-night, point-in-time counts such as HOPE. In New York the results of the survey have been used to expand the ecology of the count to include a number of hard-to-reach areas where homeless people reported sleeping the night of the count. For example, DHS now sends special enumeration teams to count in previously unknown encampments and under certain highways.

Information was collected from 1,171 individuals (378 individuals declined, were asleep, or could not speak English) at 23 programs of five types: 12 soup kitchens, 2 mobile food van "runs," 4 drop-in centers, 4 outreach programs, and 1 shelter intake center. Interviewers first obtained consent from the individual and then asked questions about where the person was staying on the night of the count. If the person reported being homeless and unsheltered, a follow-up question asked about where the individual had been staying and whether the

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[7] For safety reasons, teams of volunteer enumerators are instructed to count the people they can see and talk to on the streets, from pathways, from the pathways in and around parks, and in accessible areas of subway stations and trains. Enumerators are instructed not to search for unsheltered homeless people in potentially unsafe areas, for example back alleys, abandoned buildings, wooded areas in parks, or parts of the subway system away from those that are routinely accessed by the public.

individual thought he or she would have been visible to enumerators on the night of the count.[8] Among unsheltered homeless users of services, 79% slept in locations that would have been covered by the HOPE 2005 study areas. Most of the remainder were in indoor places (9%) or abandoned buildings (5%). Indoor places included primarily stairwells, landings, boiler rooms, or entryways in occupied buildings, but also commercial establishments, such as all-night coffee houses, garages, and warehouses.

The next section of this guide discusses how your community can implement a quality assurance study as part of a street count. It describes in more detail the results from and lessons learned by New York City's experience. It also offers valuable information for any community that conducts a public places count and would like to determine how accurately it has enumerated unsheltered homeless persons.

6.2   Implementing a Quality Assurance Study

This section will help your community decide if a quality assurance study is appropriate for your CoC and provide guidance on implementing the plant capture and next day survey techniques. HUD is not requiring CoCs to implement either type of quality assurance exercise and encourages communities to carefully consider priorities when deciding whether to undertake such an effort.

What Types of Communities Should Consider Conducting a Plant-Capture and/or Next Day Study?

Implementing a quality assurance study in conjunction with your community's public places count requires a significant amount of organization, volunteer assistance, and reliable statistical and sampling knowledge. The first step is figuring out if the benefits of conducting a plant-capture or next day study outweigh potential costs in staff time and volunteer effort. Without a preliminary understanding of the nature and patterns of homelessness in your area and careful cost/benefit consideration, a quality assurance study could misuse valuable CoC resources.

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[8]   Interviewers assumed individuals were "hidden" if they reported being unsheltered and staying in an abandoned building or a similar accommodation (i.e. the stairwell of a building) and did not ask follow-up questions about visibility in these instances. For individuals on subway trains enumerators asked if they rode to the end of the line, where the City's enumerators were counting. Unsheltered persons subway trains were considered "hidden" if they did not ride to the end of the line

You should keep the following in mind:

- The plant-capture and next day survey methods only apply to communities that conduct a public places count, not those that exclusively use service-based enumerations.[9]

- The plant-capture undertaking is most useful for public places counts that rely heavily on volunteers, particularly if the method calls for tasks perceived as challenging, such as approaching everyone in each survey area, traveling to remote areas, or covering areas that are heavily trafficked. In smaller CoCs, where police, formerly homeless people, or outreach workers have knowledge of and seek out well-hidden homeless people, the plant-capture and next day survey studies may be less useful because CoCs are already counting most homeless people.

- A plant-capture study could benefit any CoC that seeks to discover the proportion of visible homeless people who are being counted during the public places enumeration. However, it is most useful for CoCs that use a probability sampling strategy to count and estimate their unsheltered homeless populations. These communities are most in need of the adjustment because extrapolation of the total count relies on the quality of the sampling technique and resulting sample. Most CoCs that use this technique are large and ecologically complex.

- The methods will be more useful for communities that have stringent guidelines for enumerators that limit the number of homeless people they may find. For example, if your CoC instructs enumerators to stay on pathways, avoid going into parks and other unsafe locations, the two methods could help identify shortfalls and adjust your count. If, however, your CoC uses aggressive search techniques, a plant-capture and next day study will be less useful because your CoC may already be finding and counting a significant number of unsheltered homeless people.

- The next day survey technique is especially useful for areas that may have large "hidden homeless" populations – individuals and families who live in abandoned buildings, cars, or other remote areas, but tend to access nonshelter services on a regular basis. The next-day survey is essentially equivalent to a service-based enumeration strategy, but using that strategy to judge the accuracy of and identify gaps in a count instead of being the main approach to an enumeration.

- Although the quality assurance approaches should ideally be conducted together, it is possible to implement a single component of the two-pronged quality assurance approach – for example, by skipping the plant-capture study, but conducting next day surveys to gather information about the proportion of unsheltered homeless people

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[9] This is not meant to suggest that a community that uses a service-based enumeration approach does not need to think about quality assurance – it does. However, the quality assurance methods used for a service-based approach differ from those appropriate for a community that uses a public places enumeration and are not covered in this guidance.

who were not visible during the public places enumeration. If, for instance, your community uses very aggressive search techniques for the public places count (interviewing and counting in alleys, wooded areas, under freeway overpasses, in cars, in abandoned buildings) and you have good reason to believe a majority of visible homeless people are counted, you may only be interested in the finding out about the proportion of homeless people who were "hidden."

- It is important to remember that the coordination of either quality assurance component is in addition to the effort your CoC already expends in organizing the street count. Additional data collection should not be at the expense of your public places count. If possible, CoCs should consider contracting or partnering with an independent evaluator to perform the plant capture or next day study. This approach will lend more credibility to the study results and help ensure staff are not overwhelmed with planning activities.

- You must rigorously implement plant-capture and next day techniques and accurately report results. You should have access to statistical expertise during the planning and analysis phases, and report on confidence intervals and the lower and upper bounds of potential adjustments to your count. The results and how you apply them should be clear.

6.3 Implementing a Plant-Capture Study

Planning for a Plant-Capture Study

Once your CoC decides to conduct a plant-capture study to better understand the proportion of visible unsheltered homeless people who are missed during your point-in-time enumeration, you will need to think about the logistics of implementing such a method. These considerations include:

- Staffing commitments,

- A timeline for preparation,

- Selecting sites for the plants to visit and identifying staging areas,

- Recruiting plants,

- Training plants,

- Developing data collection materials, and

- Other planning logistics.

Staffing Commitments
One of the most important considerations is deciding who should be responsible for implementing the plant-capture study. Should the lead CoC organization, an independent research team, or some other type of organization be responsible for the plant-capture study?

It should likely be an organization or staff that is not involved in routine planning and implementation for the public places count because both involve enormous amounts of work. At the same time, the plant-capture study team needs to know the plans for the enumeration, including, above all, the sites being sampled. Your CoC should keep in mind that plant-capture studies involve a significant amount of data collection, entry and cleaning, and analysis. It may be to the advantage of your CoC to partner with a local academic institution that brings knowledgeable and experienced staff and other resources to the table, as well as access to a pool of potential student volunteers. In New York, NKI and NYU each contributed in-kind research expertise toward implementing the Shadow Count and Next Day study, and in completing the data analysis for each piece.

Depending on the size of your CoC and scale of your plant-capture study, staffing commitments will vary. The New York City plant-capture study required a full-time graduate student employee for recruiting, training, and coordination in the six weeks leading up to the count. The primary researcher spent about 50 percent of his time on the study in the six weeks leading up to the count, with additional time during the last two weeks to field check the sites. The statistics team at NKI spent 40 percent of their time over two weeks to establish a sampling frame and a stratified sample of sites. About five staff members committed between 20 to 40 percent of their time during the last three weeks of preparation to coordinate with the City, map sites, prepare materials for the plants, and field check sites. On the night of the count, a graduate student employee or faculty member (with volunteer assistance) was in charge of managing and deploying the plants at each of the six staging areas in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, and the Bronx. The primary researcher was in charge of the largest staging area, the Upper West Side, and received help from five current or former students and one of his department's staff. After the night of the count, data analysis and the written report absorbed about 15 percent of the primary researcher's time during the month following the count, as well as time from site coordinators and graduate students. The statistical team also contributed about a day of additional time for initial analysis. (More sophisticated analyses (combining results from plant-capture and next day studies) would later require additional statistical work.)

Timeline for Preparation
It will take *at least* six weeks for your CoC to prepare for a plant-capture study. The two most time consuming aspects of the study are recruiting plants and selecting the sites to which they will be assigned on the night of the count. The NKI research team began organizing for the Shadow Count approximately five weeks in advance of February 28, 2005 (the original date of the street count). The team coordinated with the City to ensure that it had accurate information about the sites where the City planned to enumerate, selected a random sample of sites to which teams of plants were sent on the night of the count, recruited and trained plants, arranged facilities for six staging areas throughout the City, and prepared materials, including instructions and an observation recording sheet for the plants, as well as data tracking tools for staff.

Selecting Sites

Selecting the sites to visit on the night of the count will require ongoing communication with the entity that is responsible for organizing your community's public places or street count. If your community's point-in-time count does not use a complete coverage approach, you will need to ensure that plants are being sent to the areas that enumerators are counting. Your study team will also need to develop a sampling strategy if your teams of plants are not able to cover every area included in the point-in-time count. If your community attempts to count every block and area, then *it* does not have to worry about sampling count locations but *you* still do, as you will not be able to plant people everywhere. In this situation, the plant-capture team actually has a much more difficult job than the CoC's because there is no initial sampling plan to serve as the basis for sampling sites where plants will be sent.

In New York City, the research team coordinated very closely with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to gain access to maps of enumeration sites and to learn about which sites the City's teams of volunteer enumerators would visit on the night of the 2005 count. The research team selected a stratified sample of these sites and modified it shortly before the count in light of changes in the City's site selection and the expected number of volunteers available for plants. The sampling strategy was based on three considerations:

1. The likelihood of finding homeless people at that site based on past street counts;

2. The City's designation of the block as having a high or low probability of finding a homeless person at the site on the night of the count; and

3. Plant-capture methodologies from past efforts.

The Shadow Count intended to put plants on a random sample of high- and low-density blocks, for a total of 75 covered study areas. However, because of a shortage of plants on the night of the count, only 59 sites were covered.[10]

Once the initial sample of sites is selected, members of your study team should visit each site to determine its suitability for the study. Sites that are too dangerous or inaccessible, for example an abandoned building or a vacant lot with a fence around it, should be dropped. In New York, the primary researcher tried to visit all of the selected sites in person and at night to get a sense of the surroundings and the number of people that might be at the site at night. Any site that was dropped was substituted using an adjacent site or using the next randomly selected site on the selection list. Visiting sites ahead of time will also help you assess safety concerns, assign the most appropriate team of plants to each study area, and designate a specific location where the plants should station themselves.

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[10]   Due to a winter storm, the count was postponed one week. The postponement likely lead to the shortage of plants on the rescheduled night of the count.

> **Safety Concerns**
>
> The safety of plants was a primary concern during the New York City Shadow Count. Plants were dispatched in pairs and site coordinators carefully assigned plants according to site characteristics. Plants were instructed to leave the area if they ever felt unsafe. Cell phone numbers of the study coordinators were provided to plants on data collection forms and organizers ensured that each pair of plants had at least one cell phone between them in case of emergency.

