HUD's
HOMELESS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

A Guide to Counting Unsheltered Homeless People

Office of Community Planning and Development

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

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Acknowledgements

Contents

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 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 will be addressed separately by HUD. Approaches to counting sheltered homeless people are 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 agencies involved in Continuums of Care (CoCs), state and local government agencies, 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 (see Section 2.2 for HUD's definition of 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 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

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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].

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.

Starting with the 2003 Continuum of Care application, HUD encouraged CoCs to use a new homeless population and subpopulations chart to *collect* local data on the number and characteristics of unsheltered homeless people. CoCs were also asked to describe the methodology used to collect the reported data on unsheltered homeless people. HUD requested similar information in 2004 and will continue to do so in future applications. This chart is now part of the Consolidated Plan section on homeless needs.

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 the unsheltered; 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, with or without an interview component, turn to page 13.

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 Food Stamps and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). If you are interested in these "serviced-based" counts, turn to page 38.

Finally, *Chapter 5* presents examples of simple enumeration forms and detailed surveys that CoCs have used for interviews. The chapter also includes examples of the timelines two communities follow to prepare for their counts and provides contact information for the Continuums cited in this guide. To see this information, turn to page 54.

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 benefits of conducting counts and what has been learned to date from counting unsheltered persons. This is followed by 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 Why Count Unsheltered Homeless People?

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;
- 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.

> 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.

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 shelters *and* among the unsheltered homeless population, based on local data collected through "on the ground" counts.

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:

- In a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).

A *sheltered* homeless person resides in:

- In an emergency shelter.

- In transitional housing or supportive housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelters.

Raising Public Awareness and Community Involvement

Many CoCs have found that counting homeless people on a regular basis is valuable for raising public awareness. The primary benefit of a "street" count, particularly in suburban and rural areas where homeless people may not be visible, is making the public aware that unsheltered homeless people live in their community. "Street" counts typically receive a lot of attention from the press, which CoCs can use to their advantage 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

> "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)

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.

> **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.

The term "street count," however, is problematic when it is used to refer to all activities designed to learn about unsheltered homeless people. "Street" serves as a convenient shorthand term to refer to a wide variety of places not meant for human habitation. One can also 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 homeless people. Many communities, however, want more information for their efforts and choose to include an interview component.

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.

2.2 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. 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 homeless people 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. Identifying people who are inconsistently housed is one reason for scheduling any counting and interviewing activity for the last week of the month, when public assistance is most likely to have run out.

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.

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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.

> **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.
> > (2004 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. (HUD's Chronic Homelessness Fact Sheet)
>
> 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.
> > (2004 Continuum of Care application)

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 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." 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.

2.3   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 at a one-day point in time" (2004 CoC application). The application also asks CoCs to describe in detail the methods used for collecting the data and the reasons for choosing those methods. Currently, CoCs are awarded points for conducting a point-in-time count at least every three years *and* describing the methodology behind the count. Beginning with the 2005 application, communities will be asked to perform a point-in-time count every other year.

> **HUD STANDARD**
> **How Often Should CoCs Conduct a Count of Unsheltered Homeless People?**
>
> Beginning in 2005, HUD requests that communities perform a point-in-time count every other year. CoCs interviewed for this guide reported that, if resources allow, it is preferable to conduct the count every year or at least every other year, since circumstances for unsheltered homeless people can change significantly from one year to the next.

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 one-day, point-in-time count of homeless individuals and families in shelters, CoCs must collect information on the number of sheltered homeless people considered to be: chronically homeless, seriously mentally ill, chronic substance abusers, veterans, persons with HIV/AIDS, victims of domestic violence, and unaccompanied youth.

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. (2004 CoC application)

CoCs must also count or estimate the number of unsheltered homeless people who meet HUD's definition of chronic homelessness (see Section 2.2 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

> **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.

the sheltered population by a certain factor as an alternative to doing a point-in-time 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 to simply report the number of people counted. As an alternative, CoCs can use statistical sampling and extrapolation to arrive at an estimate of the number of unsheltered homeless persons. It is likely that CoCs will need outside expert advice to implement this approach. New York City's use of statistical sampling and extrapolation is described in Chapters 3 and 5.

