

2026 PIT COORDINATOR MANUAL

AVA PAREDES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

3	.....	Introduction
4	.....	Challenges & Limitations
5	.....	Sheltered Planning
7	.....	Housing Inventory Count
9	.....	Counting Us App
10	.....	Unsheltered Planning
13	.....	Subpopulation Tips
14	.....	Community Engagement
15	.....	Suggested Timeline
16	.....	Steps to Take Close to the Count
17	.....	Glossary
20	.....	Additional Information for PIT Leads

INTRODUCTION

This Coordinator's Manual provides guidance on how to plan and implement the Point-in-Time Count. It is not inclusive of everything that needs to be done for a successful count, as many factors of count planning are community-specific. This document should be viewed as a jumping-off point to start the planning process. The PIT Coordinator for each coalition/community is responsible for knowing this information in advance of the PIT Count, which will be occurring on **Thursday, January 22nd, 2026**.

Every year, local agencies and organizations conduct a count to determine the extent of homelessness in their community. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires Continuums of Care (CoCs) to complete a PIT count of the people who are unhoused and people who are sheltered in their community. Aside from eligibility to compete for HUD homeless funding, an accurate count offers several benefits including:



CONTEXT

HUD requires each CoC to conduct the unsheltered count at least biennially during the last ten days of January and the sheltered count annually. The Texas Balance of State Continuum of Care (TX BoS CoC) opts to conduct the full count every year, though.

To meet HUD requirements, local homeless coalitions and communities will count people who are:

Sheltered (living in emergency shelters, transitional housing, or hotels paid for by voucher)

Unsheltered (living in cars, outdoor encampments, other places not meant for human habitation)

In addition to gathering a headcount of those experiencing homelessness, volunteers are also asked to gather information about the demographic characteristics of the survey participants, whether they have a mental illness, substance use disorder, HIV/AIDS, or whether they are survivors of domestic violence or veterans.

HUD acknowledges that the unsheltered count will not totally reflect the exact amount of homeless people in communities, but hopes to provide a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness on any given night. This is often referred to as the minimum number of individuals experiencing homelessness in a community, on a single night.

CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

A successful PIT Count requires buy-in, a level of cooperation and commitment in the community, and communication from start to finish. Often PIT Counts must confront the myths and misconceptions about homelessness in addition to completing the count.

PIT Count Challenges

1

The time of the year: extreme weather conditions tend to make it harder to find volunteers and locate unsheltered neighbors.

2

Concerns around the number of people identified not reflecting the true picture of homelessness. The count is meant to be only a snapshot, but many providers are worried about significant undercounting.

3

The PIT count definition of homelessness is less inclusive than other definitions. It doesn't account for those experiencing "hidden homelessness" such as couch surfing.

4

Simply knowing where to look for unsheltered homeless people can become an overwhelming task. The geographic areas can sometimes feel impossible to fully cover.

GENERAL PLANNING TIPS

A PIT Count is dependent on consistent, accurate methods across the whole CoC. It will be critical for PIT leads to ensure that all volunteers have received the necessary training and that they feel comfortable on the day of the count.

Additional Considerations:

- Secure Local Government Support
 - Obtain a resolution/declaration from local county and city government supporting the PIT count
- Use the Media (Television, Print, Internet)
 - Before the count:
 - To recruit volunteers
 - inform people of the count
 - draw attention to the issue
 - After the count:
 - To disseminate the results
 - Educate the community about homelessness
- Involve people with lived experience in count planning and surveying
- Use incentives
 - For both volunteers and survey participants
- Use the count as a form of outreach
 - Provide community resource information and necessary referral process to participants

SHELTERED PLANNING

Regardless of funding source, all providers of shelter, vouchers, or funds for shelters (including motel/hotel rooms), and/or transitional housing need to provide unduplicated information about the individuals and families they house on the night of the count. Surveys should be conducted as participants are coming into the shelter to stay the night on January 22nd, 2026.

WHO COUNTS?

Individuals and Families residing in:

- ☒ Emergency Shelter
- ☒ Transitional Housing
- ☒ Domestic Violence Shelter
- ☒ Cold Weather Shelter
- ☒ Hotel paid for by agency voucher
- ☒ Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) and residential programs
- ☒ Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Emergency or Transitional Housing

WHO DOES NOT COUNT?