As your team is finalizing the sample of sites where you will station plants on the night of the study, you should also identify community or other facilities that could be used as staging areas. Although the size of the New York City study required six staging areas (two in Manhattan and one in each other borough), the scale of your study and the geography of your community may require as few as one or two staging areas.

Recruiting Volunteers to Serve as Plants
Your CoC will have to recruit and train a certain number of plants depending on the scale of your plant-capture study and the number of sites you plan to cover on the night of the count. Unless you have a funding source to compensate plants, your community will most likely need to recruit volunteers to act as plants during the study. If your CoC already uses volunteers for your public places count, you should use similar recruitment methods and sources for the plants. Your study team should also recruit from universities or colleges in your area and, if appropriate, consider recruiting or employing formerly homeless people.

NKI and NYU researchers primarily recruited plants from undergraduate and graduate students at colleges and universities throughout New York City. The Upper West Side staging area was largely staffed with Columbia students; the Lower Manhattan staging area was primarily staffed with NYU students. Potential plants were recruited through a variety of outreach efforts, particularly to selected university departments such as public health, and students of the researchers who were conducting the study.

Training Plants
To assist with the recruitment of volunteer plants it is a good idea to hold orientation sessions for people who are interested in participating. Orientation sessions present an opportunity to alleviate concerns about safety and answer important questions. While the orientation provides background and some training information, your research team should also plan to conduct a brief training with plants on the night of the count before they are dispatched to study sites.

Before the night of the count, NKI researchers held four orientation sessions for people who signed up to be plants. Plants were asked to attend one training session. The training sessions typically lasted about two hours, including time to complete paperwork. Each session covered the following topics:

- The study design, logic, origins, and the precedent of the 1990 S-Night Count (the basis for Shadow Count 2005).

- The study as collaboration between NKI/NYU and the DHS, with support from HUD.

- How the Shadow Count related to the City's HOPE count.

- The role of the plants.

- Logistics for the night of the count. Recruits were told: 1) to arrive at their assigned staging area between 9:30 and 10 pm on March 7; 2) to be prepared to travel to their assigned site by midnight, the start of the count; and 3) to dress warmly, bring a blanket, and wear a "crummy" hat.[11]

- Each plant was asked to bring a cell phone so contact could be maintained with emergency numbers provided by the researchers.

Developing Data Collection Materials

Your team should develop materials to distribute to plants so they can easily record data in the field and after they return to the staging area. You should also create tracking sheets to assist staff managing the shadow count and to monitor the location of plants. New York's materials included:

- *Instructions and a Recording Sheet for plants.* This information was included in a small pamphlet for plants to carry with them to their site (see Section 6.6). A sticker with the plant's site number was also attached to the pamphlet. If plants were counted and interviewed, they were instructed to give the stickers to the City's enumerators who placed it on the City enumeration form as a way to keep track of which plants were counted at which sites. Emergency phone numbers were also included on the back of the pamphlet. Plants had three phone numbers to call in the event of emergency or if they needed more information once they reached their sites.

- *A spreadsheet to track plants.* To track which plants were sent to which site, researchers created a spreadsheet to record the assigned site for each individual, the time the plants returned from the site, if they were counted and interviewed, if they saw other people at the site, and other information. The plants were required to sign out on this sheet before leaving the staging area for their assigned site and in order to receive subway fare for travel.

- *A separate sign-in sheet.* In addition to the spreadsheet that was completed when a plant departed for the field, the research team required plants to sign in at the beginning of the evening and sign out once they were completely finished with the count.

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[11] For the 2006 HOPE, NKI and NYU repeated the plant-capture study. This year plants had to make an effort to appear stereotypically homeless (i.e. draped in blankets, layered in coats, etc.) to help minimize volunteer enumerator's instinct to distinguish the plants from actual unsheltered homeless persons.

These procedures were important to ensure that all plants were accounted for at the end of the night. In New York these sign-in and sign-out sheets also served as documentation for payment (plants received $100 for the night).

Other Planning Logistics
Your research team may want to prepare for any other needs that you think may come up on the night of the study. In New York, the primary researcher and organizer had arranged initially for a nurse to be at one of the staging areas in case of emergency (the nurse did not actually participate due to the date change). Two lawyers were on call in the event of any incidents with police or other legal issues.

It is a good idea to call and remind plants that they are scheduled to participate in the count either the day prior to or early on the day of the enumeration. You should also contact any plants that do not arrive at the staging area by 30 minutes past the designated time of arrival. In addition, emphasize that plants do not need to have attended an orientation session to volunteer on the night of the count. Volunteer plants may be encouraged to bring interested friends or family members. However, your CoC will need to determine the required age limit for plants, e.g. plants must be at least 18 years of age to volunteer.

The Night of the Count

The following section highlights details that you will need to pay attention to on the night of the count. It is based on observations from New York's Shadow Count.

Timing
Staff should arrive at staging areas with plenty of time to organize and train plants before they are dispatched to the field. Depending on the location and size of your community, be sure to allow adequate travel time for teams of plants to get to their assigned sites. You should instruct plants to arrive at the staging site about two hours before the start of the count to permit time for a brief refresher training, site assignments, and travel to sites.

Logistics
You should set up a sign-in table to greet volunteers as they arrive and a separate logistics table with the materials to be distributed to the plants. Because public places counts frequently take place late at night or early in the morning, you should try to provide sustenance for the plants before and after the count, such as bagels, donuts, coffee, water, or fruit. In addition, be sure to have extra flashlights, ponchos in case of rain, and adequate pens, pencils, and other office supplies for plants and staff.

Assigning Sites
You should have maps for each of the sites that you plan to cover to assist you in assigning sites and explaining site locations to the plants. In New York, the primary site coordinator talked with each pair of plants prior to assigning them to a study site to make sure they were

comfortable with going to certain locations in the City. Some plants were instructed to situate themselves in specific locations at their site, while others had more flexibility in choosing a location. Each pair of plants received a map of their site location to take with them.

Communication with Other Staging Areas
Be sure to establish a method of communication with other staging areas via cell phones or walkie talkies. Communication was essential in New York when the change in the date of the street count due to inclement weather led to a fewer number of plants than expected. Organizers reshuffled staging area and site assignments according to which boroughs were in need of additional plants.

Site Instructions
You should review instructions with each group at each staging area prior to sending plants out to their sites. In New York, plants were instructed to stay at their assigned site for the duration of the count or until they were counted by a team of City enumerators or contacted by staff from the staging area. Plants were not to interact with other people at their assigned site. They were told to remain visible and alert, not to "act" homeless, for example, not to panhandle, and to collect information on three primary aspects of the experience:

1. Did enumerators visit the site?

2. Did the enumerators count and/or interview the people at the site?

3. Did the enumerators count/interview the site completely as far as the plants could tell?

Plants were given an Instruction and Recording Sheet pamphlet to take with them to their site. If approached by a City enumeration team, the plant was instructed to disclose their identity as a plant and hand over the site-specific sticker located on the inside of the Instruction and Recording Sheet. While in the field, plants were instructed to complete the recording sheet, noting the time they were counted and any other people who may not have been counted at the site. Plants were told to stay somewhat close to one another once on-site. If they felt uncomfortable or unsafe, they were instructed to call the staging area or return to the staging area for reassignment to another site. Plants were instructed to return to the staging area to be debriefed once they were counted or, if they were not counted, by the end of the count.

Return and Debriefing
When plants begin returning to the staging area after the count, it is important to have a staff person interview and debrief them for details about their experience. In New York, plants began returning to the site about 45 minutes into the count. As each pair returned, they were debriefed and asked to complete their Recording Sheet, if they had not already done so. During the debrief, the plant and staff person reviewed the answers to Recording Sheet questions. Staff also probed for additional details about other people who were at the site, what happened when they were counted, and any other useful details. After a plant was debriefed, he or she could sign out on the initial sign-in sheet and head home. At the end of

the night, the team double-checked the data collection sheet *and* the sign-in sheet to ensure that everyone who was sent out to a site reported back to the staging area.

Assessing the Quality of Plant-Capture Data

As your CoC begins data entry and analysis, you should review the information collected from each plant to establish if there were any instances where plants were unclear about whether they were counted or not. This may have occurred when plants saw enumerators, but were not interviewed and do not think they were counted. For these ambiguous incidents you should contact a staff person involved with the count for clarification. One way to avoid this type of ambiguity altogether is to emphasize the interview requirement with your enumerators during the training for the count. If enumerators interview every person they come across in their assigned area (and collect each sticker), each plant that is visible should be counted.

The plant-capture data entry and analysis in New York City revealed a handful of ambiguities. Researchers were able to speak with some of the enumeration teams responsible for counting areas with ambiguous situations to better understand why some plants were counted and others were not. Whereas 11 plant pairs were not counted because they never saw HOPE enumerators, 7 plants did see enumerators, but were not interviewed (although they may have been counted by visual inspection). This most frequently happened in crowded locations, particularly subway stations, where enumerators may have been using a triage strategy to quickly determine who *seemed* most likely to be homeless and interview them before they switched locations. In addition, there were two incidents of ambiguity related to the boundaries of enumerators' assigned sites. In one of these scenarios plants were sitting outside the wall of a park and were seen, but were not counted by volunteers who thought the plants were outside of their assigned area. Two teams of plants were also late arriving to their sites, one by 15 minutes and the other by one hour. During the analysis, the first was counted because they saw enumerators and the latter was dropped from the sample.

6.4   Implementing a Next Day Survey

The following section provides details on organizing and carrying out a next day survey study. This type of study helps your CoC determine locations where non-sheltered, service-using homeless persons stayed or slept during the point-in-time public places count. Next day surveys consist of brief interviews with users of non-shelter services to identify unsheltered homeless persons and determine if they would have been visible during the street count to an enumerator following the community's established counting procedures. Using this information, researchers can adjust procedures for the count to better capture unsheltered homeless people who are "hidden" or not visible to enumerators during the count.

Preparing for the Next Day Survey

To implement a next day survey your CoC first needs to identify the types of non-shelter services in your community that unsheltered homeless persons typically use. These services

may include soup kitchens, drop-in centers, outreach services, or mobile food or health services. You should determine a sampling procedure if there are too many programs for you to conduct interviews at all of the locations. You will also need to develop a short survey to gather the appropriate information from respondents, recruit people to conduct the survey, decide on the timing of the survey and how many days to interview to minimize duplication, and devise one or more procedures for sampling service users at large sites, assuming it will be difficult to interview every person.

Selecting and Recruiting Non-shelter Service Sites
To select and recruit non-shelter service sites, you first need to assemble a list of programs that tend to serve unsheltered homeless people. For each program, you will need information about the program size or number of people served (either per day or per meal, depending on the program type), hours and days of operation, and contact information for the program staff. In all probability, you already have all or most of this information as part of your most recent McKinney-Vento SuperNOFA application, but you should update it even if it is a few months old.

If possible, you should begin by contacting a random sample of programs to obtain or verify the needed information and request their participation. Although you will begin with a random sample, you should recognize that the mix of participating programs will largely be determined by other factors, including the availability of volunteers or staff to conduct the surveys and the willingness of programs to be involved in the study. You should try to include different types and sizes of programs (soup kitchens, outreach, mobile health services, mobile food services, etc.) and work hard to encourage the largest services in the community to participate. If your CoC is sampling sites, you may need to engage a local statistical consultant to ensure that the sample of programs is large enough that you have a good representation of programs.

