

Point-in-Time Count

Toolkit



Canadian
Observatory on
Homelessness

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Jesse Donaldson

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Acknowledgments

Funded by the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy. The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

This document draws from the knowledge and expertise of individuals and communities across the country including:

Dr. Alina Turner, Turner Strategies, who developed the *Canadian Point-in-Time Count Methodology and Toolkit* on which this guidance draws from and builds on.

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Darren Cooney/Della Knoke, Province of Ontario Homelessness Secretariat

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Gwenda Drover, Newfoundland and Labrador Statistics Agency

James McGregor, Mouvement pour mettre fin à l'itinérance à Montréal

Jane Henderson, Choices for Youth

Jesse Donaldson, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness

Jesse Thistle, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Laural Raine/Joseph Stalteri/Joey Reeder, City of Toronto
Marcel Swain/Linda Lavalee, Lu'ma Native Housing Society
Marie Morrison, Regional Municipality of Waterloo
Matt Thompson, M. Thomson Consulting
Rachel Campbell/Dr. Nick Falvo/Meaghan Bell, Calgary Homeless Foundation
Mia Burgess, Central Okanagan Foundation
Michael Mackenzie, Saint John Human Development Council
Naomi Leadbeater/Mark Anderson/Michelle Lemoine
Pierre-Luc Lortie, Ville de Montréal
Sarah Brown, Youth Leadership Council
Dr. Stephen Gaetz, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
Susan McGee/Giri Puligandla/Robbie Brydon, Homeward Trust Edmonton
Tim Richter, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
Wally Czech, CAEH and City of Lethbridge

An additional thanks to the following people who helped shaped the integrated youth methodology and complementary resources:

The Laidlaw Foundation, who generously funded the Youth Count Toolkit, which informed the development of the methodology within this toolkit.

Krista Gladney/Bruce Pearce/Judy Tobin, End Homelessness St. John's
Sarah Brown/Jane Henderson/Andrew Harvey, Choices for Youth
The Youth Leadership Council, Choices for Youth

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About This Toolkit

Purpose

This toolkit is designed to help communities plan and implement accurate Point-in-Time Counts in Canada. The content is aligned with the requirements of the 2018 Coordinated Count, as described in the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

The toolkit complements [Everyone Counts: A Guide to Point-in-Time Counts in Canada, 2nd Ed.](#), which details the Core Standards and requirements of the Coordinated Count, as developed by HPS. We make reference to these standards throughout the toolkit.

If you are participating in the Coordinated Count, we recommend reading the [Guide to PiT Counts](#) before reviewing this toolkit. Similarly, communities in Ontario should first review the [Guidelines for Service Manager Homelessness Enumeration](#).

Community Workspace on Homelessness

The [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) is a free online platform for community representatives, service providers and others working in the homelessness sector to collaborate, share information and exchange resources.

If you are planning and implementing a count, we strongly recommend registering for the workspace. By doing so, you will be able to ask questions, share learning and exchange resources with other communities and experts from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.



Throughout this toolkit we link to a number of complementary resources. Look for the Community Workspace on Homelessness logo to download free tools and templates to help you plan and implement your count.

Resource Directory

Throughout this toolkit we have also linked to the resources and tools available as of May 2017. As more resources are developed and shared by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and participating communities, we will update the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), available on the workspace.

Point-in-Time Counts in Canada

An Overview

A Point-in-Time (PiT) Count is a strategy to help determine the extent of homelessness in a community on a given night, or at a single point in time. A PiT Count allows a community to better understand the nature and extent of homelessness and the characteristics of the homeless population. Such counts support better planning, and when done on more than one occasion, allow communities to assess their progress in reducing homelessness.

Conducting a PiT Count is an important part of any community response to homelessness. It is not simply about enumerating those experiencing homelessness; it's about catalyzing change at the local and national levels to end homelessness.

A PiT Count is a snapshot: the success and accuracy of the numbers and information gathered depend on the thoroughness of the methods and participation by stakeholders. A PiT Count is just one data collection strategy among many. Homelessness management information systems, such as HIFIS, shelter bed counts, registry weeks and other research methodologies provide complementary information.

While a comprehensive PiT Count offers important information about a community, the count cannot provide an exact number of people experiencing homelessness in a given community. For example, those who are provisionally accommodated or disconnected from homeless-serving agencies are less likely to be counted. However, the limitations of this method should not prevent communities from undertaking a PiT Count, which will yield worthwhile data.

Benefits of Point-in-Time Counts

A PiT Count provides critical information to help guide local, provincial and national responses to homelessness. PiT Counts enable communities to measure their progress in reducing homelessness and test the efficacy of community interventions. PiT counts provide vital benchmarks, especially in communities where systematic data on homelessness is sparse.

Counts can significantly increase a community's ability to take action toward ending homelessness by:

- ▶ Identifying the characteristics of the local population.
- ▶ Increasing capacity to undertake a local needs assessment.
- ▶ Enhancing system planning and program development.
- ▶ Measuring progress toward ending homelessness.
- ▶ Increasing public awareness about homelessness.

The benefits of PiT Counts extend beyond the community. For example, in the United States (U.S.), regular nation-wide counts help communities and governments, including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, measure progress. Communities are federally mandated to conduct [PiT Counts of sheltered](#) and [unsheltered homeless persons](#), biennially. These counts provide critical information for local, regional and national homeless-serving systems.