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.

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 emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, and homeless outreach services that receive funding through the McKinney-Vento Act 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 not need 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.

2.4　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 *n*th 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 encouraging or requiring:

- Ensure people have not been counted twice;
- Develop estimates of the number of people who may have been homeless over the course of the year; 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. 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 welfare 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)
- Washington (DC).

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)
- Long Beach (CA)
- Denver (CO).

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[3] New York City's 2003 count covered Manhattan only; the 2004 count was extended to Brooklyn and Staten Island.

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 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.

> 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.

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.

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

This method was used by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) in its 2003 count of unsheltered people in Manhattan as an alternative to complete coverage. Due to the sheer size of Manhattan and the impossibility of covering every street block, the count organizers divided the city into "study areas" of approximately three-tenths of a mile each. During extensive preparation for the count, each study area was classified as low, medium, or high density based on the number of homeless people expected to be found in that area. On the night of the count, enumerators visited every high density area and a statistically valid sample of medium and low density areas. The purpose of selecting a statistically valid sample of medium and low density areas was to be able to limit the number of areas enumerators had to cover while allowing the data collected on the night of the count to be extrapolated to the entire borough of Manhattan. Once the count was completed, the DHS used 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 borough as a whole.

The methodology and statistical sampling procedures used in New York City's 2003 count are described in more detail in Chapter 5, as well as changes to the methodology implemented in the 2004 count. Although this method requires a fair amount of statistical sophistication, what is most challenging is determining whether each study area is a low, medium, 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, medium, or low), these designations will 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.

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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.

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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 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 appear to be 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, Inc. (PCNI), the census 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.

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

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.

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 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 on foot, but do not canvass abandoned buildings or private property. Enumerators do count people living in densely vegetated areas under freeways and bridges. Enumerators also try to encourage youth squatting in abandoned houses or buildings to come forward and complete a special survey, but do not actually enter the abandoned structures.

- 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 rural McHenry County (IL), homeless individuals assisted in identifying tent encampments for the purposes of the count, but requested that the revealed locations be kept confidential.

3.4　　Selecting a Date and Time

Picking a Date

It is a generally accepted best practice for CoCs to conduct the counts of unsheltered and sheltered homeless people on the same night to avoid double counting people who may be in a shelter one night and on the streets the next. 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 likely lead to the most accurate count. Most Continuums with cold winters pick a winter or early spring night for the counts (December, January, February, or March) because this is when the shelters are likely to be at peak capacity. Other 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.

Beginning in 2005, however, HUD will request that every Continuum conduct their public places count during the last week of January. This timeframe was selected to provide consistency to the national data HUD receives from CoCs and because, in most regions of the country, it is the time of the year when shelter use peaks. 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. In addition, winter is the season when people are 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.

HUD STANDARD

Consistency in the Timing of the Count is Important

In 2005, HUD specifies that all the counts in the country take place during the same week – the last week in January – in order to generate comparable numbers and to increase public awareness of homeless issues. This will also provide some basis for comparison from year to year (although changing weather conditions and differing data collection methodologies may still make such comparisons difficult). HUD will permit CoCs to conduct public places counts at a different time of the year, provided they have a sufficient rationale that is clearly stated in the relevant portions of the CoC application. In some communities, public places counts are an annual tradition, taking place at the same time every year. Other communities may have unique reasons for proposing a different point in time.

In addition to seasonal variations, conducting the count during the last week 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, the quarterly "street" counts take place on the third Wednesday of the month in order to identify persons who may be temporarily housed at the beginning of the month (due to some type of public assistance income) but spend 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, 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 new timeframe (the last week 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 3:00 am) or start very early in the morning (often beginning before 4:00 am). Generally, 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). 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, CoCs must have a way of dealing with the double counting that is likely to occur when the count extends beyond a single point in time (see Section 3.9 *Dealing with Duplication*).

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.

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How 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 – Local service providers recommended currently and formerly homeless individuals to work on the public places count. Recruits frequently originated from the Veterans Affairs Compensated Work Therapy program. Individuals were paid $10 per hour to participate in a "dry run" of the public places count, work on teams during the enumeration, and conduct surveys of a sample of homeless individuals following the count. The count incorporated about 100 formerly homeless persons, each paired with a community or service provider volunteer on the night of the count.

