



Conducting the 2021 PIT Count: Full Unsheltered and Sheltered Guidance

To maximize safety but allow for sufficient data collection to understand basic trends among people experiencing homelessness, THN is providing the following flexibilities for the 2021 PIT Count.

Safety Basics:

During the PIT count, adhere to the following COVID-19 safety basics.

- Decrease face-to-face interaction with clients
- Decrease the number of volunteers who need to work in physical proximity
- Provide personal protective equipment for volunteers
- Design volunteer processes that minimize close contact

Data Collection Considerations: Each community will need to submit a plan for their 2021 PIT count. Not only will this form assist with your planning for the deduplication of surveys, but it will also help inform me when we need to have THN staff available to provide technical assistance. The deadline to submit is January 11, 2021, at 11:59 pm.

Link to the form: <https://thn.wufoo.com/forms/r19uaqafowg2sxf/>

Sheltered Flexibilities: THN will allow each community the option to adjust their sheltered count in a variety of ways to help with sheltered staff capacity while also limiting the need for outside volunteers assistance. If none of the following flexibilities will work for your community and you are still concerned about your ability to conduct a sheltered count, please identify that on the survey tool. Please note that you will need approval to utilize any of the following flexibilities.

The potential flexibilities include:

1. Allowing sheltered clients to fill out their own paper surveys during intake.
2. Allowing sheltered surveys to be conducted by staff over the phone.
3. Utilizing HMIS to fill in the survey (after obtaining client consent).

Unsheltered Flexibilities: Out of an abundance of caution, the 2021 Unsheltered Count has shifted to an Observation Count only. This means that there will be no interviews and that each community will only be gathering enough information to conduct a headcount.

Below are the flexibilities:

1. If your community cannot safely conduct an Unsheltered count, you are permitted to opt out.

2. The Unsheltered count can be extended until 1/29/21 at 11:59 pm (If your community would like).

Sheltered Considerations: Below you will find a more in depth description of each of the sheltered count options. Please note that your community will need to demonstrate that you have adequate planning measures in place before receiving approval.

1. **Allowing Clients to fill out their own paper surveys at intake:** For this year we are willing to create paper copies of the sheltered survey tool so that clients will be able to fill them out themselves. This will allow clients to directly participate in the survey process without putting them at further exposure risk (because they will not need to interact with anyone).

Paper Survey Considerations:

- You will need to have a secure place to store these surveys until they can be entered into the app.
 - You will need to have a way to track the surveys to ensure that they all get entered and none of them are lost.
 - You will need to identify which staff person(s) will be putting the surveys into the app.
 - **All surveys will need to be in the app by no later than 11:59 pm on 2/1/21**
2. **Allowing sheltered surveys to be conducted by staff over the phone:** This flexibility is primarily geared towards sheltered locations that are contracting out to hotel/motels to house clients as well as shelters that are not permitted to have face-to-face contact with clients at this time. It will also be beneficial to transitional housing projects that have multiple sites. If conducting the sheltered surveys over the phone is easier for staff and would eliminate the need for in person interaction, please feel free to opt into this on the survey.
 3. **Utilizing HMIS to fill in the survey (after obtaining client consent):** This option is only available to those sheltered projects that are currently in HMIS. If you are in a comparable database or use some other database, you will not be permitted this option. If you have a shelter selecting this option, it is not an automatic guarantee that it will be approved. **Also, it is very important to note that you will be required to obtain client consent before using their HMIS data to fill in the information on the mobile app.** Below are the considerations we will take into account before approving this.

HMIS Considerations:

- You will need to submit the names of each sheltered location that would like to be considered.
 - Our team will be running data quality checks on their projects in early January to determine if this is viable.
 - If we have concerns over data quality, they will not be permitted to use this option and will have to coordinate with you on an alternative.
- HMIS does not gather all of the information that we collect on the sheltered survey, so you will have to leave some very important questions blank in the survey if you opt to use this.
- This method will likely take the most time of the three options provided, because you will have to look for the information in multiple places.

Unsheltered Considerations: Below you will find a more in depth description of each of the unsheltered options. Please note that your community will need to demonstrate that you have adequate planning measures in place before being approved for the extension.

