

2009 Point in Time Count Instructions

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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 29, 2009.

These instructions are provided for counties using the state forms, database, and technical assistance we are offering to assist with the point in time 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: <http://www.cted.wa.gov/PIT>

Step 1 - Identify a continuum count coordinator

Each county needs to identify a coordinator who will work with CTED and local homeless service providers to conduct the one-time 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 continuum 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.

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 - Distribute forms to each homeless service provider

The coordinator will distribute the count survey forms to providers, or provide them with an electronic copy of the form that can be printed and copied on site.

Step 3b - 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).

Step 4 - Forms are completed by homeless persons and/or staff at each facility on Jan. 29

One point in time count survey form should be completed for each homeless household on Thursday, January 29, 2009. Forms can be completed by homeless persons and/or staff. Incomplete forms are OK, but ideally the entire form will be completed.

Persons selecting "permanent supportive housing" in the "*Where did you stay last night?*" section will not be counted as homeless and only need to complete this section of the survey (see *Who should be counted?* below).

Persons who are victims of domestic violence or have not provided written consent may not provide initials, birth month or birth year. See instructions on the back side of the survey form for details.

If it is not possible to fill out forms on January 29, a homeless provider can alternately choose any 24 hour period during the week January 25 to 31. Because the database recognizes duplicate clients, different organizations collecting information on different days in the same community will not result in a duplicated count if sufficient identifying client data (birth dates and initials) are recorded.

Step 5 - Forms are entered into the web-based database

The count coordinator will identify people in their community to type survey data into the database. Each form takes less than a minute to type in. The person entering the forms into the database will need access to a PC with an internet connection.

Forms should be collected in batches by organization, so they can be grouped in the database by facility. For example, Salvation Army Men's Shelter forms should be clipped together and labeled "Salvation Army Men's Shelter." The person(s) entering the forms into the database will enter the Salvation Army Men's Shelter forms into a specific online account labeled "Salvation Army Men's Shelter." This will allow the production of reports that separate out people served by each facility. CTED will work with the count coordinator to set up these accounts.

What if we have questions or need more help?

If you need help please don't hesitate to contact Nick Mondau at (360) 725-3028 or NicholasM@cted.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.

Who should be counted?

- All persons living in emergency shelters (1-90 day stay limit)
- 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, such as THOR and HOME TBRA). (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, 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.

New for 2009: 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 database 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 CTED in the county annual report due April 17th 2009.

Counting of 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 provides important information that will further assist in identifying needs of homeless individuals.

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> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking homeless persons in shelters or at feeding programs where encampments are • Asking people in encampments if they know where other encampments are • Asking police officers and fire department personnel • Asking city/state/federal park department employees 	<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>