Individuals and Families residing in:

- ☒ A home they are at risk of being evicted from
- ☒ Rapid Rehousing (RRH) or Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
- ☒ HUD-VASH or FEMA projects
- ☒ The home of a friend or family member temporarily
- ☒ Emergency foster care/ youth treatment facilities
- ☒ Mental health, criminal justice, or chemical dependency facilities

SHELTERED PLANNING HELPFUL HINTS

- For large agencies where providers may have difficulties completing all the surveys; enlist assistance from volunteers to assistance in completing the surveys on January 22nd.
- Be sure to meet with providers ahead of time. They need to know what to expect and have trainings in using the forms. This is especially important for providers who pay for motel/hotel vouchers. Work closely with them ahead of time to decide who should complete forms. This is especially true for any new agency/organization that may be providing data for the first time or have new staff/volunteers that are not familiar with the process.
- Two to three days prior to the count, contact all homeless service providers to remind them about the count. Assess if there are any last minute questions regarding using the Counting Us Application. **Remind providers to submit data only on participants who are residents on the evening of January 22nd.**

SHELTERED PLANNING

Steps to Take for PIT Leads:

Provider Coordination

- Review the list of all agencies that provide shelter and transitional housing in your community. This list will be provided by the Data and Engagement Coordinator at THN. Ensure that this is an all inclusive list (Including non-profit, faith based, government, volunteer organizations).
- As early as possible, inform all providers of the date of the count, deadlines, and strategies.

Data Collection

- Deliver data collection instructions to all providers by **January 5th**.
- Repeat that identifying information from all sheltered and unsheltered people is critical for un-duplicating the data. **(with the exception of survivors of domestic violence)**.
 - Always attempt to get a full first and last name along with exact age
 - If an individual is hesitant make sure to at least get at least their initials and age
- All shelters and transitional housing providers should make sure that their surveys were submitted in real time or if created in draft form, that they are submitted by **11:59PM on January 22nd 2026**. Data not submitted by the due date will not be included in any reports pertaining to the Texas Balance of State CoC.
- Remember to follow-up with all agencies conducting surveys; i.e. organizations, government entities, and faith-based groups that provide vouchers for motel/hotel rooms in lieu of shelter to make sure they have submitted all surveys via the mobile app or web browser.
- PIT Leads should use the name, age, location information to determine if any person(s) has already been surveyed to help eliminate the duplicated data. This may involve contacting interviewers to clarify the information obtained.
 - THN will assist in the de-duplication process

Training for the Sheltered Count - Providers

- If the program staff will be collecting data for the sheltered count, **they will need training**.
 - Keep it brief - less than an hour
 - Try to offer more than one session
 - Consider providing training as part of your local coalition meeting
 - Use the provided supplemental materials for trainings
 - Always provide contact information for a person who can answer questions regarding the forms

HOUSING INVENTORY COUNT (HIC)

The HIC is a point-in-time inventory of projects within your CoC that provide beds and units dedicated to serving people experiencing homelessness. It is important that the sheltered portion of the PIT count be closely coordinated with the administration of the annual Housing Inventory Count. The Housing Inventory Count (HIC) takes place on the same night as the PIT. All Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing projects surveyed for the PIT need to be included in the HIC. In addition, the HIC also contains other housing projects that are not counted in the PIT.



