

Point in Time Count Instructions

January 2011

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Overview

As part of the Washington State Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act and the federal McKinney-related obligation to HUD, homeless service providers are required to conduct a count of homeless persons each year. The next count will occur on Thursday, January 27, 2011.

The Washington State Department of Commerce provides forms, guidelines and instructions for completing the count. Counties can opt to use their own system/forms to conduct their homeless count, as long as the count is in compliance with the state guidelines. Count guidelines, forms and instructions can be found here: www.commerce.wa.gov/PIT

Step 1 - Identify a count coordinator in each county

Each county needs to identify a coordinator who will work with Commerce and local homeless service providers to conduct the count. The coordinator will organize the count for the county, including distributing survey forms to homeless service providers in their continuum, and arranging for the completed forms to be typed into the web-based database.

Step 2 - Identify contact person for each homeless service provider

The count coordinator will identify a person from each homeless service provider in their continuum who will be responsible for organizing the completion of the survey forms for every person they serve. Count forms should be distributed to each service provider.

Providers that are required to participate are: emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, permanent supportive housing programs*, homeless resource and outreach centers, feeding programs and food banks.

*Individuals staying at permanent supportive housing programs are not considered homeless by HUD and therefore are not required to complete the entire survey form. However, each county is required to submit data on the total number of persons served by each emergency shelter, transitional housing

program and permanent supportive housing program on the night of the count (see *Who should be counted?* below).

Step 3a - Organize effort to count homeless persons not served by a homeless service providers

Efforts should be made to survey homeless persons who do not interact regularly with homeless service providers (see *Methods and Locations of Persons to be Surveyed* below).

Steps 4 - Forms are completed by homeless persons and/or staff at each facility on the night of the count.

One point in time count survey form should be completed for each homeless household on Thursday, January 27, 2011. Forms can be completed by homeless persons and/or staff. Incomplete forms are OK, but ideally the entire form will be completed. Forms will not be used if location, gender or year of birth is missing. If someone refuses to answer questions for the survey, please make sure to fill in at least these three fields for them. If you do not know the exact birth year of a household member, guesses are OK.

Important: DO NOT provide name, birth day, or birth month for households with an individual who is: 1) in a DV agency; 2) currently fleeing or in danger from a domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault or stalking situation; 3) has HIV/AIDS or 4) anyone you do not have written informed consent from. However, a signature is not needed to collect other information. All homeless households and individuals should have a form filled out.

If it is not possible to fill out forms on January 27, a homeless provider can alternately choose any 24 hour period during the last ten days of January with Commerce's approval. Extra steps must be taken to avoid duplication if counties choose to use a date other than January 27.

Step 5 - Forms are entered into database or HMIS

The count coordinator is responsible for reporting the final PIT numbers to Commerce. Counties can use their own databases or HMIS. Forms should be collected in batches by organization, so they can be grouped in the database or HMIS by facility. For example, Salvation Army Men's Shelter forms should be clipped together and labeled "Salvation Army Men's Shelter."

For counties using Commerce HMIS for their PIT counts

Counties have the option of using Commerce HMIS to capture and report on their PIT data. There are two elements to using Commerce HMIS for the PIT. Detailed instructions will be made available on the website.

1. Unsheltered Count - All of the unsheltered and doubled-up surveys will be entered into the lead PIT agency's Commerce HMIS. Every member of the household is entered into Central Intake and then placed into a temporary "PIT Count" program. All required PIT data elements for each household member will be entered on the Additional Questions page.

2. Sheltered Count – For shelter programs already set up in HMIS, counties have the option of simply recording a “PIT” activity for everyone in the program they count. For every client surveyed, the HMIS user will record the “PIT” activity and answer a few additional PIT questions. Both the activity and the extra PIT questions will be entered on the Additional Questions page. This will save time by eliminating the need to enter households in the system (they are already there).

Clients in shelter programs not already in HMIS will be entered into the temporary “PIT Count” program with the unsheltered population. **Counties can also choose to enter all clients in the temporary “PIT Count” program even if they are already in another program in the system.** Homeless clients will not be duplicated because they will only receive the “PIT” activity once.

Because homeless individuals are being entered into HMIS for the count, they will need to sign the **HMIS consent form**. This consent form is now attached to back of the new PIT survey form. Clients that already are in HMIS and already have a signed consent form on file are not required to sign it again on the PIT survey form.

If a client does not have an HMIS signed consent form already on file and refuses to sign the PIT survey form, all household information will still be entered into HMIS however without any personally identifying information such as name and full date of birth.