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.

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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 homeless youth.

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 it is not advisable to 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 by telephone and asking them to recruit among their memberships or employees; and
- Running a newspaper advertisement to recruit volunteers from the general public.

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.

Recruiting Volunteers

Boston – After twenty years of conducting annual street counts, the City of Boston has a base of approximately 150 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 recruiting volunteers two months prior to the public places count by sending out a general announcement for volunteers through its member agencies. The Coalition also creates a half-page flyer that provides the date and time, describes the training session, and asks volunteers to organize themselves into teams of three to four people with a designated team leader. 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.

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.

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.

> 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.

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 (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 several communities:

- *Philadelphia:* Most volunteers that assist with Philadelphia's quarterly street enumerations are affiliated with homeless service providers, social service agencies, or other government departments. When the count first began in 1998, organizers ran hour-long trainings prior to the "street" count. Enumerators have since become very experienced and Philadelphia no longer conducts formal training sessions. Volunteers are sent out in groups of two or three, with experienced enumerators paired with new volunteers.

- *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 a half-day training. The session includes 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;

> 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.

- 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;

- 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.

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Additional Tips for a Successful Count

Supply your enumerators with wallet-sized homeless services resource guides to distribute to homeless people if requested. 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.

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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 5 provides examples of preparation timelines for Boston and Atlanta.

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 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.

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.

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

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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 5.) 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 2003 count of unsheltered homeless people in Manhattan, 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, age group (under 21, 21-55, over 55), 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.

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 5.

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-day (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 known locations 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.

- Complete coverage 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.

- Timing 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 very 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.

- The Director of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission devotes 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 requires the equivalent of one full-time staff person for a full six weeks.

- In its multi-jurisdictional count, the Washington Balance of State CoC spent approximately $4,500 on a technical assistance consultant and used staff time from the CoC lead agency valued at approximately $5,000.

- Atlanta conducted its first count and survey of sheltered and unsheltered populations in 2003. Pathways Community Network, Inc. (PCNI), the census project manager for the Tri-Jurisdictional CoC, chose to hire a research consulting company to help develop the methodology, manage the logistics of the count, and write the report. PCNI 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.

- 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. You may also want to collect information on service use during the study period to help eliminate duplication.

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.

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-weeks 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.

4.1 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 Food Stamp Program 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.

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., Food Stamp and TANF 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 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

The CoCs interviewed for this guide conduct their service-based data collection at different times of the year, depending in part on the local climate. As discussed in Chapter 3, CoCs generally conduct the counts when they believe shelter usage to be at its peak. In most parts of the country, counts occur during the winter months (December through March), but some CoCs operate on a different schedule. For example, the Broward County, FL, CoC conducts its sheltered and unsheltered counts in August because that is when its shelters are at peak capacity due to the extreme heat.

Beginning in 2005, however, HUD will request that point-in-time sheltered and unsheltered counts take place every other year, during the last week in January. However, for CoCs with a good rationale for conducting the point-in-time count at another time, HUD will allow for variation in the timing of counts. For CoCs using a service-based approach that lasts more than one day, the single date chosen for the point-in-time tally should fall within the last week in January. Service-based interviewing can extend

> 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).

beyond that particular week as long as individuals and families are asked about their homeless status on the selected day for the point-in-time 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:

- 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 the Pasadena, CA and Broward County, FL conduct their surveys over several days because it is not feasible to cover the entire jurisdiction in a 24-hour period. However, other CoCs using 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 people access, 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, Food Stamps, and Medicaid offices – as often, and a longer data collection period may be necessary.

> 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.)

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 above). 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 23rd, everyone interviewed on the 23rd 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 23rd would be asked where they spent the night of the 22nd in order to collect comparable data. Only people determined to be homeless on the night of the 22nd 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 5 for examples of these kinds of questions used in Kentucky and Denver.

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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.

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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 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

> 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.

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 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

> **Sample Screener Questions**
>
> - As of today, 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, such as a park bench or bench in a bus station?
> - Where do you usually sleep?
>
> (From New York's 2003 public places count in Manhattan)

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 5.