Projects Counted in the HIC

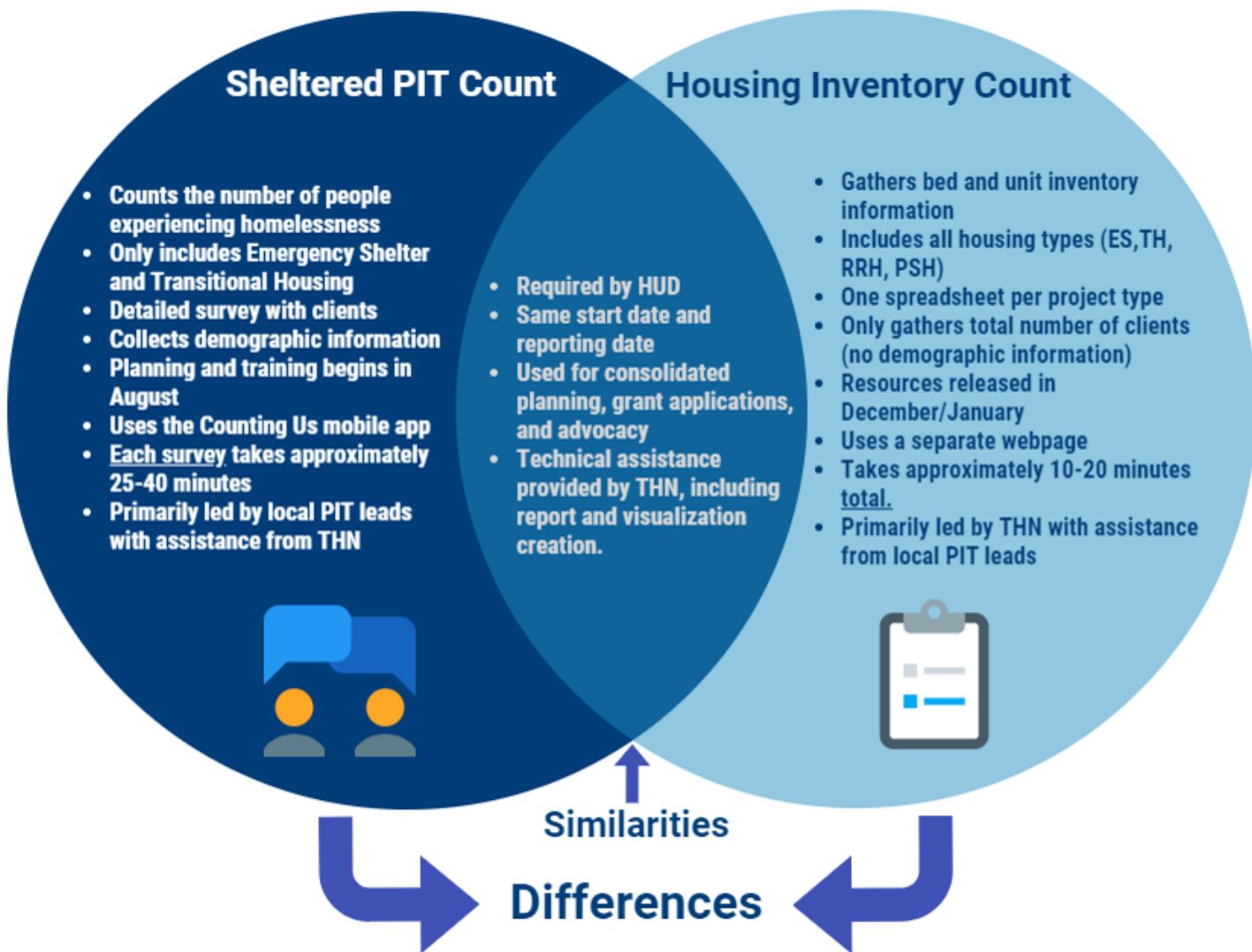
Emergency Shelter (ES)*
Transitional Housing (TH)*
Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
Rapid Rehousing (RRH)

*Also counted in the PIT

You will be provided with a list of identified shelter locations by December. You can also view the list of agencies and shelters that participated in last years HIC on the by downloading the most recent HIC report from the THN Website. You should reach out to these projects for the HIC 1-2 weeks before the count so that they are aware that the count is happening, and so you are aware if they are still operating or not.

HOUSING INVENTORY COUNT

Similarities and Differences between the PIT and HIC



The key differences between the PIT and the HIC are that the PIT requires individual surveys of each client residing in the Emergency Shelter and Transitional Housing program. Each survey takes approximately 25-40 minutes, whereas the HIC only requires you to fill out one form for each housing project the organization has, which takes about 10-20 minutes. The PIT is driven by local leads with support from THN, whereas the HIC is driven by THN with support from local leads. Some of the similarities between the PIT and the HIC are that they are both required by HUD, happen at the same time, and THN provides technical assistance for both.