In New York, the researchers spoke with City staff, other researchers, and service providers to figure out what types of programs to include in the study. They decided to include five types of programs in the next day survey – soup kitchens, outreach programs, mobile food vans, drop-in centers, and shelter intake centers – and then began assembling lists of these programs from different sources. The lists included hours and days of operation, the estimated number of users, and contact information for the person in charge of the program.

The primary researcher sought a representative sample of programs and started with a random sample stratified by borough and frequency of service (as a proxy for program size). Two programs were ultimately unable to participate due to the date change of the City's public places count. Other programs could not be included because they did not operate on Tuesdays or Wednesdays, the two days of the week that the next day survey took place. The City's assessment shelters and a handful of outreach programs, mostly in the outer boroughs, agreed to have program staff administer the next day surveys, so volunteer interviewers were not assigned to these sites. Ultimately, the number and locations of the nonshelter services selected

for participation were the result of a combination of factors, including program size (and hence importance), program days and times of operation, the number of volunteers available to conduct surveys, and the programs' willingness to be included or to have on-site program staff conduct the surveys. The mix of program types included:

- 12 soup kitchens (7 of which were open three or more days per week; 5 were open two or fewer days per week);

- 4 drop-in centers;

- 4 outreach programs;

- 2 mobile food programs; and

- 1 shelter intake center.

Developing the Survey

The survey your CoC develops for the Next Day Study should include a consent statement and a brief series of questions to find out where the individual was staying on the night of the count. You will not need to collect detailed geographic information about where each person was located, only a general description of the type of place – for example, the street, an abandoned building, an apartment or rented room, or a relative's house. An initial screener question will help you classify individuals into three groups: not homeless, sheltered homeless, or unsheltered homeless. Sheltered homeless are those people who are staying in emergency shelters, drop-in facilities, or other non-street places where they will be included in your community's point-in-time sheltered count. For the purposes of the next day survey, you are concerned about gathering information from the unsheltered homeless people about the type of place they were staying on the night of the count and if they were visible to enumerators.

The interview guide used in the next day survey in New York was very short (see Section 6.7). It was customized to each location, inserting the name of the program and, depending on the day of the interview, changing the first question to be sure to ask where the person slept on the night of the count. For two classes of people, those who were not homeless and the sheltered homeless, the survey ended after the first question with a brief follow-up question about the type of place in which the person was staying. The third class of people, unsheltered homeless people, was the core group of interest for the next day survey. If a person responded that he or she was homeless and unsheltered on the night of the count, the interviewer asked where the person slept or stayed and whether she or he could have been seen from a street or pathway.

Because an academic institution was involved and the next day survey involved interviewing people directly, Institutional Review Board (IRB) human subjects approval was required for

the survey instrument in New York.[12] Especially if an academic institution is involved, you should allot adequate time in your planning process for the institution's IRB review and approval, if necessary.

Staffing Commitments and Recruiting and Training Interviewers
The staffing demands of a next day survey are somewhat less than the plant-capture component, especially if program staff stationed at service locations are willing to conduct the interviews with their clients. In New York the lead researcher who planned and organized the next day survey spent about 25 percent of her time on the study in the six weeks proceeding the count and also had assistance from a graduate research assistant who spent about 10 percent of his time preparing for the study. In addition, four other staff people collectively spent about 10 percent of their time preparing for the Survey.

Although you will most likely be recruiting fewer volunteers for a next day survey, you should ensure that they are adept interviewers. Your CoC should plan to assign at least two volunteer interviewers to each next day survey site with larger numbers at your community's biggest nonshelter service facilities. Organizers of the next day survey in New York recruited 23 volunteers who covered 18 of the 23 service sites, several of whom conducted interviews at two or more sites. Most of the volunteer interviewers were graduate students or colleagues known to the researchers managing the study.

The coordinator of the next Day Study ran several training sessions for survey volunteers that fit into the interviewers' schedules. A session lasted an hour or less, and followed the general outline of the "Evaluating the Count—Procedures for Volunteers" (see Section 6.8). Interviewers that were not able to meet with the lead researcher reviewed the summary and contacted the researcher with any questions.

Timing of a Next Day Survey
The next day survey took place over two days in New York, but could be limited to one day for smaller communities. One important issue for a next day survey is the possibility of duplicate counting, especially if the survey is conducted over two or more days and in numerous service locations of different types. To deal with duplication, your CoC should include a question in the survey that asks anyone who was homeless on the night of the count if they used any of the other types of programs included in the next day survey study within a specific time span. Analysis of these responses will allow your research team to develop a rough estimate of possible duplication.

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[12] The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee within an institution that reviews and approves proposed research studies that involve human subjects. IRB review is designed to protect participant's rights and ensure compliance with federal regulations and other ethical standards.

Next Day Survey: Procedures in the Field

Prior to the next day survey you should contact participating programs to remind program directors or site supervisors about the survey and convey any relevant contact or other information to the volunteer interviewers assigned to the site. It is important to emphasize that interviewers:

- **Establish a complete count of people who use the site during the time of the next day survey and track refusals for interviews.** Getting a complete count is important because volunteers may not be able to approach and interview every person at the site, although it is likely that they will come very close. To establish accurate estimates your research team will need to know what proportion of people using the site they were actually able to interview. Coming up with a total count can be done in several ways. Interviewers may be able to interview everyone served by the program, in which case the completed surveys provide the total count. Interviewers could speak with everyone and add people who agree to participate and those who refused to total a complete count. Most likely, however, the program itself will keep a tally of the number of people served so interviewers can just record that count. In addition to establishing a complete count, interviewers should tally refusals. Your team may want to establish a one-page form or other easy way for interviewers to keep track of refusals.

- **Know how to select people to talk with if they are unable to interview everyone.** At most sites interviewers will be able to approach every person to request an interview. In New York, even at the largest soup kitchen in the city, which estimates serving 1100-1200 meals every lunchtime, the interviewers had to use sampling techniques, but were able to interview most of those receiving services. However, if the number of people served is considerable and the number of interviewers limited, volunteers should interview a sample by approaching every *nth* person (for example, every third or fifth person) depending on the total number of people expected to be served. You should outline sampling procedures with interviewers during the training.

- **Obtain consent and phrase questions to encourage participation.** It is unlikely that any interviewer will have time to read the full detailed consent statement. (See Section 6.9 for New York's consent.) New York City's enumerators used the following statement to establish consent and CoCs could adopt a similar phrase to obtain consent: "I would like to ask you a few questions about your housing situation. All of your answers are strictly confidential. If you would like to participate, I will begin the survey. Would you like to participate?" This type of explanation coupled with distributed copies of the full consent statement and a list of homeless resources worked well in New York.

Analysis of Next Day Survey Data

While you are preparing for the next day survey, you will want to think about how you intend to analyze the data. Analysis will require solid quantitative skills. If you do not have a staff person with these data analysis skills, you should seek additional help. If you will also need

assistance with sampling non-shelter programs to include in the study, this person will likely be able to assist with analysis, as well.

Your team should plan on a two-month period to complete data analysis and write a final report. However, the amount of time needed will vary depending on your CoC's size and the amount of data you collect. In New York, collecting data from all of the next day survey sites took about 10 percent of the primary researcher's time over a four-week period following the count. Data entry and analysis took about two weeks of full-time staff work, not including the written report.

6.5 A Summary of Lessons Learned from New York

New York City's plant-capture and next day studies provide valuable information for other communities that seek to improve their enumeration of homeless people by conducting similar quality assurance studies. The techniques will help your CoC to refine the methods used for counting homeless people and potentially increase the accuracy of counts. This section highlights some important lessons learned in New York that could benefit other communities.

Most importantly, any community considering a plant-capture or next day study must: (1) have access to statistical expertise for planning and analysis and (2) accurately report the results, including confidence intervals and lower and upper bounds. Your audience **must** understand the results and how they were applied to the baseline count of unsheltered homeless persons.

Plant-Capture Study: Lessons Learned

The plant-capture study implemented by NKI and NYU with the support of the New York City Department of Homeless Services, discovered that between 15 to 30 percent of plants had been missed during the point-in-time public places count, depending on what one counts as a "true miss." The City chose to increase the overall unsheltered estimate by 22.5 percent, the midpoint of the range.

If your community is considering a plant-capture study you should remember the following:

- The plant-capture undertaking is most useful for public places counts that rely heavily on volunteers, particularly if the method calls for tasks perceived as challenging, such as approaching everyone in each survey area, traveling to remote areas, or covering locations that are heavy-traffic areas. In smaller CoCs, where police, formerly homeless people, or outreach workers have knowledge of and seek out well-hidden homeless people, the plant-capture and next day survey studies may be less useful because CoCs are already counting most homeless people.

- Your team should remember to give very specific instructions to plants during the training. Remind plants that they should not reveal their identity as plants to

enumerators until they are approached to be interviewed and counted, nor should they expose the locations of other plants.

- Be prepared for delays due to weather, understand how such delays could impact your study, and be ready to adjust accordingly on the night of the count. In New York, the postponement caused fewer sites to be covered (59 as opposed to the planned 75) and simultaneously reduced the number of the City's volunteer enumerators.

Next Day Survey: Lessons Learned

The results from the next day survey suggest that unsheltered homeless persons in Manhattan were more likely to be visible during the count than those located in the outer boroughs and that those located on the surface or street, as opposed to in the subway system, were less likely to be visible. The results estimate that 31 to 44 percent of homeless persons in Manhattan and 48 to 68 percent of homeless persons in outer boroughs were not visible during the count. Among unsheltered homeless users of services, 79% were in areas covered by HOPE 2005. Most of the remainder were in indoor places (9%) or abandoned buildings (5%). Indoor places included primarily stairwells, landings, boiler rooms, or entryways in occupied buildings, but also commercial establishments, such as all-night coffee houses. New York City elected not to adjust the total count based on the next day survey because the method was new and the results had not been replicated. The City did use the results to refine enumeration methods in the 2006 count to include more hard-to-reach locations.

If your community is considering a next day survey study you should remember the following:

- If you cannot conduct interviews at all nonshelter sites, the methods you use for sampling sites are very important. Ideally, you should have some information about the types and locations of services unsheltered people tend to use and be able to weight your sample accordingly. Researchers in New York, however, found that the type of service at which an individual was interviewed had no impact on whether or not that person was visible during the count, which was an unexpected result that could have been due to chance. However, the service location where the individual was interviewed did impact whether or not an individual was homeless and unsheltered.

- It may be possible to use the next day survey and the results from a street count to gauge which enumeration method is better for your CoC to use. This can only be determined if you ask the people enumerated during the count whether they use non-shelter services and which types they tend to use. If most unsheltered homeless persons do use non-shelter services then your community may want to use a service-based approach instead of a street count. If, however, significant portions of unsheltered homeless persons do not report using services, a street count is necessary.

- The next day survey is a relatively new technique, which holds promise for estimating the number of service-using unsheltered persons who were not visible and not

counted during a street count. Further research is required to ensure reliable and accurate use of this approach. Ideally, the next day survey should be used in conjunction with an interview question that establishes how many unsheltered homeless persons counted during the street count use services. This would allow researchers to measure the proportion of service-using unsheltered people who are not visible on the night of the count AND the proportion of unsheltered homeless people who do not use services, thereby providing information to estimate the complete picture of "hidden homelessness." The researchers and authors of this study suggest this more complete approach be the focus of future research.

Sections 6.6 – 6.9 provide examples of materials that were used to conduct the plant-capture and next day studies in New York, including:

- The instructions and recording sheet for plants;

- The next day survey;

- Procedures for volunteers who were conducting interviews for the next day study; and

- The consent statement for the next day study.