1. ***If your community cannot safely conduct an Unsheltered count, you are permitted to opt out:*** We recognize that many of your communities have been experiencing a rise in COVID-19 cases since the Holiday Season started. If you are concerned that even with the new precautions and guidance, that you will not be able to safely count please know that it is okay to opt out.

Opting Out Considerations:

- The deadline to opt out is 1/27/21.
 - Please know that this means your community will not have any formal unsheltered PIT data for 2021. **We are not responsible for any impact this may have on grant applications; however, we will support you in any way we can to help you identify alternative data sets.**
2. ***The Unsheltered count can be extended until 1/29/21 at 11:59 pm:*** All communities are being offered this opportunity; however, you will need to provide additional documentation explaining your process for ensuring data quality. We are recommending that only experienced count communities and/or areas where you know the majority of your unsheltered folx by name opt into this.

Extension Considerations:

- You will still need to limit the amount of interaction between volunteers and unhoused neighbors.
- **This only applies to the Unsheltered Count. You will still only be permitted to conduct the sheltered count on 1/28/21.**
- Try to rely heavily on outreach workers and other volunteers who know your unhoused neighbors by name, they will be able to help document identifying information on the surveys.

Volunteers: Conducting unsheltered PIT counts in many communities requires a large number of volunteers. Many regions rely on volunteers that are 55 and older as well as post-secondary students, which are less likely to participate due to the COVID-19. HUD and THN discourage areas from using volunteers that are at high risk of contracting COVID-19, including persons age 65 or older, to physically count. If your region has people that want to volunteer but are in a high risk group, you are encouraged to determine if there are other ways to use their services that minimize their exposure (e.g., entering data from surveys collected), or to politely decline their assistance this year. Also, many colleges and universities are allowing virtual learning which is limiting the number of students in communities that would ordinarily participate in the counts. Communities can still reach out to their local colleges and universities to see if there is a way to mobilize students that are studying virtually. Remote trainings and physical distancing may mean new volunteers may express interest in participating.

Homeless Service Provider Staff: Many homeless service providers are understaffed and have maximized their current staff capacity. If an unsheltered PIT count is conducted, your area will likely rely heavily on homeless service provider staff to serve as enumerators. Before considering whether to extend your count for the extra day, please consider whether this additional requirement may be too much for providers that simply cannot take on another task.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Your region will need to ensure that all volunteers have some PPE. PIT Leads should ask all volunteers to bring masks and wear them for the duration of the count and other volunteer efforts. We have a supply of donated masks that we would be happy to send you if you need. We also recommend that you provide gloves and/or hand sanitizer to volunteers if accessible. Please let us know if you do not have access to these things and we will work with you on developing a strategy to get some for your volunteers. Please work with your local public health authority to ensure you are providing adequate PPE for conducting a safe count. Please let us know if you need help contacting them.

Social distancing: All volunteers will need to conduct counts in compliance with social distancing principles which recommends remaining at least 6 feet apart. Our recommendation is that you limit the number of teams as much as possible. Since there are no unsheltered interviews happening, you could remove teams entirely. If you do still want to use teams, our recommendation is to keep them small, with only two or three volunteers per team and to try and limit the teams to being household members or coworkers. These teams should maintain at least six feet from one another other as well as people experiencing homelessness, so this means that nobody should be riding in a car with someone outside of their immediate household or co-working space.

Health precautions: To prevent the risk of spreading COVID-19, we recommend that any volunteer be tested for COVID-19 prior to participation in the count no more than 7 days prior, or at least screen for symptoms and check temperatures. PIT leads should encourage volunteers to stay home if they have any symptoms and plan for volunteer absences. We also recommend volunteers observe for symptoms for up to 14 days after the count and consider getting tested for COVID-19. Many states and communities have created contact tracing applications so that people understand who they have come in contact with in the event they, or someone they interacted with, tested positive for COVID-19. PIT Leads should consider requiring or at least suggesting that enumerators download that application if one is available in the jurisdiction they are counting in.

Partnerships: PIT Leads should work closely with public health and health care partners to conduct the PIT count. Partnering with Health Care for the Homeless providers and the public health authority will give regions needed insight about safely conducting the unsheltered PIT count and may provide additional access to health resources to conduct the count.

HUD and THN are committed to keeping people experiencing homelessness and those who serve them safe. HUD and THN also feel that understanding basic trend data on unsheltered homelessness is critical to enhancing our ability to better address this important population.