COUNTING US APP

The Counting Us app, developed by Simtech Solutions, helps automate the data collection requirements of the annual Point-In-Time Count to meet Federal requirements and address local policy needs. Access the application by downloading it from Google Play or the App Store, registering an account, and using the count code "TXBoS2026" to access the survey tool.

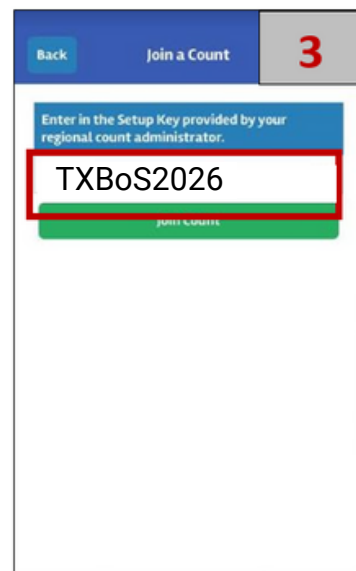
After you have downloaded the app and registered an account, open the app and press "Choose Count"



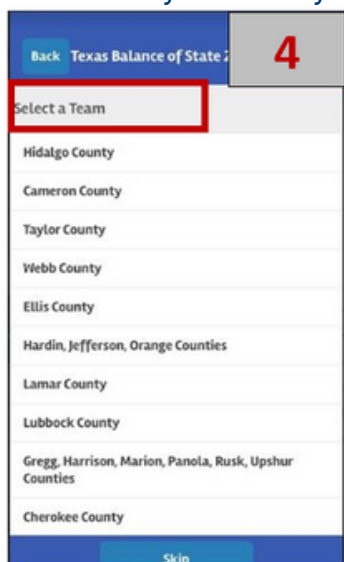
Next, press "Join New Count"



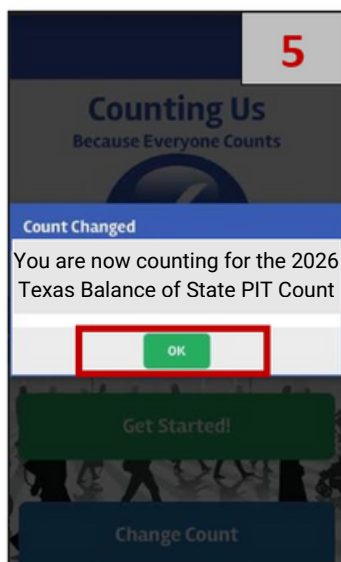
In the box, type in the setup key: TXBoS2026 then press "Join Count"



After you join the count, you can now select your team based on your county



You should be counting for the 2026 PIT Count. If you see this screen, press "OK"



Now press "Get Started" and you can practice surveying



UNSHELTERED PLANNING

A count of people who are homeless but not in a shelter or transitional housing program is an unsheltered count. The unsheltered count requires identification of homeless people who are living on the street, in abandoned buildings, in their vehicles, tents, shanties, parks, woods, transportation stations, or other places not meant for human habitation on January 22nd.

For the unsheltered count we look for people residing in:

- Streets
- Abandoned Buildings
- Encampments/Tents
- Parks/Campgrounds
- Cars
- Other places not meant for human habitation

There are two ways to conduct an unsheltered count:

NIGHT OF COUNT (USED FOR HIGH POPULATION AREAS WHERE PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE FOUND)

The unsheltered count strategy that a local coalition chooses for its area depends on demographics, geography, and resources. In more populous areas, where there is visible homelessness or known locations where homeless people congregate, volunteers may be able to more successfully find and survey people in the streets during the count. ALL SURVEYS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 11:59 pm on 1/22/26.

SERVICE-BASED (CONDUCTED POST COUNT FOR LESS POPULOUS AREAS)

In contrast, many rural areas have successfully used a service count to secure information on unsheltered homelessness. In a service count, agencies that provide services that people who are homeless tend to seek (food pantry, soup kitchen, day shelters, drop-in agencies, provider organizations, etc.), survey people over more than a single day in the week following the night of the count. Coalitions may conduct a service-based count from between 1 and 7 days, but it must not exceed 7 days (1/30/26) after the designated count night. ALL SURVEYS MUST BE SUBMITTED BY 11:59 pm on 1/30/26.