6.6   Instructions and Recording Sheet for Plants

New York State

omh

Office of Mental Health

A system of mental health care for New Yorkers

Sharon Carpinello, RN, Ph.D.
Commissioner

nkii

Nathan S. Kline Institute for Psychiatric Research
140 Old Orangeburg Road
Orangeburg, New York 10962

In collaboration with the NYC
Department of Homeless Services

Emergency Numbers

Staging Area

Coordinating Center

shadow count '05

Instructions

Your job is to pass for a homeless person on the street tonight. But you will be stable, well-behaved, dressed-for-the-weather, and approachable.

• Stay in your allotted location between the hours of 12 and 3 a.m. (or until counted or called by your staging area coordinator).
• Remain visible and awake.
• Stay reasonably near, or at least in eye contact with, other decoys at your site.
• Avoid interacting with other people who may be at the site – if questioned, explain that you are part of the City's effort to count people on the street.
• No eccentric or bizarre behavior, please. (This is a study, not an audition.)
• Respond honestly if approached by one of the City's HOPE interview teams – that is, disclose your status as a decoy (part of a "Quality Control" study), and hand over your sticker.
• Record what happens during the hours of the count. Did they come? Did they count? Did they count completely? (See next page for details)

MOST IMPORTANT

Your safety is paramount – if you feel uncomfortable in a setting, walk away and call your staging area. We'll either re-assign or pick you up. In an emergency: call 911.

Recording Sheet

Did a team of HOPE interviewers visit the site?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, approximate time of arrival _____

Were you interviewed and/or counted?

• Interviewed ☐ Yes ☐ No
• Turned over your sticker ☐ Yes ☐ No
• Counted ☐ Yes ☐ No
• Probably counted (not sure) ☐ Yes ☐ No

Did the HOPE team interview and/or count *other people* at the site?

• Interviewed ☐ Yes ☐ No
• Counted/not interviewed ☐ Yes ☐ No

How many people were at your site when the HOPE team arrived—*including yourself and any other decoys*? _____

• How many of them were interviewed: _____
• How many of them were counted: _____

Additional comments on how the HOPE team of interviewers operated:

Site

Time you arrived: _____

6.7   Next Day Survey

Evaluating the Count – Next Day Survey: Program: _____

HAND PROJECT DESCRIPTION; READ FIRST PARAGRAPH

Where did you sleep Monday night (last night/ the night before last)? Was it your own place, a shelter, or someplace else?

_____A. **Not Homeless:** e.g., own place, friend's or relative's place, dorm room, SRO, or other ordinary accommodation (not for homeless people). → *THANK RESPONDENT, END INTERVIEW*

_____B. **Homeless Program**: e.g., shelter, drop-in center, church shelter bed, or other program designed for homeless people. → *THANK RESPONDENT, END INTERVIEW.*

_____C. **Somewhere else**: → *Probe as needed to code and then ask follow-up:*

_____ 1. **Street** → *Ask and circle:* Could someone walking along the street have seen you?
     a. Yes   b. No → **Comment:** _____

_____ 2. **Subway train** → *Ask and circle:* Did you ride to the end of the line?
     a**. Yes   b. No** → **Comment:** _____

_____ 3. **Subway station or tunnel** → *Ask and circle:* Could someone walking along the platform or a passage have seen you?
     a. Yes   b. No → **Comment:**_____

_____ 4. **Transportation Hub** (e.g., Port Authority, Penn Station) → *Ask and circle:* Could someone walking around [**INSERT NAME**] have seen you?
     a. Yes   b. No → **Comment:** _____

_____ 5. **Park** → *Ask and circle:* Could someone walking along paths in the park have seen you?
     a. Yes   b. No → **Comment:** _____

_____ 6. **Abandoned building**

_____ 7. **Indoor place not intended for living** (e.g. boiler room, stairwell, commercial building)

_____ 8. **Other** → **Specify (no address needed)** _____
     Probe for whether person could have been seen by City enumerators
     a. Yes   b. No → **Comment:** _____

CONTINUE: Did you use any of the following services in the last 24 hours? **(check all that apply):**

    _____ 1. **Soup kitchen**
    _____ 2. **Food van or mobile food program**
    _____ 3. **Outreach program**
    _____ 4. **Drop-in Center**

Additional comments:_____

THANK RESPONDENT; OFFER LIST OF DROP-IN CENTERS & SHELTERS, END INTERVIEW.

****

Evaluating the Count: Site Summary Sheet

Please fill out one site summary for each program or service where you collect information.

Your name: _____

How we can reach you (phone or e-mail)?_____

Name of program or service_____

Type:
    _____ 1. Soup kitchen
    _____ 2. Food van or mobile food program
    _____ 3. Outreach program
    _____ 4. Drop-in Center
    _____ 5. Shelter intake

Day of interviews: _____ Start time: _____AM PM End time: _____AM PM

How many people used the service during this period: _____

Is this number:

    _____1. A count

    _____2. An estimate: how did you estimate?

_____
_____

Did you approach :

      _____1. Everyone

      _____2. A random sample: Please describe your
procedure:_____
_____
_____

How many people refused to talk to you? _____
(Note: you may want to keep a tally at the bottom of this page)

Please include any comments or impressions on the back of this page. Make arrangements to return to the study director (XXX) XXX-XXXX; e-mail address.

Tally for refusals:

6.8   Evaluating the Count – Procedures for Volunteers

Thank you so much for agreeing to help with our study! Please read through this before you go to your site or service, and call the study director at (XXX) XXX-XXXX with any questions.

Study Goal. The goal of the study is to determine whether people who were homeless on the night of the City's count were in a position to be counted. The City gets a count of everyone in shelters and drop-in centers, and sends volunteers to a sample of locations on streets and subways and stations, parks, and transportation hubs. People who are visible to the City's volunteers in these locations are counted, and the City then estimates how many such people it would have counted if it had surveyed every street, etc., instead of only a sample. We want to determine whether there is any sizable group of people who were in places that were off-limit for purposes of the count (potentially dangerous areas, tunnels, fenced-in abandoned lots, abandoned buildings, stairwells/boiler rooms/loading docks in private residences or businesses, etc.). We also want to know whether people at the sampled sites are readily visible to passers-by (and not hidden by makeshift shelter, barriers, or other protections). All of these people would be missed by the count.

How we picked your site or service. We picked a random sample of soup kitchens, drop in centers, mobile food programs and outreach programs throughout the City.

What to do to get ready: Please review these procedures, and make sure you have enough project summaries, next day surveys, and lists of drop-in centers and shelters for everyone. We'll pay for duplicating.

What to do at your site or service: 1) Counting people who are there. Please get a count of all the people served during the time you are there. If you have to estimate, tell us how you did that on the Site Summary Sheet.

What to do at your site or service: 2) Picking people to talk to. Please consider whether you have time to approach every person at your site during the time you are there or not. If not, please decide on a way to get a random sample of people. Random means that every person has an equal chance of being approached, so that we don't talk to the people that we know better, or who look friendly or have any other special characteristic. If you are interviewing people on line, or if people are sitting down, you could take every second person or every third, or every fourth. It's better to underestimate the number of people you can talk to rather than overestimate, so that no group gets left out. If people are coming through a moving line, you could position yourself at some imaginary line, talk to the first person who passes the line, then as soon as you are done with that person talk to the next person who passes the line, etc. Make a plan. If you have a question, call (XXX) XXX-XXXX, and we'll try to answer it. (We'll ask you to summarize what you did on the Site Summary Sheet.)

What to do at your site or service: 3) Getting permission, counting refusals. Please read the first paragraph of the project summary statement – you can leave out the part about being over 18 if the person is clearly well over 18 – and hand it to the person. (They don't have to take it.) Keep a count of everyone who refuses to answer the questions by tallying them on the Site Summary Sheet.

What to do at your site or service: 4) Interviewing people who agree. Ask the questions of everyone who agrees, and fill out a Next Day Survey for each person. The first question asks where the person was the night of the count. On Tuesday, say "last night," On Wednesday say "the night before last" or "Monday night." Be sure the person understands. If the person was in a home, dorm, etc., or in a shelter or drop-in center the night of the count, you are done. If the person was homeless and NOT in a shelter or drop-in center, PROBE until you can code where the person was. This means, follow-up in your own words until you know enough to chose one of the responses 1-8. Note that response 8 is "other" for anything that doesn't fit above, but we ask you to specify what sort of other place. Then, if indicated, ask the follow up question to determine whether the person could have been seen by a City enumerator (volunteer counter) following directions to walk along the street, park, subway platform etc. (Note that the City counts people who stay on subway trains at the end of the line.) The last question about services, helps us to determine whether the person has used other services, where someone else might have asked our questions. You don't need to ask about the kind of service where you are. For example, if you are at a soup kitchen, we know the person has used a soup kitchen, so you don't need to ask this, but please do ask about mobile food programs, outreach programs, and drop-in centers. (We may have already deleted the question about the type of service where you are from the Next Day Survey you got.)

What do when you are done, After finishing with the interviews, look over the surveys and make sure they are complete and readable. If you made any comments that might be hard to read or understand, please try to clarify them. Then please fill out the Site Summary Sheet. You don't need to put the program name on each Next Day Survey, but if you are visiting more than one program, fill out a separate Site Summary Sheet for each program, and make sure that it is clear which surveys go with which summary sheet. Please arrange with the study director (e-mail address) how to get the surveys and the site summary back to her. If you spent money to duplicate surveys or to mail them back, include that information, and where we can send you a check.

THANKS AGAIN!!!!

6.9   Consent Statement for Next Day Survey

Evaluating the Count: Project Summary Statement

Researchers at New York University and the Nathan Kline Institute are trying to evaluate New York City's count of homeless people. We would like to ask you a few questions about where you were at the time of the count; this will take 2 or 3 minutes. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. We don't need your name or address, so what you say to us is confidential. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and will have no effect on any services you might receive, and you don't need to answer any questions you choose not to answer. There are no risks or benefits to your participation. We'll also give you a list of drop-in centers and shelters, whether or not you decide to answer any of our questions.

If you have any questions about the study, please call the study director, [NAME], New York University, (XXX) XXX-XXXX. If you have any questions about being in the study, please call the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects, (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thanks for your help!

7. Sample Data Collection Instruments and Other Resources

This chapter provides several resources that CoCs can use in designing their counts and data collection efforts, including sample "tally sheets" for simple counts of homeless people in public places, simple surveys for data collection during a street count, and more detailed interview guides used primarily with the service-based approach. The chapter also provides preliminary guidance on how to conduct a count of unsheltered homeless people in a sample of locations and extrapolate that data to locations not counted in a way that is statistically valid and acceptable to HUD. Finally, the chapter provides the names and contact information for the CoC representatives interviewed for this guide. These individuals are willing to answer questions about their count methodology and procedures – all emphasized the importance of not "reinventing the wheel."

7.1 Tally Sheets for Public Places Counts

Following are two examples of enumeration forms, or "tally sheets," used in counts of unsheltered homeless people in Seattle/King County and the Atlanta metropolitan area.

The Seattle/King County form asks for a total count of men, women, adults of unknown gender, and children under 18. For each person counted, the form also asks the enumerator to record the person's location, including a category for "walking around." Finally, the second page of the tally sheet asks whether any families with children were encountered and if so, how many. It also includes space where the enumerator can provide additional information about the count. For example, the enumerator might want to note the specific location of a person observed if there is some question as to whether this person is located within the boundaries of the enumerator's study area. Enumerators are also encouraged to record stories about the people they encounter. These stories bring a human element to the process and are used for press releases and in reports.