Point-in-Time Counts in Canada

Communities across Canada, including Vancouver, Toronto, Calgary and Edmonton, have been using PiT Counts for years to measure progress toward ending homelessness. In 2014, [Alberta's 7 Cities](#) conducted the first coordinated count in Canada. Then in 2016, the Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), took a laudable step forward by leading the first Coordinated Count, a pan-Canadian effort to enumerate homelessness.

In total, 32 communities participated in the 2016 Coordinated Count, including communities that had not previously conducted counts. As a result of the combined effort, HPS published data collected from nearly 6,000 people experiencing homelessness, a nearly unprecedented dataset on homelessness in Canada.

Key findings from the 2016 Coordinated Count include:

- ▶ 5,954 people were found in shelters, on the street and in transitional facilities during the coordinated count.
- ▶ 56.7% of respondents were experiencing hidden homelessness.
- ▶ More than a quarter of respondents had not used a shelter in the past year.
- ▶ 37% of respondents identified as Indigenous.
- ▶ Nearly 5% indicated they had served in the Canadian Armed Forces.

For more information refer to [Highlights – 2016 Coordinated Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness in Canadian Communities](#).

In 2018, HPS will lead the second [Coordinated Count](#) between March and April 2018. All designated communities are encouraged to participate. For those communities that participated in 2016, the second count marks an opportunity to measure progress against the 2016 results.

In 2016, Ontario made additional progress when it became the first province to [require](#) communities to enumerate homelessness locally, using consistent approaches and standards. Through PiT Counts, Registry Weeks, period prevalence counts or a combination of those mechanisms, communities in Ontario will measure homelessness every 2 years. For communities that elect to use the PiT Count methodology, Ontario has endorsed the methods developed by HPS. This encourages even greater coordination and will ultimately improve our understanding of homelessness across Canada.

Complementary Methods

A PiT Count is not the only method to collect data on homelessness. Complementary strategies such as [Registry Weeks](#), [period prevalence counts](#) and housing needs assessments can be used in combination with PiT Counts to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of homelessness locally.

Fortunately, the PiT Count methodology, as set forth by the HPS and in this toolkit, is flexibly designed so that communities can combine data collection strategies to meet their local needs.

Inclusivity, Engagement & Effectiveness

The causes and consequences of homelessness differ for groups, particularly when experiences of homelessness intersect with experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of structural disadvantage. Groups that may be particularly vulnerable due to these disadvantages include Indigenous Peoples, youth, women and children fleeing violence, newcomers, members of LGBTQ2 communities, and older adults.

The success of your PiT Count relies on your ability to recognize the diversity of experiences of homelessness amongst these groups, and to celebrate the diverse knowledge and insights these varied experiences provide. To make your PiT Count as inclusive as possible, think critically about how to include people from these groups in the planning, leadership and execution of the count. This will also help ensure that each of these groups is accurately enumerated in the count.

Indigenous Homelessness

Ensuring respectful and equitable partnership with Indigenous Peoples in all stages of your PiT Count (e.g. planning, leadership, execution, analysis and dissemination of results) should be a key priority. Not only are Indigenous Peoples significantly overrepresented among homeless populations and disproportionately at risk of becoming homeless, but existing services for Indigenous Peoples are often overburdened and inadequate.

Homelessness among Indigenous Peoples is intimately connected with centuries of federal and provincial laws and actions that have harmed Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous communities and scholars have emphasized the connection between historical and cultural intergenerational trauma and the disproportionate number of Indigenous Peoples experiencing homelessness. Structural societal factors, such as racial discrimination in the workplace or the housing market, also contribute to higher levels of homelessness among Indigenous Peoples.

Given that Indigenous Peoples are both overrepresented and undeserved – across Canada – Indigenous Peoples should be involved but more importantly, play a leadership role in any PiT Count. It is to the benefit of the entire community for Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups to work collaboratively throughout the process.

To capture the unique experiences and dimensions of homelessness among Indigenous Peoples in your community, your PiT Count should draw on the insight, leadership and expertise of local Indigenous Peoples. This should include, where possible, Indigenous communities. Indigenous Peoples with lived experience, including youth, should also be consulted throughout the process.

To support these efforts, we have included guidance throughout the toolkit on partnering with Indigenous communities to implement effective counts. In addition to this guidance, we encourage you to review the following resources:

- ▶ [Fostering Indigenous Partnerships & Cultural Competency During your Point-in-Time Count](#)
- ▶ [Homelessness Partnering Strategy: Aboriginal Communities](#)
- ▶ [Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession \(OCAP\) or Self-Determination Applied to Research](#)
- ▶ [Presentation: Engaging the Aboriginal Community](#)
- ▶ [Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres: USAI Research Framework](#)

Youth Homelessness

It is a common misconception that PiT Count methods cannot accurately enumerate youth homelessness or capture their unique experiences. While it is true that traditional PiT Count methods may underrepresent the experiences of youth, communities in Canada have made demonstrable progress in developing strategies to measure youth homelessness in the context of a count.

One of the barriers to enumerating and surveying youth is the relatively hidden nature of youth homelessness. Due to the transient nature of their homelessness, youth are often less visible during counts. Further, with few youth shelter beds available in most communities and inherent risks to staying on the street, many youth stay temporarily with friends and family, often referred to as ‘couch surfing.’ Finally, some youth actively avoid contact with youth-serving organizations out of fear or mistrust, making them nearly impossible to locate during a count.