Communities wishing to conduct a service-based count must obtain written

*approval from the Data and Engagement Coordinator by NO LATER THAN *
December 1st 2025

UNSHELTERED PLANNING

Night of the Count Method Planning

Identify Locations

- Consult with outreach workers, people who are or have been homeless, shelter or services staff, police, fire department, school systems, businesses, community development organizations, faith based groups, housing inspectors, parks and recreation staff, etc.
- Engage people with lived experience in order to help find locations and to survey people
- Develop a list of locations to visit, and survey them prior to the count. Use data from previous counts to identify locations

Train Everyone Participating in the Unsheltered Count

- Ensure that the ground rules are understood
- Recording information/use of Counting Us Application
- What to do in an emergency
- Communication Strategies (cell phones, central number, radios/walkie talkies)
- Provide written guidelines, maps, and directions
- Ensure volunteers are quipped with forms, pencils, flashlights, and incentives, if possible

Send Out Notifications (*as needed*) to:

- Media - newspaper, television, radio, internet and social media
 - Please see the "Engaging the Media" resource hyperlinked [here](#)
- Service providers - homeless, social services, mental health services, education, faith based
- General Community (include people with lived experience with homelessness)

Tips for Training Volunteers:

- Training should take place at least a week before the count so that leaders can better plan for geographic coverage
- Provide a general overview of what you will be presenting, including safety info.
- Distribute a summary of the surveying guidelines to volunteers
- During training, present and review the protocol for every public location such as parks, alleys, parking ramps, and uninhabitable buildings
- Model and practice the Counting Us application
- Allow time for volunteers to ask questions
- Make sure there is an emergency contingency plan and proper safety protocols in place
- Make sure all volunteers understand what is expected on the night of the count, including:
 - What time they need to be there
 - Who they will be working with (if known)
 - What time they can leave
- Provide a list of necessary and recommended items, including fully charged cell phones/tablets, device chargers, flashlight, identification, pencils, paper, or other communication.
- Provide an emergency phone number

UNSHELTERED PLANNING

Service-based Method Planning

Identify agencies where unsheltered individuals receive assistance in your area. Consider the following:

- Community Mental Health Centers
- Community Health Clinics
- Hospital Emergency Rooms
- Parks and Recreation Service
- Drop-In Centers
- One-Stop Employment Centers
- Food Pantries
- Soup Kitchens & Meal Sites
- Community Service agencies
- Domestic Violence - Related Agencies
- Law Enforcement
- Probation and Parole
- Faith-Based Organizations
- Clothing Providers
- Consumer-Run Organizations
- Day Shelters
- Fire Departments
- Veterans - Related Agencies
- School Systems

Ensure that all participating Providers understand:

- The overall goal of the count and how the information will be used
- Date and time period for which they are counting surveys
 - All providers must enter all surveys into the Counting Us app by **11:59 PM on January 30th.**
- Whom to Survey (per HUD's Definition)
 - **Explain that they can only survey people that were experiencing homelessness on 1/22/26.**
- If possible, provide incentives to people who are willing to complete surveys (care packages with hygiene necessities, socks, underwear, snacks)
- If possible, provide pamphlets with information on how to connect with housing services
- Assign someone to check in periodically with all of the participating providers to make sure they are collecting the data collection forms.

Helpful Hints for Training Service Providers

- Training is needed for everyone who is participating in the PIT count
- Provide a general overview of what you will be presenting
- Present a one-page handout with the most important points
- Supply copies of instructions
- Ask each provider to discuss how they plan to collect data at their agency
 - if they plan on using the Counting Us app, ensure they understand how to use it
- Allow time for questions
- Repeat the procedures (when to survey, who will be surveying, when to stop surveying)
- Check in with providers so they understand the expectations (provide your contact info)
- Go over logistics (where to go, who will be in charge, what time to arrive)

SUBPOPULATION TIPS

Homelessness is experienced differently by each subpopulation. This is why it is important that your PIT count takes specific actions to intentionally engage individuals and families within each group. You will find resources hyperlinked on this page for each of the following groups.



YOUTH/FAMILIES



SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Youth homelessness cannot be solved in isolation from family homelessness, and vice versa.

SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

57% of all women experiencing homelessness report domestic violence as the immediate cause of their homelessness.