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 Continuum of Care Population and Subpopulation Chart. While the CoC application requires subpopulation information for sheltered homeless

individuals and families, such information is optional for unsheltered homeless people, except for chronically homelessly persons.

<div style="border:1px solid; background:#fdfbe4; padding:1em;">

Sample Additional Interview Questions

To understand service patterns:
- What was the last county and city you lived in before you became homeless?
- In what type of place did you spend the night of _____ (the first day of the count)?
- In which county and city did you spend the night of _____ (the first day of the count)?
- How long have you been homeless this time?
- How many times have you been homeless before this time?

(From Denver's 2003 count)

</div>

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 5 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' 2003 Core Survey Instrument asks:
  Do you have a disabling condition?
  What type of disabling condition do you have?
  - Physical/medical problems – besides HIV/AIDS
  - HIV/AIDS
  - Mental health or emotional problems
  - Drug or alcohol problems
  - Other

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.

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

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.

Information Collected Through Interviews

Most interview forms collect some or all of the following information:

❑ Name	❑ How many times the person has been homeless
❑ Date of birth	
❑ Gender	❑ Reasons the individual became homeless
❑ Race/ethnicity	
❑ Age	❑ Disability status
❑ Household composition (how many adults, children)	❑ Veteran status
	❑ Employment status
❑ The last city the person lived in before the current location	❑ Income level and source of income
	❑ Housing needs
❑ Length of time the person has been homelessness	❑ Supportive services needs

---

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.

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 TANF offices, 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. 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 the interviews to estimate how many people are likely to have been counted twice. This method is more complicated and less concrete than the unique identifiers approach because you cannot determine precisely who has been counted twice. The method involves asking all the homeless people you interview at all locations (including *both* sheltered and unsheltered homeless people) about their use of shelters and other services during the past 7 days. ("In the past 7 days, on how many days did you sleep in shelters?" "In the past 7 days, on how many days did you eat in soup kitchens?" and so on.) Once you have this information there are several ways to use it. The simplest is the following:

For everyone you found at shelters, make a column in which you display the proportion who had a chance to be found in each of the other locations, either because they used the services or because they had slept on the street within the past week. For instance, for all people found in shelters, if 100 percent used shelters, 70 percent used soup kitchens, 10 percent used health care facilities, and 50 percent spent at least one night on the streets out of the past seven days, your array would look like the first column below. Make a column for each type of location where you looked for homeless people.

What They Used in Last 7 Days	Where You Found Them			
	Shelters (N=100)	Soup Kitchens (N=100)	Health Care (N=100)	Streets (N=100)
Shelters	100	50	40	30
Soup Kitchens	70	100	70	80
Health Care	10	5	100	5
Streets	50	75	65	100
Numbers Interviewed at Location (N=400)	100	100	100	100
Unduplicated Numbers (N=190)	100	50	25	15

Suppose you do a week-long study. On the first night, you conduct your shelter count and get a comprehensive count of all people using shelters, and find 100 people. Throughout the rest of the week you visit other service and street locations, and find 100 people in each type of location. For a crude way to eliminate duplication, begin with shelters. Count everyone

you found at shelters (100 people). Next look at the people you found at soup kitchens, and count *only* those who did *not* use shelters during the past week (50 people). (If they did use shelters, you would have counted them as part of the shelter users, and you do not want to double count them.) Do the same thing for each additional location type. In the example above, only 25 of the people found at health care sites had not used shelters or soup kitchens during the past week, and only 15 of the people found on the streets had not used any of the three services in the past week. Your total unduplicated count of homeless people for this week is thus 190, not 400.

If you do collect this type of data to help in estimating an unduplicated count, you need to be careful about its reliability. You may need to specify all of the types of programs you mean when you ask the question, so people have a chance to answer you truthfully in relation to the way you will interpret the answer. For example, you <u>do not</u> want to do any of the following:

- Ask people whether they use food programs and have them say "no" because they are thinking only of soup kitchens that serve hot meals, when in fact they pick up a brown bag lunch every day from a church food program and they eat a hot meal once or twice a week at a drop-in center;

- Ask people whether they sleep in shelters, and have them say "no" when they are supported by a voucher program to live in a hotel;

- Ask people whether they have a home of their own, and have them say "yes," when their home is a shelter or a cardboard box in a back alley.