Fortunately, we now know that effective youth engagement and complementary enumeration strategies, such as magnet events and service counts, can improve the representation of youth in counts. Using various youth count strategies, detailed within this toolkit, communities such as St. John’s, Kamloops and Thompson have shown success in leveraging the PiT Count to better understand youth homelessness.

As youth homelessness continues to grow as a priority across Canada, our ability to measure the issue is important. To end youth homelessness, we must first understand the extent of the problem and then measure the efficacy of our response. PiT Counts, alongside other sources of data such as the [Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey](#), service and system-level data, shelter data studies and prevalence counts, allow us to do both.

Although some communities in the U.S. conduct Youth Counts separately from PiT Counts, the Coordinated Count methodology developed by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy allows for a more integrated approach. We strongly recommend that communities conduct combined PiT/Youth Counts; doing so will provide better results that are comparable from year-to-year and across communities.

Throughout the toolkit, look for the ‘Youth Count’ sections for more information on developing your local PiT/Youth Count approach. Before you begin, we suggest completing the [Youth Readiness Assessment](#) to help shape your initial planning.

Planning & Partnership

While PiT Counts are generally conducted over a single day, counts take many months of planning. Before making any methodological decisions, such as where and when to count, you must formalize your count leadership and begin to build community support for the exercise. The success of your count will rely on your ability to inform and educate the community about the benefits of PiT Counts, while creating ample opportunities for community stakeholders to provide input and feedback.

This section will be particularly useful for Community Entities as they hire staff to plan and implement the PiT Count. It covers the following:

- ▶ What is a PiT Count committee? What role does and should it play in a count?
- ▶ What skills and attributes does a PiT Count coordinator need?
- ▶ How does the scope of a count influence stakeholder engagement?
- ▶ How can various stakeholders positively contribute to a count?
- ▶ What role should Indigenous communities play in a count?
- ▶ What are the benefits of consulting with people with lived experience?
- ▶ How can effective media engagement improve a count?

Leadership

A successful count relies on input from a range of community stakeholders, but ultimate accountability should rest with single organization or entity, such as [Community Entities](#) or [Service Managers](#), for Ontario counts. PiT Count leadership, including a PiT Count coordinator, should be appointed with care, to ensure that a group with sufficient expertise, resources and determination drives the count.

The PiT Count leadership is responsible for:

- ▶ Defining the scope of the count.
- ▶ Identifying the broad objectives of the count.
- ▶ Engaging community stakeholders.
- ▶ Determining resources required.
- ▶ Recruiting and training volunteers.
- ▶ Adhering to budgets and timelines.
- ▶ Upholding ethics, confidentiality and safety.
- ▶ Analyzing and communicating results.
- ▶ Disseminating findings.

HPS Core Standard 3

The local implementation of the PiT count is based on consultations with the local HPS Community Advisory Board and Aboriginal Community Advisory Board, where applicable. The local methodology is approved by the community's HPS Community Entity and Aboriginal Community Entity, where applicable. The local methodology must be submitted to the HPS prior to the count for review.

IMPLEMENTATION

Defining the scope of the count

The scope of your count will, in part, shape the membership and structure of your count leadership. Although many of your methodological decisions should be made once your committee is formed and your coordinator is hired, we recommend assembling a small planning team to consider the following questions before committee membership is formalized.

KEY QUESTIONS	IMPLICATIONS
<p>Have you conducted a count previously?</p>	<p>Carefully evaluate the effectiveness of your previous PiT Count committee and coordinator. What were their strengths? What were their challenges? Can the previous committee implement any new objectives you might have for this count? While it is helpful to have a committee that is familiar with planning and implementing a PiT Count, we encourage you to make changes to your committee or hire new coordinators if necessary, based on what you learned from your previous counts, or on new requirements for your proposed count.</p>
<p>In your overall local homeless population, which populations are overrepresented?</p>	<p>PiT Count committee membership should reflect the unique makeup of your local homeless population. For instance, in communities across Canada, Indigenous Peoples are vastly overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. As a result, it is essential that count committees include members who can speak to Indigenous experiences of homelessness (e.g., Indigenous leaders, representatives from Friendship Centres, Indigenous people who have experienced homelessness). Also consider hiring a count coordinator and/or assistant count coordinator who has experience working with Indigenous populations, conducting Indigenous-based research and/or is familiar with Indigenous ways of knowing.</p>
<p>Will you survey individuals who are experiencing hidden homelessness as part of your count?</p>	<p>Although the PiT Count methodology is designed to capture unsheltered and sheltered homelessness, a number of communities in 2016 also included hidden homelessness in their counts. While PiT Counts cannot accurately enumerate the full extent of hidden homelessness in a community, the count provides an opportunity to collect useful survey data from people who are couch-surfing. If you choose to include hidden homelessness, consider recruiting committee and/or subcommittee members who can help you implement the additional methodological elements required to capture this population (e.g., magnet events, service counts, etc.). Invite representatives from agencies dedicated to helping newcomers, youth, women, seniors and/or low-income populations.</p>
<p>Will you include public systems (e.g., corrections, hospitals, detox facilities) in your count?</p>	<p>As per Recommended Standard 2 of the Guide to PiT Counts in Canada, communities are encouraged to collect data about people who are staying in public systems without a fixed address during the time of the count. Collecting data from public systems requires additional planning and resources and most importantly, access. Should you decide to include public systems in your count, we strongly suggest engaging these systems at the outset of planning and formalizing their roles through committee membership. Refer to Public Systems for more information on collecting data in public systems.</p>
<p>Is youth homelessness a priority in your community?</p>	<p>Youth are likely to experience hidden homelessness; therefore, they may be missed through traditional PiT Count methods. Fortunately, there are additional strategies that can improve data collection from youth, including effective youth engagement, magnet events and service counts. These strategies require additional resources and expertise. Should you wish to expand the scope of your count, be sure your committee and/or subcommittees include representatives from youth-serving organizations, child protection services, schools and youth themselves. If youth homelessness is a significant priority, consider hiring a count coordinator who has experience with youth or an assistant coordinator dedicated to the additional youth-focused elements.</p>