The Atlanta form asks enumerators to record the number of homeless individuals and homeless families seen in separate sections of the form. Homeless individuals are recorded in one of the following categories: single adult men (18 or older), single adult women, single male youth (under 18), single female youth, and single persons of undetermined age or gender. For each homeless family unit seen, the enumerator is asked to record the number of adult men, adult women, youth, and persons of undetermined age or gender. In addition to recording the number of homeless individuals and homeless families, the form also asks enumerators to detail when groups of five or more homeless individuals were observed by recording the number of individuals and describing the location where the homeless individuals were found. The form also includes a small area for notes.

Seattle Enumeration Form[13]

Count Area_____

One Night Count of the Homeless
January 26th 2007

We found these people:

WHO	TALLY	TOTAL
Men		
Women		
Gender unknown		
Children (under 18)		
TOTAL COUNTED		

In these locations:
(one tally for each person)

Benches		
Parking Garages		
Cars/Trucks Assume 2 people per vehicle average		
Hand-Built Structures (lean-to, tent, etc.) Assume 2 people per structure average		
Under roadways/bridges		
Doorways		
City Parks		
Bushes/Undergrowth		
Bus Stops		
Alleys		
Walking Around		
Other (specify):		
TOTAL PER LOCATIONS		

Operation Nightwatch 206-329-2099

THESE FIGURES NEED TO MATCH

Any other information? Any stories? Record them on the back of this sheet.

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[13]   The form was reproduced from a document provided by Alison Eisinger of the Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless.

Did you find any families with children?   ☐ Yes   ☐ Yes   **If yes, how many?**
Do you have any stories to share about people you encountered?

Atlanta Enumeration Form[14]

Pathways: 2007 Tri-Jurisdiction Metro-Atlanta Homeless Census
Street Tally Sheet: Rosel Fann Site

Form for Enumeration Area: 108   **Blockgroup # (only <u>one</u>): 75003**

Enumerators: Jane Doe and Bob Smith _____

_____

# of Single ADULT MEN (18 or Older)	# of Single ADULT WOMEN (18 or Older)	# of Single YOUTH MALE (under 18)	# of Single YOUTH FEMALE (under 18)	# of Single Persons UNKNOWN AGE/GENDER
~~////~~ ~~////~~ ~~////~~ //	//	/		
Total: 17	**Total: 2**	**Total: 1**	**Total: 0**	**Total: 0**

FAMILY UNITS	# ADULT MEN (18 or Older)	# ADULT WOMEN (18 or Older)	# Youth (Under 18)	# Persons, Undetermined Age/Gender
Family 1	/	/	//	
Family 2		/	/	
Family 3		/	///	
Family 4				
Family 5				

Captain name: **Phone:**

Captain name: **Phone:**

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[14]   This form was reproduced from a document provided by Pathways Community Network.

2007 Tri-J Homeless Census: LOCATION INFORMATION FORM

For Enumeration Area: 108   Blockgroup # (only <u>one</u>): 75003

Use the upper part of this form to give details about locations at which you found groups of 5 or more homeless persons. If you wish, or have time, you can also record location information about smaller groups or single individuals.

For each separate location, place a check or X in the appropriate left-hand box below to show the approximate number of homeless persons you found there. Then use the right-hand column to describe where you found the homeless persons. Be <u>specific</u> about the location – give a street intersection or address if possible.

Number of persons: Description of location where you found these persons

5 to 10	10 to 20	20 or More	
	X		**Corner of Park Avenue and Casanova Street**

Use this section to record other observations about the tally or location, *especially if you found no homeless persons in this block group*. Thank you!

7.2   Tally Sheet Plus Short Interview

Following is the tally sheet and short interview form used in New York City's 2006 street count of Manhattan.[15] The form includes a series of screener questions to find out about the person's housing status and determine whether he or she is homeless. These questions are only asked of people who are awake and agree to participate in the survey. For each person believed to be homeless based on the screener questions, the form also includes a place for the enumerator to record the person's gender, approximate age, race/ethnicity, and any notable identifiers. Enumerators also record the location and time of the encounter.

---

[15]   This form was reproduced from a document provided by Jay Bainbridge of the New York City Department of Homeless Services.

New York's Tally Sheet and Interview Form

[FOR **SURFACE AREAS ONLY**]: AREA NUMBER, (E.G., "Q546"): ____
[FOR **SUBWAY STATIONS AND SUBWAYS ONLY**]: STATION NAME: ____
SUBWAY LINE # OR LETTER (E.G., "L" OR "6"): ____

HOPE 2006 QUESTIONNAIRE

INTERVIEWER: **PLEASE <u>DO NOT</u> READ THE WORDS IN CAPITALS OUTLOUD!**

1. IS THIS PERSON:
   ☐ AWAKE
   ☐ ASLEEP   **(SKIP TO Q6)**

INTRODUCTION:
Hello, my name is (NAME) and I am a volunteer for the City of New York. We're asking everyone a few questions about their housing situation. Your answers are confidential.

2. Would you like to participate?
   ☐ YES
   ☐ NO **(STOP INTERVIEW, SKIP TO Q6)**

3. Tonight, do you have some place that you consider to be your home or the place where you live?
   ☐ YES
   ☐ NO   **(SKIP TO Q5)**
   ☐ REFUSED   **(SKIP TO Q5)**
   ☐ DON'T KNOW   **(SKIP TO Q5)**

4. Is that a room, an apartment, a house, a shelter, or a spot in some public place?
   ☐ ROOM/ APARTMENT/ HOUSE
   ☐ DROP-IN CENTER
   ☐ SHELTER
   ☐ DORMITORY HOTEL (PLACE W/O SEPARATE RMS)
   ☐ STREET/ PARK / OTHER OPEN SPACE
   ☐ ON A BUS/ SUBWAY/ TRAIN/ FERRY
   ☐ IN A SUBWAY STATION OR TUNNEL
   ☐ IN A TRANSPORTATION HUB (E.G., PORT AUTHORITY, AIRPORT, FERRY TERMINAL)
   ☐ COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENT (E.G., CAFÉ, BAR)
   ☐ OTHER INDOOR PLACE (BUT NOT HOUSED, E.G., STAIRWELL, BASEMENT, ETC.)
   ☐ ABANDONED BUILDING
   ☐ EMERGENCY ROOM
   ☐ PRIVATE VEHICLE (E.G., CAR OR TRUCK)
   ☐ OTHER (SPECIFY): _____
   ☐ REFUSED
   ☐ DON'T KNOW

5. Did someone else ask you these questions today?
   ☐ YES (**READ TERMINATION PARAGRAPH**)
   ☐ NO (**READ TERMINATION PARAGRAPH**)

TERMINATION PARAGRAPH:
IF THIS PERSON IS HOMELESS, ASK IF HE/SHE WOULD LIKE TO BE TAKEN TO A SHELTER THIS EVENING.

Thank you very much for your participation. Again, all the information you have given is confidential. Good night.

<u>ANSWER QUESTION 6 FOR EVERYONE!</u>

6. DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THIS PERSON IS HOMELESS?
   ☐ **YES**
   ☐ **NO**   **(STOP HERE, SKIP TO Q12)**

ANSWER Q.7 THROUGH Q.11 ONLY FOR THE HOMELESS!

7. GENDER: ☐ MALE   ☐ FEMALE   ☐ UNKNOWN

8. ESTIMATE RESPONDENT'S AGE: _____

9. RACE/ETHNICITY (**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**):
   ☐ WHITE   ☐ BLACK   ☐ HISPANIC
   ☐ ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER   ☐ UNKNOWN
   ☐ OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY:)_____

10. DETAILED LOCATION: (LIST THE NEAREST ADDRESS / CROSS STREETS / OR LOCATION WITHIN SUBWAY STATION):

11. DOES THIS PERSON HAVE UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS (SCARS, TATTOOS, UNUSUAL CLOTHING) THAT COULD BE USED TO ELIMINATE DOUBLE COUNTING? IF SO, SPECIFY WHAT THEY ARE:

12. TIME: _____

13. TEAM LEADER INITIALS: _____

7.3   Preparation Timeline for Public Places Count

Below are examples of the preparation timelines of two CoCs that conducted a public places count of unsheltered homeless people in 2003. The first example, Boston, has been conducting public places counts for more than 20 years. The second example, Atlanta, conducted a public places count (and survey) for the first time in 2003.

City of Boston

Six weeks prior to the count:

- Recruit a "high profile" person or group to participate in the street count. This might be an elected official, such as the mayor, the CEO of an important local business, a major philanthropist, or a celebrity. Gaining the commitment of such a person to participate in the count can help with recruiting volunteers (e.g., the recruitment letter can be signed by the person) and gaining the attention of the media.
- Begin recruiting volunteers. Send out a mailing to homeless service providers and past volunteers to recruit for the upcoming count; send out a mass e-mail to city employees; spend the next few weeks gathering responses from this effort and organizing teams of volunteers.
- Contact all places that house homeless people. Update bed inventory data, contact information, and inform providers of the public places count, which happens on the same night as the sheltered count.

Two to three weeks prior to the count:

- Assemble the packets that go out with the team leaders. The city is divided into 38 areas – each covered by a team of 5-15 people, including the team leader. Packets contain: tally sheets, directions on how to use the radio that is given to each team, a map of the assigned neighborhood with all intersections and boundaries clearly marked, and, if known, special advice about where homeless people are known to live in that section.
- Send a letter to all state agencies, hospitals, police, the transportation authority, and park rangers to inform them about the date and time of the count. The transportation authority is particularly important because enumerators will need access to subway platforms without having to pay the fare.
- Set-up extra outreach vans for the night of the count. Typically, there are two outreach vans on any given night, but for the 2003 count, five vans were available.
- Contact neighborhood representatives from the Office of Neighborhood Services and the police to ask about any new or unusual information about where to find homeless people in different neighborhoods (e.g., special places to look). As noted above, this information is included in the team leader's packet.
- Divide the volunteers into teams of 5 to 15 people. Organizers try to ensure that team leaders are people with experience in working with homeless populations, either as service providers or outreach workers. The teams have a mix of new and experienced volunteers.

One week prior to the count:

- Meet with the team leaders to explain the logistics of the count, as well as how to manage the volunteers on their team.

Metropolitan Atlanta (City of Atlanta, Fulton County, DeKalb County)

November 2001 (sixteen months prior to the count)
- Tri-jurisdictional Collaborative confirmed its joint sponsorship of the point-in-time homeless census.

February 2002 (thirteen months prior to the count)
- Developed preliminary budget estimates.
- Began discussions of count methodology and procedures; decided to issue an RFP for professional consultant with census experience.

March, April, May 2002 (ten to twelve months prior to the count)
- Tri-jurisdictional Collaborative decided on Pathways Community Network, Inc. (PCNI), the tri-jurisdictional HMIS, as the census project manager.
- Homeward, Inc., a private non-profit organization working on homeless issues, raised funds for the count from private donors.

June 2002 (nine months prior to the count)
- HUD granted approval for PCNI to use the remainder of its technical assistance grant for the count.

July 2002 (eight months prior to the count)
- PCNI formed nine-member Advisory Council to guide the process.

August 2002 (seven months prior to the count)
- RFP issued to qualified consultant organizations.

