



## Engaging Subpopulation for the Point-in-Time Count

Below please find hyperlinks and information that will help your community identify the best ways to engage subpopulations in the planning, organizing, and execution of the PIT Count. When conducting a PIT Count it is extremely important to include subpopulations as they bring additional expertise and resources to the PIT Count process.

### **Resources:**

- [Individuals with Lived Experience](#)
- [Youth](#)
- [Veterans](#)
- [Families](#)
- [Domestic Violence Survivors](#)

### **Youth:**

*Collaborate with local school district homeless liaisons.*

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

*Recruit currently or formerly homeless youth to assist with the count.*

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

*Engage organizations serving homeless youth. Identify and engage all stakeholders that might encounter or serve unaccompanied, homeless youth age 24 or under to participate in local PIT count planning meetings.*

- Key providers include:
  - Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs
  - Youth shelters
  - Youth drop-in centers
  - Street outreach teams



- Local churches that serve hot meals
- Health clinics—youth-based and adult, including mobile health outreach
- Local middle schools, high schools, and alternative education programs
- Youth employment programs
- Food banks
- LGBTQ service providers
- Libraries
- Recreation centers

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

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

*Hold magnet events.*

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

*Use social media to raise awareness and outreach.*

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

*Identify a lead homeless youth PIT count coordinator to facilitate data collection*

- Engage other youth providers, and coordinate collection of data from locations where homeless youth congregate.

*Provide services, food, and incentives to youth being counted.*

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

*Survey locations during multiple times throughout the day of the count.*

- Youth might not be visible on the street during school hours. Consider assessing count routes prior to the count to ensure that teams are in the right places at the right times. A location that is crowded in the morning might be empty only a few hours later.



- A CoC may choose to extend the hours of the count into the evening hours to reach youth during the time between when drop-in programs close for the day and when they retire for the night. CoCs choosing to do this must take the steps necessary to ensure people are not double counted. CoCs surveying an area multiple times throughout the day must use an interview that allows for deduplication.
- CoCs must be creative and develop strategies to ensure that the unsheltered counts cover or systematically sample locations where unaccompanied homeless youth congregate. CoCs' efforts to overcome the challenges with counting youth, will likely result in promising practices that will improve the accuracy of the homeless youth data local

#### Veterans:

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

*Below are some suggestions about specific ways local CoCs and VA can collaborate:*

- Engage the local VA Medical Center, VA Vet Centers, or VA department staff that have experience screening and interviewing veterans to determine eligibility for VA homeless services, as well as those who provide services to homeless veterans or work on homeless issues to help plan and implement the count.
- Knowledgeable and experienced staff can help:
  - **Locate unsheltered veterans.** VA medical centers and VA Vet centers have homeless coordinators and outreach workers who regularly interact with veterans, including homeless veterans. These staff workers are knowledgeable about the locations where unsheltered homeless veterans live, sleep, and congregate, and can identify the places that must be included in the unsheltered count. These individuals can also help make sure the roster of housing programs for homeless veterans is complete for the count and identify any other VA funded service centers that should be involved, such as Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs), VA community Resource and Referral centers (CRRCs), VA Vet centers, and Women Veteran Programs.
  - **Provide guidance on count and survey instruments.** VA staff can offer technical support to improve data accuracy.



- **Assist during the count.** Veteran homeless coordinators and outreach workers can form special teams to canvas encampments and other remote areas that might not have been included in previous counts. Their relationships with clients could also help homeless veterans feel more comfortable providing information.
- **Work with service providers, homeless and mainstream, who target veterans specifically.** These might include agencies that call themselves “veteran centers” but are not part of the VA. Lists of chartered and non-chartered agencies serving homeless and other veterans can be found nationally at the National Resource Directory for Veterans ([www.nrd.org](http://www.nrd.org)) and the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans ([www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org)). In addition, every state has a Department of Veteran Affairs or equivalent office that might be able to provide a list of relevant service agencies by location.
- **Reach out to local Veteran Service Organizations (e.g., American Legion, Disabled American Veterans) for their cooperation with the count.** Especially in rural areas where there might not be many homeless service providers, Veteran Service Organizations provide assistance to homeless veterans and their families. Some VSOs have funds that are set aside to assist these families with motel vouchers and utility payments.
- **Recruit homeless or formerly homeless veterans to be enumerators for the unsheltered count.** Homeless veterans can be an indispensable resource while planning and conducting a PIT count. Before the count, they can assist in identifying locations where unsheltered homeless veterans might be living. They can also participate in the count itself, as they might be able to gain the trust of homeless veterans more easily than other staff or volunteers and have more success completing surveys.

#### **Chronically Homeless:**

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