VETERANS

It is estimated that just over 9% of all adults experiencing homelessness in the United States are veterans of the U.S. Military

THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

People who have experienced homelessness are the experts and are an indispensable resource when it comes to planning, organizing, and implementing a count.



VETERANS



THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A critical component to any effective count is community engagement.

The greater the involvement and understanding of key community members, the greater likelihood of a successful and accurate count. Community involvement also leads to other successes in addressing homelessness beyond the PIT Count, primarily by providing assets and resources essential to ending homelessness.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Face to face
meetings

Follow-up
phone calls

Regular e-mail
and mail
campaigns

POTENTIAL COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Individuals with lived experience of homelessness (current or historical)

Hospitals, emergency rooms, urgent care clinics

Faith-based organizations

Veterans' services

Campgrounds

School homeless liaisons

Workforce Commission

Juvenile courts

24-hour businesses: box stores, retail stores, restaurants, fast food, taverns, laundromats

Media outlets such as newspapers, radios, and television stations

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

Important Items to Consider

- Contact fire department to obtain insight on possible locations of homeless persons residing in abandoned buildings.
- Contact schools, veterans' services providers, etc, prior to the count and follow up afterwards to obtain numbers.
- Contact local law enforcement to inform them that volunteers will be completing the count.
 - It is important to note that each community engages Law Enforcement in a way that prioritizes the safety of unhoused neighbors. This can include limiting the roles of Law Enforcement on the night of the count. (Not allowing uniformed officers to survey, and choosing not to notify LE). They can also be used to identify hotspots

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

OCTOBER

- Form your PIT Committee
- Finalize data collection approach for sheltered and unsheltered counts
- Attend mandatory PIT lead training
- Review interviewing procedures
- Begin mapping unsheltered locations

NOVEMBER

- Begin volunteer recruitment and community engagement
- Attend mobile app training webinars
- "Office Hours" support call opportunities begin

DECEMBER

- Continue volunteer recruitment
- PIT leads and communities can sign up for One-on-One support calls
- Refresher materials and supplemental training materials to be released by THN
- Volunteer training materials released
- Begin provider outreach
- Develop guidelines for volunteers and shelter staff
- Begin media engagement
- Finalize count materials
- Organize donations for incentives/care packages
- Conduct training sessions for providers and volunteers
- Deadline to sign up for service-based count and/or paper surveys, December 1st

JANUARY

- Deliver count materials to providers
- Prepare map of the area
- Discuss what to do in emergencies and go through safety procedures
- Collect incentive/care package items
- Train volunteers
- Attend support calls with Data and Engagement Coordinator
- Conduct the count

STEPS TO TAKE CLOSE TO THE COUNT

First Week of January

- Deliver Count materials to providers
 - Shelter-based count materials
 - Service-based count materials
- Prepare map of the area - directions to various locations, highlight area to be covered by each team individually

Second Week of January

- Prepare packets of materials for the unsheltered count
 - Include map of the area, emergency contact material, releases, identification badges, instructions, etc.
- Prepare a back-up plan, if volunteers do not show up or the count is postponed
- Collect incentive items from donors

Week of the Count

- Remind providers and volunteers about the count
- Pack incentive items
- Assign volunteers and staff in pairs or teams by experience - try to select a team leader who has previous experience working with this population and is familiar with the area

Night of the Count

- Make sure that providers have received all necessary materials before the count (instructions, pens, clipboards, flashlights, identification, incentives, portable chargers, etc.)
- If volunteers are assisting, ensure they know where to go and where to arrive
- Assign sites appropriately - to teams with enough people and experience
- Provide coffee, snacks and food for returning volunteers and staff (if possible)
- Make sure all surveys are submitted in real time or if saved as a draft that they are uploaded by **11:59PM on January 22nd**
 - If given permission by THN to use paper surveys, make sure to enter them into the system by 11:59PM on January 30th, 2026
- Keep notes of where volunteers and staff did or did not observe people to utilize for future counts
- Track all hours of volunteers (separate forms will be provided by THN)

After the Count

- Evaluate the PIT count process
 - How did the planning group function?
 - What changes should be made for next year?
 - Does the planning timeline need to be adjusted?
- Ensure that all volunteers have submitted the "Volunteer Hour Tracker Form"

GLOSSARY



Adults with HIV/AIDS

This subpopulation category of the PIT includes adults diagnosed with AIDS and/or have tested positive for HIV.