September 2002 (six months prior to the count)
- RFP responses received; Advisory Council began evaluating proposals.

October 2002 (five months prior to the count)
- Applied Survey Resource (ASR) selected as the consultant; began contract development.

November 2002 (four months prior to the count)
- Identified known locations where unsheltered homeless were likely to be located.
- Updated statewide Homeless Advisory Council on progress with the count.

December 2002 (three months prior to the count)
- ASR contract executed; ASR visited Atlanta and presented to service providers and other interested parties.
- PCNI partnered with United Way's 211 HelpLine for real-time reporting of census data.
- Solicited participation of police departments and jails.

January 2003 (two months prior to the count)
- Produced initial list of known locations; conducted a day-long mapping session to identify known locations and discuss the characteristics of each area.
- Began phone calls to recruit volunteers and solicit cooperation from community groups and other organizations.
- Identified deployment sites for teams on the night of the count.
- Developed the survey instrument.

Metropolitan Atlanta (cont'd)

February 2003 (one month prior to the count)

- Sent mailings with information about the count to service provider agencies and other appropriate groups.
- Confirmed the participation of Hands On Atlanta (a volunteer organization).
- Continued recruiting deployment captains, volunteer enumerators, and currently or formerly homeless employees.
- Finalized survey instrument.
- Held two-hour training session for those participating in the pre-test or "dry-run," including deployment captains and employees from the Veterans Administration's Compensated Work Therapy program.
- February 25, 2003: Conducted "dry-run" in downtown Atlanta and outlying areas; adjusted procedures as necessary.

March 2003 (month of the count)

- March 4-5, 2003: Conducted six two-hour training sessions for enumerators.
- Completed GIS mapping; finalized boundaries of geographic areas and assignments of teams.
- Confirmed jail, police, and health center participation; coordinated with police departments to determine which areas required a police escort and which sections should solely be covered by police.
- Notified every participant about location assignments, and the date and time for the enumeration.
- March 11, 2003: Point-in-time count occurred. Enumerators released in two waves at 1:00 am and 4:45 am. Counts tallied on survey sheets and called in to the United Way call center.
- Previously homeless employees and outreach workers conducted surveys for two to three weeks after the count. Held a Saturday afternoon meal event; meal tickets distributed and redeemed upon completion of the interview. Homeless people that participated in the survey were given pre-paid phone cards as an incentive.

April 2003 (one month after the count)

- Data entry, cleaning, and analysis of enumeration and survey data.

May 2003 (two months after the count)

- ASR's draft report reviewed by the Advisory Board.

June 2003 (three months after the count)

- ASR produced the final report and presented results to interested parties.

7.4   Surveys Used in Public Places and Service-Based Counts

The following pages contain two examples of survey forms used in public places and service-based counts. The first survey was used by the Denver metropolitan CoC in 2002 for its count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people in shelters, public places, and service locations.[16] It includes several screener questions to determine the homeless status of the individual and asks about where the person was living prior to becoming homeless, how long and how many times the person has been homeless, why the person became homeless, whether the person has received any services, how much income the person receives, and the source of that income. The survey also collects information on the person's gender, race/ethnicity, disability status and household composition, including the age and gender of each family member.

The second form was used by the Kentucky Balance of State CoC in 2001 for its statewide survey of sheltered and unsheltered homeless people.[17] The survey of unsheltered homeless people took place mainly at service locations such as soup kitchens and mainstream social service agencies. Like the Denver survey, the Kentucky survey includes basic screener questions that determine whether the person is homeless (in this case defined as not having a permanent place to stay that is fit for human habitation). If the person is homeless, the survey then goes on to ask a series of questions about the person's history of homelessness, reasons for homelessness, family composition, service use, service needs, and disabilities, as well as gender, race, age, and education level. The survey concludes with a series of statements about the problems facing homeless people that the respondent is invited to agree or disagree with. It also collects personal identifying information to help with unduplicating and calculating a point-in-time count. Slightly longer than the Denver survey, the Kentucky survey reportedly takes about 10 minutes to complete. This is about the maximum time one can expect to be able to interview people without providing an incentive.

A Note about Sample Survey Instruments:
These samples are from 2001 and 2002. Changes were made to subsequent NOFAs. Please use these samples for reference only.

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[16] The survey was reproduced from a document provided by Tracy D'Alanno of the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs.

[17] The survey was reproduced from the *2001 Kentucky Homeless Survey Report*, prepared by the Institute for Regional Analysis and Public Policy and provided by the Kentucky Housing Corporation.

Denver Survey Form

We need your help! Please fill out this survey so we can plan what types of housing and services we should be working on to better meet your needs. Your answers are confidential, and results will be reported in group form only.

Agency collecting the survey:

1. First three letters of your last name: _____ _____ _____

   First letter of first name: _____   First letter of middle name: _____

2. Your date of birth: _____/_____/_____
   (month)   (day)   (year)

3. Are you homeless?
   1 ☐ No
   2 ☐ Yes

4. Where are you staying now? Please check the **one** place that best describes where you are staying.
   1-1 ☐ transitional housing
   1-4 ☐ family or friends
   1-7 ☐ hotel/motel
   1-2 ☐ domestic violence shelter
   1-5 ☐ emergency shelter
   1-8 ☐ rented house or apartment
   1-3 ☐ on the street, under a bridge, etc.
   1-6 ☐ camping or in the car
   1-9 ☐ in a home I/we own
   2-1 ☐ subsidized permanent housing for previously homeless persons
   2-2 ☐ subsidized permanent housing (not for previously homeless persons)

5. What was the last county and city you lived in before you became homeless?
   1 ☐ Adams County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Eastlake   ☐ Strasburg
   ☐ Bennett   ☐ Federal Heights   ☐ Thornton
   ☐ Brighton   ☐ Henderson   ☐ Watkins
   ☐ Commerce City ☐ Lochbuie   ☐ Westminster
   ☐ Dupont   ☐ Northglenn
   2 ☐ Arapahoe County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Columbine Valley   ☐ Glendale
   ☐ Bow Mar   ☐ Deer Trail   ☐ Greenwood Village
   ☐ Byers   ☐ Englewood   ☐ Littleton
   ☐ Cherry Hills Village ☐ Foxfield   ☐ Sheridan
   3 ☐ Boulder County
   ☐ Allenspark   ☐ Jamestown   ☐ Nederland
   ☐ Boulder   ☐ Lafayette   ☐ Niwot
   ☐ Eldorado Springs ☐ Longmont ☐ Pinecliffe
   ☐ Erie   ☐ Louisville   ☐ Superior
   ☐ Hygiene   ☐ Lyons   ☐ Ward
   4 ☐ Douglas County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Highlands Ranch ☐ Louviers
   ☐ Castle Rock   ☐ Larkspur   ☐ Parker
   ☐ Deckers   ☐ Littleton   ☐ Sedalia
   ☐ Franktown   ☐ Lone Tree
   5 ☐ Jefferson County
   ☐ Arvada   ☐ Evergreen   ☐ Lakewood
   ☐ Bow Mar   ☐ Foxton   ☐ Littleton
   ☐ Buffalo Creek   ☐ Golden   ☐ Morrison
   ☐ Columbine Hills ☐ Idledale   ☐ Mountain View
   ☐ Columbine Valley ☐ Indian Hills ☐ Pine
   ☐ Conifer   ☐ Kittredge   ☐ Wheat Ridge
   ☐ Edgewater   ☐ Lakeside
   6 ☐ Denver
   7 ☐ Broomfield
   8 ☐ Other place in Colorado _____
   9 ☐ Other state _____
   10 ☐ Other country _____

6. In what type of place did you spend the night of _____?
   1 ☐ emergency shelter   8 ☐ domestic violence shelter
   2 ☐ on the street, under a   9 ☐ in transitional housing
      bridge, etc.   10 ☐ with a friend or relative
   3 ☐ bus   11 ☐ hotel/motel
   4 ☐ prison/jail   12 ☐ detox facility
   5 ☐ psychiatric hospital   13 ☐ medical hospital
   6 ☐ in a home I/we own   14 ☐ in a car
      (became homeless today)   15 ☐ camping
   7 ☐ migrant shelter   16 ☐ don't know
   17 ☐ other _____

7. In which county and did you spend the night of _____?
   1 ☐ Adams County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Eastlake   ☐ Strasburg
   ☐ Bennett   ☐ Federal Heights   ☐ Thornton
   ☐ Brighton   ☐ Henderson   ☐ Watkins
   ☐ Commerce City ☐ Lochbuie   ☐ Westminster
   ☐ Dupont   ☐ Northglenn
   2 ☐ Arapahoe County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Columbine Valley ☐ Glendale
   ☐ Bow Mar   ☐ Deer Trail   ☐ Greenwood Village
   ☐ Byers   ☐ Englewood   ☐ Littleton
   ☐ Cherry Hills Village ☐ Foxfield   ☐ Sheridan
   3 ☐ Boulder County
   ☐ Allenspark   ☐ Jamestown   ☐ Nederland
   ☐ Boulder   ☐ Lafayette   ☐ Niwot
   ☐ Eldorado Springs ☐ Longmont ☐ Pinecliffe
   ☐ Erie   ☐ Louisville   ☐ Superior
   ☐ Hygiene   ☐ Lyons   ☐ Ward
   4 ☐ Douglas County
   ☐ Aurora   ☐ Highlands Ranch ☐ Louviers
   ☐ Castle Rock   ☐ Larkspur   ☐ Parker
   ☐ Deckers   ☐ Littleton   ☐ Sedalia
   ☐ Franktown   ☐ Lone Tree
   5 ☐ Jefferson County
   ☐ Arvada   ☐ Evergreen   ☐ Lakewood
   ☐ Bow Mar   ☐ Foxton   ☐ Littleton
   ☐ Buffalo Creek   ☐ Golden   ☐ Morrison
   ☐ Columbine Hills ☐ Idledale   ☐ Mountain View
   ☐ Columbine Valley ☐ Indian Hills ☐ Pine
   ☐ Conifer   ☐ Kittredge   ☐ Wheat Ridge
   ☐ Edgewater   ☐ Lakeside
   6 ☐ Denver
   7 ☐ Broomfield
   8 ☐ Other place in Colorado _____
   9 ☐ Other state _____
   10 ☐ Other country _____

8. How long have you been homeless this time?
   1 ☐ less than 30 days   5 ☐ one to two years
   2 ☐ 30 – 90 days   6 ☐ two to five years
   3 ☐ 3 to six months   7 ☐ five to ten years
   4 ☐ six months to one year   8 ☐ ten or more years

9. How many times have you been homeless before this time?
   3 ☐ 0
   3 ☐ 1
   3 ☐ 2
   3 ☐ 3-5
   3 ☐ 6 or more

Denver Survey Form (cont.)