PiT Count committee

The work involved in a PiT Count is extensive and the leadership PiT Count Committee will help with planning and implementing the count. The Committee should be drawn from the Community Entity (CE) and Community Advisory Board (CAB), as well as the Aboriginal CE and CAB, where applicable.

Committees should also include representatives from a diversity of homeless-serving agencies, including those that serve youth, adults, and women and children fleeing domestic violence. Individuals with current or past experience of homelessness will also provide valuable input. Finally, the inclusion of your local HIFIS Community Coordinator will help facilitate access to shelter data.

Be sure your PiT Count Committee is a manageable size. Specific aspects of the count, including recruiting volunteers, developing the survey and methodology, and the communication strategy, might best be addressed through subcommittees.

As you shape your committee, consider the following questions:

- ▶ Who will chair the committee?
- ▶ What role will the committee play? Advisory? Decision-making?
- ▶ How often will the committee meet? How often will committee members receive updates?
- ▶ What are the expectations for committee members?
- ▶ Will committee members be expected to fill key volunteer positions during the count?

PiT Count coordinator & staff

The PiT Count coordinator is central to the success of a PiT Count. Depending on the size of your community, a full-time position may be required to effectively plan and implement the count.

The PiT Count coordinator will require a range of skills and qualifications, including a thorough understanding of homelessness, particularly in your community. Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples among people experiencing homelessness, consider seeking candidates who are familiar with Indigenous homelessness, understand Indigenous ways of knowing and have demonstrated success in partnering with Indigenous communities to create a positive impact.

Where possible, coordinators should have demonstrated success in coordinating large-scale community projects. Ideally, the coordinator will have a range of pre-existing relationships with key stakeholders in the community.

HPS Core Standard 8

The Community Entity (CE) is responsible for the quality of data collected. Efforts should be made to ensure that each person is counted only once (i.e., to limit double-counting) through the survey itself and through de-duplication of the data (see Section 5). The CE is also responsible for ensuring that staff and volunteers receive the proper training, including the count standards, survey procedures, data management and privacy, and personal safety.

Do not underestimate the amount of time a coordinator will need to effectively carry out the many tasks required for a count. Depending on the size of your community and the scope of your count, you may require one or more assistant coordinators to manage various aspects of the count (e.g., volunteer recruitment and coordination, service count implementation, magnet event coordination).

As you hire PiT Count staff, consider the strengths of each individual and seek to create a team that includes as many of the following key competencies as possible: knowledge of homelessness, research, survey design, community engagement, communication skills, volunteer coordination, event planning, media relations, data analysis and report writing. Where your coordinator or staff team has knowledge gaps, appoint committee members with specific expertise, build partnerships or hire external consultants to provide support. For example, you might partner with a local college or university to conduct your data analysis or hire graphic designers to design your promotional materials and final report. For more information, refer to [Mobilizing the Community](#).

YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your leadership structure.

PiT Count committee

Create a youth count subcommittee to help plan and implement the youth-focused components (e.g., magnet events). A youth count is not separate from the core count; therefore, the subcommittee must work closely with and under the guidance of the PiT Count committee and PiT Count coordinator. The CE and the PiT Count coordinator remain accountable for aligning the various aspects of the count.

PiT Count staff

If resources permit, hire a part-time assistant coordinator dedicated to advancing the youth components. The assistant coordinator should work under the supervision of the PiT Count coordinator, who is ultimately responsible for ensuring all components of the count are effectively coordinated and delivered.

KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [PiT Count Committee Terms of Reference](#)
- ▶ [PiT Count Coordinator Job Description](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Mobilizing the Community

As you begin planning for your count, consider how this initiative can be an effective way to engage your community in the effort to end homelessness. Recognize, too, that the success of the count depends on effective community engagement.

A PiT Count can help to inform and educate key stakeholders, including the general public, media, policy makers, the business sector, the social services sector and people experiencing homelessness. Cross-sector collaboration will encourage buy-in and provide additional resources to support the count, including money, volunteers, supplies and expert knowledge.

The count can help your community to understand and address homelessness differently. The process of planning and implementing the count can generate cross-sector coordination that may be leveraged as you implement other initiatives, including a [Plan to End Homelessness](#), Housing First programs, systems coordination or by-name lists. Doing the count collaboratively can increase support for your efforts, facilitate new alliances, and build and strengthen partnerships. At a minimum, you should consider how you will use the information you obtain during the count to generate action on homelessness—an objective that requires community participation and coordination.

IMPLEMENTATION

Building partnerships

There are a number of key groups you should engage with and consult throughout planning and implementation. The scope of your count will determine how involved each of these stakeholders needs to be.

