Conducting an Unsheltered PIT Estimate During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

• The annual Point-in-Time count is rapidly approaching

• As with all things, COVID-19 will impact if and how communities handle their PIT estimates – particularly concerning the unsheltered population

• COVID-19 may have changed:
  • Who is experiencing unsheltered homelessness
  • The services used by people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
  • The locations of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

• HUD is offering LOTS of flexibility in how (and IF) counts are conducted
Purpose of this Report & Briefing

• Supplement to HUD Guidance

• Recommendations focused on:
  • Increasing the use of outreach teams
  • Reducing reliance on volunteers
  • Increasing the use of technology in training and surveying
  • Conducting a count over multiple nights
  • Reducing the overall burden through sampling
  • Service-based and HMIS approaches
  • **Conducting the count SAFELY**
Important Points

• The only acceptable count is a safe count
• We are NOT telling communities to conduct their PIT this year
  • Safety, legal, and logistical concerns could render a count impossible
• Embrace the change – do not pretend that everything is the same

IF POSSIBLE, this is a year to revisit PIT-infrastructure and methods
Outline

• Volunteer concerns and leveraging outreach teams
• Increasing PIT Efficiency
  • Observation-based counts
  • Use of abbreviated surveys
  • Expanding the PIT timeframe
  • Mobile app-based surveys
• Training Enumerators
• Sampling
• Service-Based Counts and Using HMIS
• Example
Leverage Professional Outreach Teams

• COVID-19 will limit public/volunteer engagement in the 2021 PIT
  • Public engagement may not be LEGAL
    • Stay-at-home orders persist and are likely to expand as cases climb
  • Volunteers are likely to be wary of participating
  • Many volunteers are part of high-risk populations

• Normal volunteer-based procedures are unsafe
  • Gathering is a danger
  • PPE shortages
  • Workarounds may not be practical
Leveraging Outreach Teams

• Already scheduled to work

• No unanticipated night-of shortages

• Already engaging SAFELY with people on street

• Have PPE
Improving Efficiency:
1) Observation-based counts

• Benefits:
  • Allow more efficient coverage
  • Limits interaction between enumerators & respondents

• Trade-offs:
  • Making assumptions based on appearance
  • Risk of duplication, though this can be mitigated
  • Cannot collect demographics per HUD guidelines
2) Abbreviated Surveys

• If you conduct surveys:
  • Ascertain housing status
  • De-duplicate

• THAT’s IT

Point-in-Time Survey Tools

Date Published: December 2020

Description

In order to collect Point-in-Time (PIT) count data according to HUD standards, CoCs need to use high quality survey instruments. HUD is providing CoCs with a set of model surveys that they can use for the 2018 PIT count. These surveys reflect the review of best local practices, and the input of leading survey and homeless methodology experts. Please see below the list of model surveys, as well as a list of guides and tools that CoCs can use for the 2018 PIT count.

In the past, HUD provided access to a free mobile PIT count application (app). This mobile PIT app is no longer available. However, HUD anticipates publishing the open source code to the app for communities that wish to use that in their discussions to determine whether to adopt mobile technology as part of their PIT counts. HUD also plans on publishing a summary of lessons learned from the PIT mobile app for communities to use. HUD has kept the webinar with the PIT survey tools and the mobile app overview available for communities to review.

Resource Links

• HUD Point-in-Time Mobile App - Technical Training Overview (HTML)
• Model Interview-based Unsheltered Night of the Count PIT Survey (PDF)
• Model Service-based PIT Survey (PDF)
• Model Sheltered Night of Count PIT Survey (PDF)
• Observation-Based PIT Count Example Form for Use on the Night of the Count - Updated December 2020 (DOCX)
• Observation-Based Unsheltered PIT Count Guidance and Example Form - Updated December 2020 (PDF)
• PIT Count Youth Survey - Addendum (PDF)
3) Expand the Timeframe

• Plan diligently
  • Cover distinct geographies on each night
    • Minimize the chance that people move between areas covered on different nights
    • E.g.: County to county, or urban vs. rural

• Plan for contingencies
  • More nights, backup staff, etc.

• De-duplication is harder

• Multiple “PIT” nights option for large CoC’s
4) Mobile-App Surveys

• **Eliminate the need for physical exchange of paper**

• Reduce time and cost of printing, sorting, distributing, and checking paper surveys

• Often come with built-in mapping features and flexibility

• Several vendors available

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<th>Mobile Tool Name</th>
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<th>Customizable Surveys</th>
<th>Count Management Tools</th>
<th>Separate Youth Survey</th>
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Training

• NOT an option

• Another reason to rely on outreach teams

• Virtual trainings are possible
  • Look into web conferencing options NOW
    • Think about
  • Reinforce material with breakout rooms, quizzes, chats, etc.
Sampling

• Allows you to visit a selection of geographies and make inferences about your entire CoC

• Probability—samples allow for some certainty of findings (and knowledge of your uncertainty - ie, Margin of Error)

• NOT hard to implement

• Improve efficiency by limiting required coverage
Sampling, 2

- Divide your CoC into smaller regions or “subareas”
  - Common boundaries like census tracts are best

- Choose an approach
  - Simple random samples: Easy but imprecise
  - Stratified samples: categorize subareas based on homelessness levels
    - E.g. “High density” and “Low Density” subareas

- Determine your sample sizes
  - Focus on “High Density” areas
  - Sample enough “Low Density” areas so a single aberrant area does not throw off your estimate
Sampling, 3

- Calculate Results
  - Multiple your number counted in each “high density” or “low density” category by a weighting factor

- Weighting factor (w.f.) = \( \frac{\text{The total number of areas in that category}}{\text{The sampled number of areas in that category}} \)

- E.g.: Weighting factor (w.f.) = \( \frac{60}{20} = 3 \)

- Category Estimate = (Number counted = 15) \( \times \) w.f.
  - E.g.: Category Estimate = 15 \( \times \) 3 = 45 people
Service-based counts

• Ascertain the housing status of people using social services
  • Requires surveying; NO observation

• May be generally preferable:
  • in rural settings where a street-count is inefficient
  • For estimating especially hard-to-count populations

• Deduplication especially important
  • People may use multiple service centers

• Can be combined with street-based counts
Administrative Data

• CoCs can submit PIT estimates based on HMIS or other data

• CoC’s must demonstrate some correlation between past data and PIT counts to show reliability for this year
Example CoC: A Street-Count Sample

• Springfield, USA

• Divide areas into 200 subareas

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Sampling Approach: A Stratified Sample

• Level 1: Certainty Zones
  • (2, in red)

• Level 2: High Density Zones
  • (98, in green)

• Level 3: Low Density
  • (100, in blue)
Create & pull your sample

• Level 1: all Certainty zones

• Level 2: 30 (of 98) High Density zones

• Level 3: 32 (of 100) Low Density zones
Assign areas to nights and teams

• January 23rd is PIT night

• Brief survey conducted over four nights

• Have access to four outreach teams

• Group similar areas together

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Compiling Results

Counts

• Certainty areas: 41

• High Density areas: 17

• Low Density areas: 2

Extrapolations

41 people

Weighting factor (w.f.) = $\frac{98}{30} = 3.3$

$H.D.\, Estimate = 17 \times 3.3 = 56.1\,\text{people}$

Weighting factor (w.f.) = $\frac{100}{32} = 3.125$

$L.D.\, Estimate = 2 \times 3.125 = 6.25\,\text{people}$

$PIT\, Estimate = 41 + 56.1 + 6.25 = 103$
Conducting an Unsheltered Point-in-Time Count During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Updated January 4, 2020

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Questions?

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