10. How do you define your gender?
  1 ☐ Male
  2 ☐ Female
  3 ☐ Transgender

11. What is your racial background?
  1 ☐ Asian
  2 ☐ Native American/Alaskan Native
  3 ☐ Black/African American
  4 ☐ White
  5 ☐ Other_____

12. Do you consider yourself to be Hispanic (Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano)?
  1 ☐ Yes, Hispanic
  2 ☐ No, Non-Hispanic

13. Please check the reasons why you became homeless (check all that apply):
  ☐ unemployment
  ☐ unable to pay rent/mortgage
  ☐ moved to seek work
  ☐ family member or personal illness
  ☐ alcohol/substance abuse
  ☐ mental disabilities
  ☐ physical disabilities
  ☐ domestic violence
  ☐ child abuse (youth on their own)
  ☐ discharge from prison/jail
  ☐ welfare assistance sanctions
  ☐ welfare payments not adequate
  ☐ welfare time limits
  ☐ bad credit history
  ☐ reasons related to sexual orientation
  ☐ other: _____

14. Have you ever received, or are you currently receiving treatment or services for any of the conditions below? (Please check all that apply.)
  ☐ severe mental illness   ☐ chronic alcohol abuse
  ☐ chronic drug abuse   ☐ tuberculosis
  ☐ HIV/AIDS related illnesses   ☐ other physical condition
  ☐ not applicable, haven't received or receiving any services

15. Have you ever been in the U.S. military?
  1 ☐ No   2 ☐ Yes

16. Do you have a job?
  1 ☐ No
  2 ☐ Yes --> How many hours a week do you work? _____

17. From which of the following sources do you get income/resources? (Check all that apply)
  1 ☐ job   9 ☐ TANF/Colorado Works
  2 ☐ family or friends   10 ☐ SSI (Social Security)
  3 ☐ food stamps   11 ☐ Veteran's Benefits
  4 ☐ social security   12 ☐ selling blood/plasma
  5 ☐ pension   13 ☐ prostitution
  6 ☐ unemployment   14 ☐ Aid to Needy Disabled (AND)
  7 ☐ child suppor   15 ☐ Old Age Pension (OAP)t
  8 ☐ asking for money on streets 16 ☐ Medicaid
  17 ☐ other: _____

18. What was your annual household income in the year 2002? (Check the closest estimate)
  1 ☐ $0.00   8 ☐ $12,500 - $14,999
  2 ☐ up to $1,000   9 ☐ $15,000 - $19,999
  3 ☐ $1,000 - $2,499   10 ☐ $20,000 - $29,999
  4 ☐ $2,500 - $4,999   11 ☐ $30,000 - $39,999
  5 ☐ $5,000 - $7,888   12 ☐ $40,000 - $49,999
  6 ☐ $8,000 - $9,999   13 ☐ $50,000 or more
  7 ☐ $10,000 - $12,499

19. Which of the following best describes your family/household? (Please check only one.)
  1 ☐ I am a single individual (do not answer any more questions)
  2 ☐ two parent family with children
  3 ☐ one parent family with children
  4 ☐ couple without children
  5 ☐ other type of family

20. How many total people are in your family/household (including yourself)?................ _____

21. How many children aged 18 or under are in your family/household?................ _____

22. How many adults are in your family?................ _____

23. For each family member (NOT including yourself), please tell us his or her age, gender, and relationship to yourself.

Person #2 (not you)	Person #3 (not you)	Person #4 (not you)	Person #5 (not you)	Person #6 (not you)
Name or Initials ____	Name or Initials ____	Name or Initials ____	Name or Initials ____	Name or Initials ____
Age (in years) ____	Age (in years) ____	Age (in years) ____	Age (in years) ____	Age (in years) ____
Gender: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☐ Female 3 ☐ Transgender	Gender: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☐ Female 3 ☐ Transgender	Gender: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☐ Female 3 ☐ Transgender	Gender: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☐ Female 3 ☐ Transgender	Gender: 1 ☐ Male 2 ☐ Female 3 ☐ Transgender
Relationship to you: 1 ☐ Child 2 ☐ Spouse 3 ☐ Partner 4 ☐ Other family member	Relationship to you: 1 ☐ Child 2 ☐ Spouse 3 ☐ Partner 4 ☐ Other family member	Relationship to you: 1 ☐ Child 2 ☐ Spouse 3 ☐ Partner 4 ☐ Other family member	Relationship to you: 1 ☐ Child 2 ☐ Spouse 3 ☐ Partner 4 ☐ Other family member	Relationship to you: 1 ☐ Child 2 ☐ Spouse 3 ☐ Partner 4 ☐ Other family member

Kentucky Survey Form

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

TO BE READ TO EACH RESPONDENT

We are conducting a statewide survey related to characteristics of people and their housing. The survey is being conducted for the Kentucky Housing Corporation by Morehead State University. Participation is completely voluntary and if you do not wish to take part in the survey, you do not have to answer any of the questions. Furthermore, you may choose to discontinue your participation at any time and you may refuse to answer any question. Participation in this study will in no way affect your eligibility for any social services.

Your responses will be confidential, and your name will not be recorded on the survey. If you agree to participate, I will read the questions to you and I will record your answers. It will take approximately ten minutes to complete. Do you have any questions or concerns about the study? Are you willing to participate?

IF THE RESPONDENT AGREES TO PARTICIPATE, PLEASE SIGN BELOW. THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.

I READ THE ABOVE CONSENT STATEMENT TO THE RESPONDENT AND TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE IT WAS UNDERSTOOD, AND THE RESPONDENT HAS AGREED TO PARTICIPATE.

_____ _____
Signature of Interviewer   **Date**

Kentucky Survey Form (cont.)

Page 1

HOMELESS STUDY SURVEY

Date: Interviewer:

Agency:

City: County:

1. In what type of place are you now staying? (i.e., APARTMENT, SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENCE, ETC.)_____

2. Is that your permanent place to stay? __ 1. NO   __ 2. YES __3. UNSURE

DO NOT CONTINUE IF THEY HAVE A PERMANENT PLACE INTENDED FOR HUMAN HABITATION

3. Are you living with someone else? ___ 1. NO   ___ 2. YES If yes, identify your relationship with that person (brother, sister etc.) _____

4. When was the last time you had your own permanent place to live? **(USE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TIME INTERVAL: DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS, OR YEARS)**
   _____Days   _____ Weeks   _____Months   ____Years

5. Where was that? CITY _____; COUNTY_____; STATE_____.

6. Have you been homeless before? ___1. NO   ___ 2. YES   ___ 3. UNSURE

   If Yes, about how many times has that happened? _____.

7. What was the reason(s) you had to leave your last permanent place? **(CHECK ALL APPLICABLE)**

   a. ___ unemployment   i. ___ alcohol/substance abuse
   b. ___ unable to pay rent/mortgage   j. ___ family rejection
   c. ___ eviction/foreclosure   k. ___ pay check/welfare late
   d. ___ moved to seek work   l. ___ low wages
   e. ___ divorce   m. ___ domestic violence
   f. ___ family member illness   n. ___ fire/flood/natural disaster
   g. ___ change in household composition   o.___ no public assistance for
   h. ___ pay check/welfare payments not adequate   two-parent family
                                              p. ___ other (SPECIFY) _____
                                              _____

8. From those selected above, which do you feel is the most important cause? **(READ ITEMS SELECTED ABOVE AND RECORD APPROPRIATE LETTER _____).**

Kentucky Survey Form (cont.)

Page 2

9. Where were you staying on Thursday, February 1, 2001? **(CHECK ONE)**

__ 1. my own home   __ 6. on the streets   __ 11. detox facility
__ 2. in a shelter   __ 7. jail   __ 12. farm structure
__ 3. hotel/motel   __ 8. hospital   __ 13. other (SPECIFY
__ 4. with relatives   __ 9. camper   _____)
__ 5. with friends   __ 10. transitional housing __ 14. Don't know

10. Did you have any family members living with you on February 1, 2001?

__1. NO   __ 2. YES **(IF YES, LIST AGE, GENDER, AND RELATIONSHIP TO RESPONDENT OF EACH INDIVIDUAL)**

Age_____   Gender_____   Relationship_____
Age_____   Gender_____   Relationship_____
Age_____   Gender_____   Relationship_____
Age_____   Gender_____   Relationship_____
Age_____   Gender_____   Relationship_____

**IF ANY MEMBERS WERE EIGHTEEN YEARS OR OLDER, PLEASE ASK RESPONDENT TO COMPLETE A SEPARATE SURVEY ON THOSE PERSONS, TO THE EXTENT THEY ARE ABLE. (ONLY AFTER COMPLETING THIS SURVEY)

11. Which of the following best describes your family living situation?

__ 1. family, one-parent   __ 4. single person
__ 2. family, two-parents   __ 5. other extended family
__ 3. couple, no children   __ 6. other (specify)_____.

12. In what geographic location do you currently reside? CITY_____; COUNTY_____; STATE_____.

13. How long have you lived in the above area? **(USE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TIME INTERVAL: DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS, OR YEARS)**
_____Days   _____ Weeks   _____Months   _____Years

14. Have you been provided the following services? **(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)**

__ Temporary Shelter   __ Clothing
__ Food   __ Financial Assistance
__ Medical   __ Counseling
__ Educational   __ Job Training
__ Permanent Housing   __ Transportation
__ Other (specify)

Kentucky Survey Form (cont.)

Page 3

15. Have you needed any of the following services and been UNABLE to obtain them? **(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)**

<div>

__ Temporary Shelter   __ Clothing
__ Food   __ Financial Assistance
__ Medical   __ Counseling
__ Educational   __ Job Training
__ Permanent Housing   __ Transportation
    __ Other (SPECIFY_____)

</div>

16. Have you or anyone you live with experienced drug/alcohol abuse?

    __ 1. NO   __2. YES   __3. UNSURE

17. Have you or anyone you live with experienced domestic violence abuse?

    __ 1. NO   __2. YES   __3. UNSURE

18. Do you receive any of the following benefits: **(CHECK ALL APPLICABLE)**

K-TAP (formally AFDC)	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Social Security	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
SSI	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Food Stamps	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Medicaid	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Medicare	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Work Income	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Vocational Rehab.	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Veteran's Benefits	__ No	__ Yes	__ Unsure
Other (SPECIFY)_____			

19. Have you ever served in the military? ___1. NO   ___ 2. YES (If yes, did you serve in any of the following conflicts?)
___WW II   ___Korea   ___Vietnam   ___Persian Gulf
___OTHER (Please specify_____)   ___NONE OF THE ABOVE

20. Last four digits of Social Security number:__ __ __ __

21. First three letters of last name: __ __ __

22. Are you aware of any physical illness/disabilities that you have?

    ___ 1. N0   ___ 2. YES (If yes, please specify: _____)

23. Are you aware of any mental illness that you have?

    ___1. NO   ___2. YES (If yes, please specify _____)

Kentucky Survey Form (cont.)

Page 4

24. How long have you been homeless this time (USE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TIME INTERVAL: DAYS, WEEKS, MONTHS, OR YEARS)
    _____Days   _____ Weeks   _____Months   _____Years

25. Sex: ___1. Male   2. ___Female

26. RACE/ ETHNICITY: ___1. White (non-Hispanic)   ___2. African American
    ___3. Hispanic   ___4. Asian   ___5. Other (Please specify_____)

27. Highest grade of formal education completed: _____

28. Age: _____.

29. Where were you born? City _____; County _____; State _____

30. Where have you spent most of your life? City _____; County _____;
    State_____

31. Do you personally know or are you aware of other homeless people?
    ___ 1. NO   ___ 2. YES (If yes, how many: _____)

32. Of those you know who are homeless, how many seek services:
    __ 1. Very Few (less than 20%)   __ 2. Some (20%-50%)   __3. Most (50%+)

33. How did you hear of services for the homeless?
    ___1. TV.   ___2. Newspaper   ___3. Radio   ___ 4. Family   ___ 5. Friend
    ___6. Service Provider   ___7. Church   Other (Please specify_____)

PLEASE INDICATE YOUR AGREEMENT OR DISAGREEMENT WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS. THAT IS, DO YOU STRONGLY AGREE, AGREE, UNDECIDED, DISAGREE, OR STRONGLY DISAGREE THAT:

34. In general, problems for homeless people are getting better.   SA A U D SD

35. There are more homeless people now than there were
    several years ago .   SA A U D SD

36. There are a lot of programs available for homeless people.   SA A U D SD

37. Most homeless people seek some type of social services.   SA A U D SD

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME. WE APPRECIATE YOUR WILLINGNESS TO HELP WITH THIS SURVEY

38. Interviewer Comments:

7.5   Methodology Used in New York City's Count

Sampling for the 2003 Count of Manhattan[18]

New York City's 2003 public places count focused solely on Manhattan. The Department of Homeless Services (DHS) divided the borough into 899 surface study areas composed of clusters of census blocks and 143 underground subway stations/platforms.[19] DHS then assigned a density classification of high, medium, or low to each surface study area and subway station. High-density areas were defined as places believed to have six or more homeless individuals; medium-density areas were places likely to have two to five homeless individuals; and low-density areas were places likely to have fewer than two homeless individuals.