Report Due Dates

There will be two different due dates for the 2011 point in time count data. The unsheltered data and initial observations report is due to Commerce no later than February 10, 2011. Complete count results must be submitted to Commerce no later than March 16, 2011. Report forms can be found on our count website www.commerce.wa.gov/PIT.

Who should be counted?

- All persons living in emergency shelters (1-90 day stay limit, includes motel/hotel vouchers)
- All persons living in transitional housing (91 day to 2 years stay limit where being homeless is a prerequisite for eligibility and case management services are required as part of the program. See count guidelines for more clarification.
- All persons living outside or in a place not meant for human habitation such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, tent cities, on the street, etc.*
- All persons living in a dwelling lacking any of the following: ability to cook hot food, drinking water, restroom, heat, or ability to bathe.
- Anyone who self-identifies as homeless should be considered homeless, unless there is compelling evidence indicating otherwise.

* Under no circumstances should count surveyors risk collecting count information in ways that pose a significant safety risk. Persons such as experienced outreach workers and currently/formally homeless persons with relationships with existing homeless persons may be able to safely enter isolated homeless encampments to collect count information.

Counting persons living with family or friends

Persons sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (often referred to as “doubled-up” or “couch surfing”) are not required to be counted for this survey. However, counting people in these situations is encouraged because it provides important information that will further assist in identifying needs of homeless individuals.

Jail

For the purposes of this count, HUD does not consider individuals in Jail as homeless; therefore counties are not expected to count this population. Anyone selecting *Currently in Jail* will be excluded from the final homeless report.

Housing Inventory HUD requires each emergency shelter, homeless transitional housing program and permanent supportive housing program to report on the total number of persons staying at each facility during the night of the point in time count. Counties can choose to utilize the PIT forms and HMIS to collect this information or request program managers to collect the information another way. The requirement is that each facility (emergency shelter, homeless transitional housing program and permanent supportive housing program) listed as current or new on the county’s annual housing inventory chart provide the total number of persons (adults plus children) served on the night of the point in time count (or as close to this night as possible). This information will be reported to Commerce in the county annual report due March 16, 2011.

Methods and locations of persons to be surveyed

| Homeless population | Location of Survey Administration | People Responsible for Administering Survey Forms |
|---|--|---|
| Persons in emergency shelter/ transitional housing | Emergency/transitional housing facilities | Paid and volunteer staff of emergency/transitional housing programs |
| Persons doubled-up with family and friends, "couch surfing" | Food banks, feeding programs, non-housing programs that serve homeless persons | Food bank or feeding program staff/volunteers, program staff |
| Homeless youth | Schools, shopping malls, alternative schools | School district homeless liaisons, volunteers, teachers |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Persons living outside -going to them</p> | <p>Identify sites that homeless persons congregate prior to count by:</p> <p>Asking homeless persons in shelters or at feeding programs where encampments are</p> <p>Asking people in encampments if they know where other encampments are</p> <p>Asking police officers and fire department personnel</p> <p>Asking city/state/federal park department employees</p> | <p>*Under no circumstances should count surveyors risk collecting count information in ways that pose a significant safety risk. Only people with appropriate experience and/or relationships should attempt to survey homeless persons in remote or other potentially dangerous locations.</p> <p>Examples of people who may be able to count homeless persons outside:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing homeless outreach workers • Food bank volunteers who already know homeless persons and are comfortable seeking them out • Formally homeless persons • Park Service employees • Fire fighters/sheriff/police/forest service • Homeless persons with work obligations as part of their shelter program <p>Assign people to cover each identified site prior to the day of the count. Providing socks, flashlights, food and other useful items can help smooth the data collection process in outdoor locations.</p> |
| <p>Persons living outside -bringing them to a central point(s)</p> | <p>Provide free food and beverages, preferably in an outdoor location to help with the paranoia some feel by being asked to go inside. Advertise with flyers posted outside including telephone poles, feeding programs, near dumpsters behind stores, etc.</p> | <p>Homeless program staff/volunteers, count volunteers, homeless persons with work obligations.</p> |
| <p>All homeless - provided services</p> | <p>Feeding programs, food banks</p> | <p>Food bank or feeding program staff/volunteers</p> |
| <p>All homeless - coming and going</p> | <p>Libraries, grocery stores, bus stations, convenience stores</p> | <p>Volunteers on 2-3 hour shifts, including homeless persons with work obligations. Must be trained on not being too aggressive, not blocking entrances and not making assumptions about individuals.</p> |

If you need help please don't hesitate to contact Nick Mondau at (360) 725-3028 or nick.mondau@commerce.wa.gov. In addition to providing technical assistance, we can arrange peer-mentoring with others to help you address problems specific to your type of community and geography.