By considering potential supporters outside the ‘usual suspects’ list, you can improve the accuracy of your count, while generating community-wide support for homelessness initiatives. For example, municipal parks and bylaw departments are likely to know the location of encampments and how best to approach these encampments in a safe and respectful manner.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS	PLANNING	IMPLEMENTATION
Individuals with lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identify locations that should be canvassed ▶ Provide feedback on survey questions ▶ Provide input on volunteer training ▶ Plan magnet events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Act as informal ambassadors on the night of the count by explaining the purpose and process to survey participants ▶ Volunteer for the count
Shelter providers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Advise on conducting the count in emergency facilities ▶ Provide input on methodological decisions such as timing, survey design, data collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Administer survey in shelters and/or support survey volunteers to deliver survey ▶ Provide shelter to those found outside during count
Non-profit service providers and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide input on count process and survey ▶ Recruit and train volunteers ▶ Identify target locations for service count 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count ▶ Host service counts ▶ Host magnet events
Health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide input on count process and survey, particularly in hospitals and emergency departments ▶ Recruit and train volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count ▶ Administer survey in hospitals and emergency departments
Corrections services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide input on count process and survey, particularly in remand, detention centres, jails ▶ Recruit and train volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count ▶ Administer survey in remand, detention centres, jails
Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Offer on-the-ground knowledge about location of rough sleepers ▶ Provide information on safety and emergency protocol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide safety overview at volunteer training ▶ Respond to emergencies
Researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide input on survey and methods ▶ Recruit and train volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count ▶ Assist with data analysis
Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide input on methodology ▶ Provide funding ▶ Increase awareness of homelessness across departments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count ▶ Advance issue within government after the count ▶ Encourage positive coverage from the media
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Increase awareness of the count and the issue of homelessness ▶ Mobilize community support ▶ Support volunteer recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide coverage of the count (consistent with concerns about confidentiality, ethics, etc.) ▶ Promote the results of the count
Businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Donate supplies and funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Volunteer for the count

PARTNERING WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

A PiT Count cannot be effectively implemented without partnering with Indigenous stakeholders. Input from Indigenous leaders, service providers, umbrella organizations and people experiencing homelessness is required to develop a count methodology that is accurate, promotes [cultural competency](#) and is ultimately effective in supporting efforts to end homelessness.

Indigenous Peoples are vastly overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. Although Indigenous Peoples make up 4% of the population in Canada, 37% of the [2016 Coordinated Count](#) participants identified as Indigenous. Similarly, [other studies](#) have indicated that on any given night, nearly 7% of all urban-living Indigenous people are homeless, compared to 0.78% of the non-Indigenous population.

Despite this overrepresentation, Indigenous Peoples may be underrepresented in counts, for a number of reasons. For example, with a legacy of harmful research practices used to exploit Indigenous populations, some Indigenous people may be unwilling to participate in counts.

The National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO) (2007) identifies that past research practices by external researchers have been “disrespectful, damaging and stigmatizing to First Nations People” in Canada (p. 3). The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) similarly identifies that “[i]n the past, Aboriginal people have not been consulted about what information should be collected, who should gather that information, who should maintain it, and who should have access to it” (p. 4).

– Excerpt from [Fostering Indigenous Partnerships & Cultural Competency During your Point-in-Time Count](#)

As a result, PiT Counts should be implemented—from the planning stages through to reporting the results—in partnership with Indigenous community leaders and representatives. This is the only way to ensure that count methodologies respect the dignity, autonomy, self-determination, rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples. With strong partnerships, the overall accuracy of your count will also be improved. Refer to [Fostering Indigenous Partnerships and Cultural Competency During your Point-in-Time Count](#).

“Involvement of Indigenous community representatives should also have a budget. It worked well to have an agreement outlining specific roles for Indigenous community involvement with an Indigenous organization. Work with Indigenous partners to identify funding or support needs for staff to be involved on working groups or in other project planning areas so Indigenous partners are represented in each working group.”

– Recommendation from the [Winnipeg Street Census 2015](#)

MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Building strong relationships with media early in the planning process can improve volunteer recruitment, encourage stakeholder participation and shed light on the issue of homelessness. However, the safety and confidentiality of survey participants should be protected at all times. Specific procedures must be in place to work with media before, during and after the count, and these must be carefully followed.

The media will play a key role in helping your community understand what a PiT Count is and why it is important. Providing the local media with accurate and timely information about homelessness in your community, and the importance of your PiT Count, will improve public support for your count.

The strategies described below will help you to effectively engage the media while planning your count.

Develop a communication plan

Along with your list of media contacts, develop a communication plan that highlights the key messages about your PiT Count. The PiT Count coordinator and others involved in planning and implementing the count should be prepared to speak about its strengths and limitations. Consider how you will respond to criticisms of the count. Since messages should remain consistent, you may decide to designate a single person as media contact (e.g., the coordinator or an individual on the PiT Count committee with media experience).

Build a list of media contacts

During count planning, determine which news outlets, columnists, blogs and social media experts you will reach out to. Building partnerships with a handful of journalists at the outset ensures allies throughout your count; this will also help with volunteer recruitment and stakeholder engagement. The National Alliance to End Homelessness [suggests](#) searching for ‘homelessness’ on the websites of your local media. This will yield a list of journalists who focus on the issue.