Of the 899 surface study areas, 54 were classified as high-density, 139 as medium-density, and 706 as low-density. Of the 143 subway stations/platforms, 29 were classified as high-density, 31 as medium-density, and 83 as low-density. DHS arrived at these density classifications based on information provided by numerous "density experts," such as outreach workers, representatives from the Parks Department, New York City Police Department, Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Community Boards, and other individuals or groups familiar with the location of unsheltered homeless individuals.

Having assigned a density to each surface study area and subway platform, DHS used rigorous statistical techniques to select a sample of surface areas and subway platforms to visit on the night of the count. DHS first calculated how many high-, medium-, and low-density areas they would need to visit in order to maximize the level of confidence in the sample count given the resources available to conduct the count. To achieve this goal, DHS decided to conduct a complete census of the high-density areas. That is, they wanted to count all unsheltered homeless persons in the areas they expected to find the most homeless people to ensure an accurate count of unsheltered homeless people overall. In medium-density areas, the agency's goal was to be 95 percent confident that the weighted sample count was within 10 percent of the actual number of unsheltered homeless persons in these areas. Low-density areas were assigned a less exacting standard because of resource limitations and because DHS did not anticipate finding many individuals in the low-density areas. In low-density areas, DHS's goal was to be 85 percent confident that the weighted sample count was within 10 percent of the actual number of homeless persons in these areas.[20]

[18]   Methodology information was provided by New York City's Department of Homeless Services.

[19]   The DHS deliberately did not use census tracts for the surface study areas because the population being counted was different from that traditionally counted by the decennial census.

[20]   The confidence level and intervals used by DHS can be adjusted depending on the degree of accuracy the one seeks in the estimates. These are the levels and intervals New York City chose to optimize resource allocation and arrive at an accurate estimate of the unsheltered homeless population. Jurisdictions seeking to replicate this methodology can choose different confidence levels and intervals in determining the optimal sample size.

The final sample of surface study areas consisted of all 54 of the high-density areas (100 percent), 69 of the 139 medium-density areas (50 percent), and 70 of the 706 low-density areas (10 percent). Medium- and low-density areas were randomly selected. The total number of surface areas selected was 193.

The sample of subway stations/platforms was selected using a similar approach. The final sample consisted of all 29 high-density areas (100 percent), 25 of the 31 medium-density areas (80 percent), and 9 of the 83 low-density areas (11 percent). These sample sizes produced similar levels of precision in their estimates of the above ground areas with the same density, with one exception. In the subway station low-density areas, the sample count would have required visiting half of the low-density stations (50 percent) in order for DHS to be 85 percent confident that the weighted sample count was within 10 percent of the actual number of unsheltered homeless persons in these areas. DHS chose to visit only 11 percent of the low-density stations because of limited resources.

Figure 1: Number of Surface/Subway Study Areas and the Number of Areas Selected According to High, Medium, and Low Density Classifications in February 2003
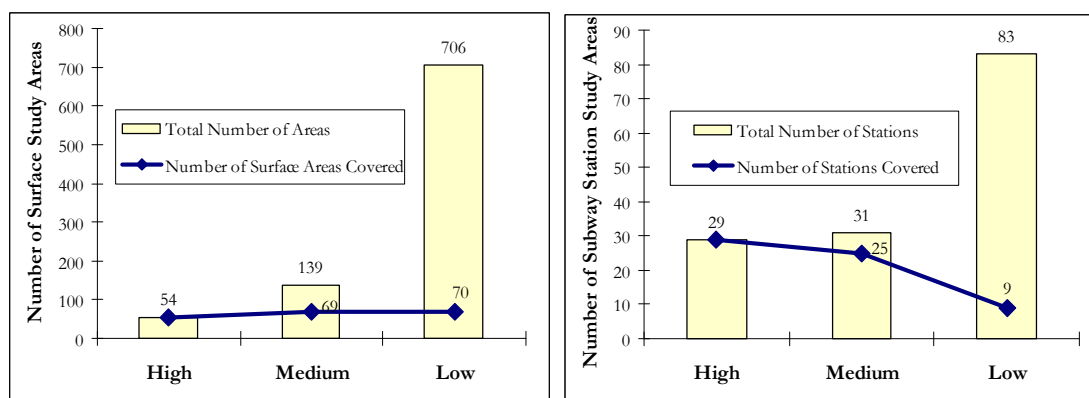
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, 2003

Sampling for the 2004 Count of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island

The DHS modified its methodology for the February 2004 public places count in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island. Modifications included reducing density classifications from three categories (high, medium, low) to two (high and low). After completing the count in 2003, organizers found that the average densities in low and medium areas were very similar. In the classification used for the 2004 count, high-density was defined as two or more individuals per study area or three or more individuals per subway station in Manhattan. For Brooklyn and Staten Island, a high-density area had at least one homeless person. Organizers canvassed each high-density study area or subway station and a random sample of low-density locations. The number of low-density locations included in the sample count was, again, determined by the agency's goal of being 95 percent confident that the weighted sample count was within 10 percent of the actual number of unsheltered homeless persons in these areas. The new classification system enabled "density experts" to provide a more

accurate estimate of the number of homeless individuals enumerators were expected to find in each study area. In addition, with the elimination of the medium category, a greater number of high-density areas were visited on the night of the count, resulting in a better estimate of unsheltered homeless individuals in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island.

New York City's 2005 and 2006 Methodology

Chapter 6 includes a brief update on New York City's recent changes to the street count methodology as part of the description of the plant-capture and next day survey methods. New York now includes of all five boroughs in the count and estimate.

7.6 More Information on Gathering Data About Precariously Housed Persons and Families

The Spectrum of Residential Instability

The first counting guide that HUD ever issued[21] described a range of situations falling within the general notion of *residential instability*. At one extreme are those without any residence—literally homeless people. At that extreme, it is usually easy to identify someone as homeless—if the person is obviously living on the streets or in a shelter. At the other extreme are people who are residentially stable—living in conventional housing, having the means to keep it, and with slim to no probability of losing that housing or of being unable to replace it if they do.

Somewhere in between these two extremes but closer to the literally homeless side are a variety of situations exhibiting varying degrees of unstable housing, which we may refer to as being *precariously housed*. Precarious situations common to both urban and rural areas include people in institutions and treatment facilities within one week of exit and with no access to or resources for housing once released. Another precarious housing situation involves people staying with friends or family who also know they must leave within a week and have nowhere else to go and no resources to obtain their own housing. "Couch surfers," runaway youth staying with one friend after another, people who can afford one or two nights a week or one or two weeks a month in a hotel or motel, and then find themselves literally homeless again—all of these people are precariously housed and at very high risk of homelessness. But on the nights they sleep in conventional dwellings or hotels they pay for themselves, they are *not* included in HUD's *definition* of homelessness.

There are good reasons, however, why a particular community might want to expand its homeless count to include collecting information about a broader range of people who are precariously housed, going beyond those who are literally homeless. A community may feel

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[21] Burt, Martha R. 1992. *Practical Methods for Counting Homeless People: A Manual for State and Local Jurisdictions*. Washington, DC: Department of Housing and Urban Development.

some responsibility for parts of the precariously housed population and want to know how many there are and what their issues are, so they can make plans to assist them. This might be true for people with serious mental illness or developmental disabilities leaving institutions without secure housing, or disabled people living in potentially abusive situations. The more a community knows about such situations, the more it can prepare to deal with them. Further, mainstream public and nonprofit agencies that have responsibilities toward parts of the precariously housed population may be more likely to cooperate in a homeless count if they understand that information about "their people" will be part of what is learned. Mental health, substance abuse, and correctional institutions are well-known places to locate other types of at-risk people—people who are about to be discharged and clearly have no place to live or any means of supporting themselves.

If your community decides to enumerate at-risk as well as literally homeless people, you will need to be sure that you can tell who is who. Remember that HUD still only asks for a count of literally homeless people. But that does not mean that you cannot tell HUD about the at-risk population to demonstrate that you are on top of planning to prevent homelessness or keep it of short duration. And you will have local uses for the data beyond what HUD wants to know. Therefore, you will have to:

- Be sure to record the circumstances under which the people you count are sleeping,

- Include some questions in any interview you do that will tell you about the person's sleeping arrangements and recent homeless/housing history, and

- Develop some mechanism to get information from people who know about at-risk populations, including mental health workers, health workers, and the people who run the closest psychiatric wards, substance abuse facilities, and jails.

7.7   Contact Information for Examples Cited in Guide

Below you will find contact information for most of the examples cited in the guide. The individuals listed have agreed to serve as a resource for questions related to conducting counts of unsheltered homeless people.

City of Boston (MA)
Melissa Quirk
City of Boston Emergency Shelter Commission
Phone: 617-635-4507
Email: melisaa.quirk@cityofboston.gov

Broward County (FL)
Steve Werthman, Homeless Initiative Partnership Administrator
Broward County Homeless Initiative Partnership Administration
Phone: 954-357-6167
E-mail: SWERTHMAN@broward.org

Denver (CO)
Tracy D'Alanno, Unit Manager, Homeless and Resource Development
Colorado Department of Human Services
Supportive Housing and Homeless Programs
Phone: 303-866-7361
E-mail: tracy.DAlanno@state.co.us

City of Long Beach (CA)
Corinne Schneider, Manager
Bureau of Human and Social Services
City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services
Phone: 562-570-4001
E-mail: corinne_schneider@longbeach.gov

Metropolitan Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional CoC (GA)
William Matson, Executive Director
Pathways Community Network
Phone: 866-818-1032, ext. 301
E-mail: william.matson@pcni.org

New York City (NY)
Jay Bainbridge, Assistant Commissioner of Policy and Research
New York City Department of Homeless Services
Phone: 212-232-0581
E-mail: jbainbrid@dhs.nyc.gov

City of Pasadena (CA)
Anne Lansing, Program Coordinator
City of Pasadena
Phone: 626-744-6701
E-mail: ALansing@cityofpasadena.net

Seattle/King County (WA)
Alison Eisinger, Executive Director
Seattle/King County Coalition for the Homeless
Phone: 206-357-3148
E-mail: alison@homelessinfo.org

Washington Balance of State (WA)
Tedd Kelleher, Program Manager, Emergency Shelter Programs
Washington Balance of State Continuum of Care
Phone: 360-725-2930
E-mail: teddk@cted.wa.gov