The approach described above probably overcorrects for duplication because it does not take into consideration the fact that over the course of seven days many more people might be found at each location than happened to be there when your survey team arrived. If you wanted to add complexity to the task of determining an unduplicated count, you could use statistical methods to account for the frequency with which each person could be found in each location during the week. You have this information from the answers to your interview questions if you asked *on how many occasions* the person used a given service location over the past seven days. However, many CoCs will likely need statistical assistance from a researcher or local university to conduct this more sophisticated analysis.

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 homeless 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 simple spreadsheet 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.

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. 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."

5.1 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 back of the tally sheet (not shown here) 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 seen, the enumerator is asked to record the number of adult men, adult women, youth, and persons of undetermined age or gender. The form also includes a small area for notes.

Atlanta uses a "real time" data collection process. As teams finish counting a census block group, they call trained operators at the United Way Help Line to report data via cell phone (instructions are provided at the bottom of the form). Operators enter data directly into databases that immediately calculate preliminary results. The hard copy tally sheets are used to double check the electronic data entry and are kept on file as backup.

Seattle Enumeration Form[4]

Count Area_____

One Night Count of the Homeless
October 17, 2003

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		

THESE FIGURES NEED TO MATCH

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[4] The form was reproduced from a document provided by Tara Connor of the Plymouth Housing Group.

Atlanta Enumeration Form[5]

**2003 Sample Street Census Collection Instrument
for the Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative on Homelessness,
covering the City of Atlanta, Fulton County, and DeKalb County**

Homeless Census Tally Sheet for Census Area ID#:   E047B003 (only one)
Census Takers Names: Bob Smith, Jim Tucker, and Nancy Wright

# 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, Undetermined Age/Gender
卌 卌 卌 卌 卌 卌	卌 卌 IIII	I		IIII
Total: 30	**Total: 14**	**Total: 1**	**Total: 0**	**Total:4**

Count a person only once, EITHER as a single person (count above) OR as a person in a family (below).

FAMILY UNITS	# ADULT MEN (18 or older)	# ADULT WOMEN (18 or older)	# YOUTH (under 18)	# of Persons, Undetermined Age/Gender
Family 1	I	I	III	
Family 2		I	II	
Family 3		I	I	
Family 4	I	I	II	
Family 5	I	I	IIII	
Family 6				

> **Notes:**
> 1) Some people in camper – can't tell how many.
> 2) Looks like two people in car – can't tell gender or ages.

Upon completion of This Census Area, call 404-614-1000. Press 1 (for English), Press 8 (for census), and give your ID Number and Password (found at the top of your map). Then report your Tally Sheet results to the Operator. Record time of call here: 5:45.

5.2 Tally Sheet Plus Short Interview

Following is the tally sheet and short interview form used in New York City's 2003 "street" count of Manhattan.[6] 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, age range, race/ethnicity, and any notable identifiers. Enumerators also record the location and time of the encounter.

Unlike the Seattle and Atlanta tally sheets, the New York City form does not include a place to record whether the individual encountered is a single individual or a person in a family. DHS did not expect to find homeless families on the street. Indeed, the results of the count showed only four individuals believed to be between 18 and 21 and no children under 18. In cases where a man and woman were found together, enumerators were instructed to complete two screeners and note the fact that the people were together in the notable identifiers section.

Depending on when the count is conducted and local patterns of homelessness, collecting information on the household composition of unsheltered homeless people may be important for planning purposes and is required for the Housing Gaps Analysis chart in the Continuum of Care application.

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[6]   This form was reproduced from a document provided by Katie Appel of the New York City Department of Homeless Services.

New York's Tally Sheet and Interview Form

Area Number: [   ]

HOMELESS SURVEY SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

NOTE: THE PORTIONS OF THIS INSTRUMENT IN CAPITALS ARE INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE INTERVIEWER, AND THOSE THAT ARE NOT IN CAPITALS SHOULD BE READ TO THE RESPONDENT.