Set ground rules for media participation

There are numerous benefits to working with the media, and careful planning and management will ensure the media respects the confidentiality of those encountered or surveyed during your count. Your communication plan should contain clear guidelines. Will you invite the media to the volunteer training? Will you ask the media to refrain from attending the count? Will you include them, but in a limited capacity? Set guidelines in advance and work with media to gain their cooperation.

Announce your PiT Count as early as possible

Once your participation in the Coordinated Count is confirmed and your communication plan is developed, you should announce your PiT Count in the local media through a press release. Though your methodology will not yet be finalized, it is important to notify the media and the community as early as possible. This will allow you to control the message and, to some extent, the coverage of your PiT Count.

Withhold the exact date of your count

While you should announce your count early, you may wish to withhold from the media the exact date. Some communities have found that too much advance notice affects results. Individuals experiencing homelessness may receive misinformation about the purpose of the count or the anonymity of their personal information, and then may avoid services or the downtown core on the day/night of the count. In your initial press release, consider specifying only the month. Closer to the count, when you put out a call for volunteers, you can provide further details on timing and, possibly, the training location.

Leverage your participation in the Coordinated Count

Advertise that your community is part of a coordinated effort to conduct PiT Counts across Canada. Explain the benefits of a coordinated count and emphasize the importance of this first-time initiative. You can refer the media to the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) for helpful information.

Explain what a PiT Count does (and does not) do

Many, including your media contacts, will be unfamiliar with PiT Counts. You can use the media to inform the public about the role PiT Counts play in addressing homelessness. Remember, a PiT Count is a “snapshot” of homelessness. Media and, by extension, the public must understand that your count will not yield a full picture of homelessness. Certain forms of homelessness, such as the experience of those who are not currently homeless but are at risk of homelessness, will not be captured. And since individuals move in and out of homelessness, a PiT Count will not enumerate everyone who experiences homelessness. However, the PiT Count will provide a useful baseline to measure progress from year to year, among other benefits.

Refer to [Everyone Counts: An introduction to Point-in-Time Counts](#), a presentation prepared by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. There you will find helpful language about the history and purpose of PiT Counts.

Use your PiT Count to start a conversation about homelessness in your community

A PiT Count is the perfect opportunity to raise the issue of homelessness with key stakeholders and the general public. Use your PiT Count and the resultant media coverage to shed light on the issue of homelessness in your community. The PiT Count is also an opportunity to combat stereotypes about homelessness: talk about who experiences homelessness and how your community is addressing the issue. Starting these conversations before your count will set the stage for sharing the results of your count.



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your stakeholder engagement strategy.

Youth advisors

Engaging youth with lived experience to plan and implement elements of your count can increase youth representation, especially if you are planning to survey youth experiencing hidden homelessness (refer to [Adding to the scope of the count](#)). Youth advisors can:

- ▶ Advise on unsheltered locations where youth might be staying.
- ▶ Provide input on your survey instrument.
- ▶ Help to plan youth magnet events.
- ▶ Encourage attendance at magnet events and service through social media.
- ▶ Provide context for count findings.
- ▶ Share the results of the count with other youth.

For more information on the role of youth advisors, refer to [Youth Leadership](#) and [Youth Magnet Events](#).

Youth-serving organizations

Regardless of the methodology used, all communities should engage youth-serving organizations to plan and implement their counts. However, you need deeper partnerships with youth-serving organizations if you plan to conduct youth magnet events or service counts. Before you decide to include youth-focused elements, assess the strength of your relationships with youth-serving organizations. While a PiT Count can provide an opportunity to strengthen existing partnerships within the homeless-serving sector, implementing magnet events and service counts requires a baseline of trust and a history of effective collaboration.

For more information on assessing your capacity to conduct a youth count, refer to [Youth Readiness Assessment](#).



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [FAQ for community agencies](#)
- ▶ [Sample letter to community agencies](#)
- ▶ [Press release: before the count](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Methodology

The Guide to PiT Counts in Canada outlines a number of requirements in count methods for communities participating in the Coordinated Count. These requirements, as dictated by the Core Standards, ensure consistency across communities, to allow data to be compared. However, there are several decisions about count methods that communities need to make locally. This allows communities to ensure their counts reflect local priorities and context.

This section covers the following:

- ▶ In the context of a PiT Count, how is homelessness defined?
- ▶ Which populations are required to be counted as part of the Coordinated Count?
- ▶ Under what circumstances should you include additional populations in the count?
- ▶ Which locations should be included in a count?
- ▶ What factors might influence the timing of a count?
- ▶ What should be asked on a PiT Count survey?

Who to Count

Historically, PiT Counts have been used to measure unsheltered and sheltered homelessness. Other forms of homelessness, such as hidden homelessness, were not generally included within the scope of early counts. The reasons for this are twofold.

First, it is only fairly recently that our common view of homelessness has included people staying on the streets and in shelters. In 2012, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness published the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#), which acknowledged a much broader continuum of homelessness, one that included people who are provisionally accommodated and at risk of homelessness.

Second, and most importantly, forms of homelessness other than unsheltered and sheltered homelessness are inherently difficult to measure. Those who are staying temporarily with friends or family, or those on the verge of losing their housing, are by nature less visible and less connected to homeless-serving agencies, and therefore less easily located during a PiT Count.

However, as our definition of homelessness broadens, so too must our data collection methods. As a result, communities have successfully piloted additional count components that have yielded important data on the experiences of people who are provisionally accommodated.