Chronic Substance Abuse

This subpopulation category of the PIT includes adults with a substance abuse problem (alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or both). Adults with a substance use disorder must also meet the qualifications identified in the term for “disability” (e.g., “is expected to be long-continuing or indefinite duration”).

Chronically Homeless Person

- Is homeless and lives in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter; and
- Has been homeless and living or residing in a place not meant for human habitation, a safe haven, or in an emergency shelter continuously for at least 1 year or on at least four separate occasions in the last 3 years where the combined length of time homeless in those occasions is at least 12 months; and
- Has a disability.
- **Note:** For purposes of PIT reporting: When a household with one or more members includes an adult or minor head of household who qualifies as chronically homeless, then all members of that household should be counted as a chronically homeless person in the applicable household type table. For example, if one adult in a two adult household is chronically homeless, both adults are chronically homeless.

Disabling Condition

An individual with one or more of the following conditions:

- A physical, mental, or emotional impairment, including an impairment caused by alcohol or drug abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder, or brain injury that:
 - (1) Is expected to be long-continuing or of indefinite duration;
 - (2) Substantially impedes the individual's ability to live independently; and
 - (3) Could be improved by the provision of more suitable housing condition.
- A developmental disability, as defined in section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (42 U.S.C. 15002); or
- The disease of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) or any condition arising from the etiologic agency for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV).

Emergency Shelter (ES)

An Emergency Shelter is a facility that provides a temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness for general or specific populations which does not require occupants to sign leases or occupancy agreements.

GLOSSARY

Lived Experience

A person with personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first hand involvement in everyday events rather through representations constructed by other people. In the case of homelessness, a person with lived experience is someone who has directly experienced homelessness first hand.

Parenting Youth

A youth who identifies as the parent or legal guardian of one or more children who are present with or sleeping in the same place as that youth parent, where there is no person over age 24 in the household.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

Permanent Supportive Housing is permanent housing in which housing assistance and supportive services are provided to assist households with at least one member with a disability in achieving housing stability

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)

Rapid Re-Housing rapidly connects families and individuals experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through a tailored package of assistance. Rapid Re-Housing programs help families and individuals living on the streets or in emergency shelters solve the practical and immediate challenges to obtaining permanent housing while reducing the amount of time they experience homelessness.

Severe Mental Illness (SMI)

This subpopulation category of the PIT includes persons with mental health problems that are long-continued and indefinite duration and substantially impairs the person's ability to live independently.

Sheltered

A person who is experiencing homelessness that is being surveyed in an emergency shelter or transitional housing project or in a hotel/motel paid for by an agency voucher on the night of the count.

Transitional Housing (TH)

Transitional Housing provides temporary housing with supportive services to individuals and families experiencing homelessness with the goal of interim stability and support to successfully move to and maintain permanent housing.

Unaccompanied Youth

Unaccompanied youth are persons under age 25 who are not accompanied by a parent or guardian and are not a parent presenting with or sleeping in the same place as his/her child(ren). Unaccompanied youth are single youth, youth couples, and groups of youth presenting together as a household.

GLOSSARY

Unsheltered

A person who is experiencing homelessness that is being surveyed living on the streets, in an encampment, in a car, in an abandoned building, and other places not meant for human habitation on the night of the count.

Veteran

This subpopulation category of the PIT includes persons who have served on active duty in the Armed Forces of the United States. This does not include inactive military reserves or the National Guard unless the person went into active duty.

Victims of Domestic Violence

This subpopulation category of the PIT includes adults who have been victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Victim Service Provider

A private nonprofit organization whose primary mission is to provide services to victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking. This term includes rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, domestic violence transitional housing programs, and other programs.

Youth

Persons under age 25. HUD collects and reports youth data, based on persons under 18 and persons between ages 18 and 24.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR PIT LEADS

.....
For more information concerning this manual, the Texas
Balance of State CoC's Point-In-Time Count, and the
HIC please contact:

Ava Paredes
Data and Engagement Coordinator
(512)-652-4714
Ava@THN.org