1. IS THIS PERSON:
   - ❑ AWAKE (**READ INTRO PGH AND GO TO Q2**)
   - ❑ ASLEEP (**GO TO Q9**)

Hello, I am (NAME), a volunteer for the City of New York Department Of Homeless Services. 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.

2. Would you like to participate?
   - __YES (GO TO Q3)
   - __NO (**STOP** INTERVIEW. **GO TO QUESTION 8**.)

3. RESPONDENT INDICATED THAT S/HE WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE BY (PLEASE CHECK AS APPROPRIATE AND GO TO Q4)
   - __STATING THAT HE/SHE WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE
   - __NODDING HIS/HER HEAD THAT HE/SHE WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE
   - __OTHER (SPECIFY) _____

4. As of today do you have some place that you consider to be your home or the place where you live?
   - __YES (GO TO Q5)   __REFUSED (GO TO Q5)
   - __NO (GO TO Q6)   __DON'T KNOW (GO TO Q5)

5. Is that a room, an apartment, a house, a shelter, or a spot in some public place, such as a park bench or bench in a bus station? (PROBE UNTIL YOU GET AN ANSWER THAT INDICATES THAT THE INDIVIDUAL IS DEFINITELY LIVING IN AN APARTMENT, HOUSE, OR ROOM, OR NOT LIVING IN SUCH A PLACE.)
   - __ROOM   (GO TO Q7)
   - __AN APARTMENT   (GO TO Q7)
   - __A HOUSE   (GO TO Q7)
   - __A SPOT IN A PUBLIC PLACE   (GO TO Q6)

   - __A SHELTER   (GO TO Q6)
   - __THE STREETS   (GO TO Q6)
   - __AN ABANDONED BUILDING   (GO TO Q6)
   - __A CAR OR TRUCK   (GO TO Q6)
   - __SOME OTHER PLACE (SPECIFY) : (GO TO Q6)
   _____
   - __REFUSED   (GO TO Q6)
   - __DON'T KNOW   (GO TO Q6)

6. Where do you usually sleep?(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)
   - __SHELTER   (GO TO Q7)
   - __DROP-IN CENTER   (GO TO Q7)
   - __STREET, PARK, OTHER OPEN SPACE (GO TO Q7)
   - __PUBLIC PLACE (BUS STATIONS, BUSES, ALL NIGHT MOVIES, AIRPORT, BAR, ETC.) (GO TO Q7)
   - __DORMITORY HOTEL (FLOPHOUSE OR OTHER PLACE WITHOUT SEPARATE ROOMS) (GO TO Q7)
   - __HOTEL (SEPARATE ROOMS FOR CLIENTS) (GO TO Q7)
   - __ABANDONED BUILDING   (GO TO Q7)
   - __SUBWAY   (GO TO Q7)
   - __SOME OTHER (INCLUDING CAR/TRUCK, SPECIFY):
   _____(GO TO Q7)
   - __REFUSED   (GO TO Q7)
   - __DON'T KNOW   (GO TO Q7)

7. Were you asked these questions by someone else today?
   - __YES (READ TERMINATION PARAGRAPH **GO TO Q8**)
   - __NO (READ TERMINATION PARAGRAPH **GO TO Q8**)

TERMINATION PARAGRAPH:
IF THE PERSON HAS IDENTIFIED HIM/HERSELF AS HOMELESS, ASK IF HE/SHE WOULD LIKE TO BE TAKEN TO A SHELTER THIS EVENING.

Those are all the questions I have for you. Thank you very much for your time and participation. Let me assure you again that all the information you have given will be kept strictly confidential. Good night.

8. **AFTER ASKING THESE QUESTIONS, DO YOU BELIEVE THAT THIS PERSON IS HOMELESS?**
   __YES (COMPLETE #9-14)   __NO (STOP HERE)

9. GENDER: __MALE   __FEMALE   __UNKNOWN

10. AGE: __ <21   __ 21-55   __ >55   __ UNKNOWN

11. RACE/ETHNICITY (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):
    - __ WHITE   __ BLACK   __ HISPANIC
    - __ ASIAN/PACIFIC ISLANDER   __ UNKNOWN
    - __ OTHER _____

12. NOTABLE IDENTIFIERS (UNUSUAL FACIAL HAIR, SCARS, TATTOOS, CLOTHING)

[   ]

13. LOCATION: (PLEASE LIST THE NEAREST CROSS STREETS)

[   ]

14. TIME: _____

TEAM LEADER INITIALS: _____

5.3   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.