But we should always be practical about the purpose and limitations of a PiT Count. Adding to the scope of the count is not required. In some communities, it may be best—due to timing, resources and local priorities—to limit the count to the Core Populations, as defined by the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#).

This section provides an overview of the minimum requirements of the Coordinated Count and offers the pros and cons of including additional populations.

IMPLEMENTATION

Core populations

Communities participating in the Coordinated Count are required, at a minimum, to enumerate the Core Populations.

The Core HPS PiT Count approach includes people who are experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness.

Unsheltered homelessness includes people who are sleeping in places unfit for human habitation, including the following locations: streets, alleys, parks and other public locations, transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles, ravines and other outdoor locations where people experiencing homelessness are known to sleep.

Sheltered homelessness includes people sleeping in the following locations: emergency shelters (general and specific to men, women, youth, etc.), extreme weather shelters, Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and transitional shelters. It may include people who receive hotel/motel vouchers in lieu of shelter beds. It does not include people who have security of tenure, who are in Housing First programs or in social or subsidized housing.

– Excerpt from the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#)

Enumerating the Core Populations ensures that communities across Canada are measuring homelessness in a consistent way. The Core Populations will form what the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) refers to as the “Core Enumeration” (that is, the number of people who stayed in unsheltered and sheltered locations on the night of the count). Consistently defined across participating communities, the Core Enumeration can be compared year over year and aggregated regionally and nationally. For more information, refer to [Calculating the Core Enumeration](#), in [Data Management, Input & Analysis](#).

HPS Core Standard 2

The methodology and survey used by the community includes the Core Screening and Survey Questions, and the Core Populations described in [the Guide to PiT Counts in Canada].

The Canadian Definition of Homelessness

The Core Populations correspond with the [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#). Communities that use this definition, or wish to, should include the populations described in 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 and 3.1. Refer below to [Adding to the scope of the count](#) for a reference table.

By using the Canadian Definition of Homelessness, you can help stakeholders understand the various forms of homelessness, while being clear about what a PiT Count does and does not measure. If you are adding additional populations beyond the Core Populations, the Canadian Definition of Homelessness provides a framework to do so.

DEFINING TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

As described in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#), transitional housing ([3.1 in the Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#)) should be included in your sheltered enumeration. Challengingly however, the definition of transitional housing varies across communities and provinces. Ultimately, you will need to define transitional housing in consultation with your PiT Count committee and other stakeholders. As you do, consider the four criteria that other communities have used in previous counts.

- 1 Do clients live there on a fixed term, generally 1 year or less? Are they required to leave at the end of this term?** The sheltered enumeration is intended to measure the extent of homelessness in your community at a particular point in time. Individuals who are likely to stay in housing programs for several years do not pose an imminent burden on the homeless-serving system.
- 2 Do clients of the housing program pay rent?** In some programs, clients pay a small amount relative to their income. This is not considered true rent.
- 3 Do clients have a right to tenancy? Is there a lease?** Clients who have a right to tenancy or a lease, such as some people in Housing First programs, have, in theory, the option to stay indefinitely.
- 4 Do clients receive supports through the housing program intended to ‘transition’ them to permanent or supportive housing?** If the expressed goal of a housing program is to move people into permanent housing on a relatively short timeframe (less than 1 year), the program should likely be classified as transitional housing.

Even with these criteria, there will be some grey areas. Regardless of your approach, be sure to clearly spell out the criteria for inclusion and exclusion. If you have questions about specific programs, you can post them on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). There, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and community experts can help you to define the housing programs in your community.

Adding to the scope of the count

The Coordinated Count is designed so that participating communities have the flexibility to add to the methodology based on local needs and priorities. For instance, communities that are prioritizing efforts to end youth homelessness are likely to benefit from including those experiencing hidden homelessness in their count.

However, additions to the minimum requirements of the Coordinated Count should be carefully considered. While it is tempting to use your PiT Count as an opportunity to fill all your local data gaps, limitations to the PiT Count methods may make this unrealistic. Efforts to make the PiT Count too expansive may reduce the accuracy of your data and mislead stakeholders about the extent of homelessness in your community.

Before you decide to include additional populations in your count, you must first understand the purposes of a PiT Count:

- 1** *An enumeration, or count, of people experiencing absolute homelessness: It is intended to identify how many people in a community experience homelessness in shelters and on the streets at a given time. Conducted over subsequent years, PiT counts can be used by the community to track progress in reducing homelessness.*
- 2** *A survey of the homeless population: Through an accompanying survey, the PiT count gives the community information on the demographics and service needs of their homeless population. This information can be used to target community resources to where they are most needed.*

– Excerpt from the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#).

The Core Populations are both *enumerated* and *surveyed* with the PiT Count methods. Although a PiT Count is not perfect (individuals experiencing unsheltered and sheltered homelessness may be missed) it does provide a reasonable estimate of absolute homelessness.

However, even with modifications to the PiT Count, such as the addition of service counts, it is not possible to accurately *enumerate* other forms of homelessness, such as people living temporarily with others. That is, the PiT Count cannot accurately measure the number of people who are couch-surfing in your community.

Note: some forms of homelessness should be neither enumerated nor surveyed through a count. We recommend the following approach for each population.