5.4   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.[7] 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.[8] 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.

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[7]   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.

[8]   The survey was reproduced from the *2001 Kentucky Homeless Survey Report*, prepared by the Institute for Regional Analysis and Public Policy and provided by Natalie Hutcheson of 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 <u>one</u> 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
     - ☐ Bennett
     - ☐ Brighton
     - ☐ Commerce City
     - ☐ Dupont
     - ☐ Eastlake
     - ☐ Federal Heights
     - ☐ Henderson
     - ☐ Lochbuie
     - ☐ Northglenn
     - ☐ Strasburg
     - ☐ Thornton
     - ☐ Watkins
     - ☐ Westminster
   - 2 ☐ Arapahoe County
     - ☐ Aurora
     - ☐ Bow Mar
     - ☐ Byers
     - ☐ Cherry Hills Village
     - ☐ Columbine Valley
     - ☐ Deer Trail
     - ☐ Englewood
     - ☐ Foxfield
     - ☐ Glendale
     - ☐ Greenwood Village
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Sheridan
   - 3 ☐ Boulder County
     - ☐ Allenspark
     - ☐ Boulder
     - ☐ Eldorado Springs
     - ☐ Erie
     - ☐ Hygiene
     - ☐ Jamestown
     - ☐ Lafayette
     - ☐ Longmont
     - ☐ Louisville
     - ☐ Lyons
     - ☐ Nederland
     - ☐ Niwot
     - ☐ Pinecliffe
     - ☐ Superior
     - ☐ Ward
   - 4 ☐ Douglas County
     - ☐ Aurora
     - ☐ Castle Rock
     - ☐ Deckers
     - ☐ Franktown
     - ☐ Highlands Ranch
     - ☐ Larkspur
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Lone Tree
     - ☐ Louviers
     - ☐ Parker
     - ☐ Sedalia
   - 5 ☐ Jefferson County
     - ☐ Arvada
     - ☐ Bow Mar
     - ☐ Buffalo Creek
     - ☐ Columbine Hills
     - ☐ Columbine Valley
     - ☐ Conifer
     - ☐ Edgewater
     - ☐ Evergreen
     - ☐ Foxton
     - ☐ Golden
     - ☐ Idledale
     - ☐ Indian Hills
     - ☐ Kittredge
     - ☐ Lakeside
     - ☐ Lakewood
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Morrison
     - ☐ Mountain View
     - ☐ Pine
     - ☐ Wheat Ridge
   - 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
   - 2 ☐ on the street, under a bridge, etc.
   - 3 ☐ bus
   - 4 ☐ prison/jail
   - 5 ☐ psychiatric hospital
   - 6 ☐ in a home I/we own (became homeless today)
   - 7 ☐ migrant shelter
   - 8 ☐ domestic violence shelter
   - 9 ☐ in transitional housing
   - 10 ☐ with a friend or relative
   - 11 ☐ hotel/motel
   - 12 ☐ detox facility
   - 13 ☐ medical hospital
   - 14 ☐ in a car
   - 15 ☐ camping
   - 16 ☐ don't know
   - 17 ☐ other _____

7. In which county and did you spend the night of _____?
   - 1 ☐ Adams County
     - ☐ Aurora
     - ☐ Bennett
     - ☐ Brighton
     - ☐ Commerce City
     - ☐ Dupont
     - ☐ Eastlake
     - ☐ Federal Heights
     - ☐ Henderson
     - ☐ Lochbuie
     - ☐ Northglenn
     - ☐ Strasburg
     - ☐ Thornton
     - ☐ Watkins
     - ☐ Westminster
   - 2 ☐ Arapahoe County
     - ☐ Aurora
     - ☐ Bow Mar
     - ☐ Byers
     - ☐ Cherry Hills Village
     - ☐ Columbine Valley
     - ☐ Deer Trail
     - ☐ Englewood
     - ☐ Foxfield
     - ☐ Glendale
     - ☐ Greenwood Village
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Sheridan
   - 3 ☐ Boulder County
     - ☐ Allenspark
     - ☐ Boulder
     - ☐ Eldorado Springs
     - ☐ Erie
     - ☐ Hygiene
     - ☐ Jamestown
     - ☐ Lafayette
     - ☐ Longmont
     - ☐ Louisville
     - ☐ Lyons
     - ☐ Nederland
     - ☐ Niwot
     - ☐ Pinecliffe
     - ☐ Superior
     - ☐ Ward
   - 4 ☐ Douglas County
     - ☐ Aurora
     - ☐ Castle Rock
     - ☐ Deckers
     - ☐ Franktown
     - ☐ Highlands Ranch
     - ☐ Larkspur
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Lone Tree
     - ☐ Louviers
     - ☐ Parker
     - ☐ Sedalia
   - 5 ☐ Jefferson County
     - ☐ Arvada
     - ☐ Bow Mar
     - ☐ Buffalo Creek
     - ☐ Columbine Hills
     - ☐ Columbine Valley
     - ☐ Conifer
     - ☐ Edgewater
     - ☐ Evergreen
     - ☐ Foxton
     - ☐ Golden
     - ☐ Idledale
     - ☐ Indian Hills
     - ☐ Kittredge
     - ☐ Lakeside
     - ☐ Lakewood
     - ☐ Littleton
     - ☐ Morrison
     - ☐ Mountain View
     - ☐ Pine
     - ☐ Wheat Ridge
   - 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
   - 2 ☐ 30 – 90 days
   - 3 ☐ 3 to six months
   - 4 ☐ six months to one year
   - 5 ☐ one to two years
   - 6 ☐ two to five years
   - 7 ☐ five to ten years
   - 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.)

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)**

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

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:

5.5   Methodology Used in New York City's Count

Sampling for the 2003 Count of Manhattan[9]

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.[10] 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.[11]

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

[10]   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.

[11]   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
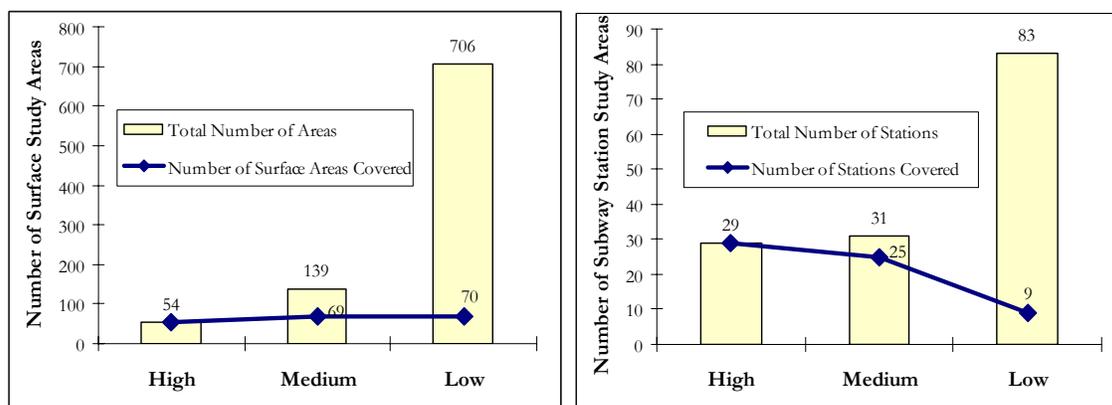
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, 2003

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.

5.6   Contact Information for Examples Cited in Guide

Below you will find contact information for all 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)
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City of Boston Emergency Shelter Commission
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Broward County (FL)
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Broward County Homeless Initiative Partnership Administration
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Denver (CO)
Tracy D'Alanno, Unit Manager, Homeless and Resource Development
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Greater Grand Traverse Area (MI)
Cheryl Naperala, CoC Coordinator
Greater Grand Traverse Area Continuum of Care
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Kentucky Balance of State (KY)
Natalie Hutcheson, Specialized Housing Resources Director
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City of Long Beach (CA)
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City of Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services
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McHenry County (IL)
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Salvation Army
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Metropolitan Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional CoC (GA)
William Matson, Executive Director
Pathways Community Network, Inc.
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