TABLE 1: CANADIAN DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS: RECOMMENDED ENUMERATION STRATEGIES

OPERATIONAL CATEGORY	LIVING SITUATION	COUNTED	SURVEYED
Unsheltered	1.1 People living in public or private spaces without consent or contract [CORE POPULATION]	✓	✓
	1.2 People living in places not intended for permanent human habitation [CORE POPULATION]	✓	✓
Emergency sheltered	2.1 Emergency overnight shelters for people who are homeless [CORE POPULATION]	✓	✓
	2.2 Violence-Against-Women (VAW) shelters [CORE POPULATION]	✓	✓
	2.3 Emergency shelter for people fleeing a natural disaster or destruction of accommodation due to fires, floods etc.	✗	✗
Provisionally accommodated	3.1 Interim Housing for people who are homeless [CORE POPULATION]	✓	✓
	3.2 People living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for accessing permanent housing	✗	✓
	3.3 People accessing short-term, temporary rental accommodations without security of tenure	✗	✗
	3.4 People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements	✓	<i>if possible</i>
	3.5 Accommodation/Reception centres for recently arrived immigrants and refugees	✗	✗
At-risk of homelessness	4.1 People at imminent risk of homelessness	✗	✗
	4.2 Individuals and families who are precariously housed	✗	✗

Although you cannot *measure* certain forms of homelessness through a PiT Count, you can still survey individuals beyond the Core Populations. By doing so, you will collect important information about the demographics and service needs of provisionally accommodated populations.

This distinction is important as you set expectations with the community about the purpose of the count. For example, if you suggest that a PiT Count can *enumerate* couch-surfing, stakeholders may interpret the results of your count to be the full extent of hidden homelessness in your community. Without clarification, this underrepresentation means your community risks seeking inadequate resources to end homelessness. For more information on calculating your enumeration and reporting your results, refer to [Data Management, Input & Analysis](#).

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

Here we define hidden homelessness as “people living temporarily with others, but without guarantee of continued residency or immediate prospects for access permanent housing” ([3.2 in the Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#)). In previous counts, some communities have included hidden homelessness within the scope of their counts.

Although you cannot enumerate hidden homelessness through a PiT Count, you may decide to survey people experiencing hidden homelessness for some of the following reasons:

- ▶ Unsheltered or chronic homelessness is not common in your community.
- ▶ Your community is largely rural, making it difficult to locate unsheltered populations.
- ▶ You have few shelter beds, and therefore the sheltered count will yield little data.
- ▶ Youth homelessness is a significant priority.
- ▶ Community leaders have indicated that hidden homelessness is common among Indigenous Peoples in your community.
- ▶ Community stakeholders have identified hidden homelessness as a priority.
- ▶ You lack local data on the nature of hidden homelessness.
- ▶ You hope to make the public and the media aware of different forms of homelessness.

To effectively survey people who are couch-surfing, we suggest additional count elements such as service counts and magnet events. With your PiT Count committee, weigh the potential benefits of expanding the scope of the count against the drawbacks of the additional time, resources and planning required. For more information on service counts and magnet events, refer to [Where to Count](#). For information on modifying your screening questions to include people who are couch-surfing, refer to [What to Ask](#).

PUBLIC SYSTEMS

Some communities include a measure of homelessness within public systems (e.g. corrections, hospitals, detox centres, jail, youth detention centres, etc.) on the night of the count. This is defined in the Canadian Definition of Homelessness as “[People in institutional care who lack permanent housing arrangements \[3.4\]](#).” Including this form of homelessness in the count may help communities to find people experiencing homelessness who may otherwise be missed.

People experiencing homelessness are more likely than the general population to interact with public systems. For instance, we know in many communities that the [criminalization of homelessness](#) is common. Further, due to structural barriers and systemic racism, Indigenous Peoples—who are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness—also experience disproportionately [high rates of incarceration](#). Other common systems interactions include hospitals and detox centres, as homelessness is shown to negatively affect the [mental and physical health](#) of those experiencing it.

Unlike hidden homelessness, homelessness within public systems can be both enumerated and surveyed (see [Table 1: Canadian Definition of Homelessness: recommended enumeration strategies](#)), but not without challenges. Although there are benefits to collecting data from public systems during the count, it can be difficult to access these institutions. Hospitals and corrections facilities, for example, often have stringent confidentiality and data-sharing protocols.

It is also difficult to define homelessness in correctional facilities. Typically, communities have included people who have ‘no fixed address’ (NFA). However, people who are serving long-term sentences, without the possibility of imminent release, are likely to have NFA until closer to their release date. Conversely, people who were homeless prior to incarceration or people serving short sentences who are NFA are much more likely to find themselves homeless at the end of their sentence. The NFA measure, therefore, may not reliably predict homelessness on release.

As noted in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#), further guidance and recommendations on how to effectively enumerate and survey populations in public systems will be provided. Until then, we encourage you to post any questions on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#), where the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and community experts can help you shape your public systems count approach.

OTHER FORMS OF HOMELESSNESS

As noted in [Table 1: Canadian Definition of Homelessness: recommended enumeration strategies](#), there are some living situations that should be neither enumerated nor surveyed through a PiT Count. The Guide to PiT Counts in Canada identifies populations outside the scope of the PiT Count:

- ▶ People who are staying in housing that they rent or own, including those who have access to permanent housing that they can safely return to. For example, a visitor to the city staying with a friend may have access to permanent housing in another city. Likewise, a youth staying with someone else for a night may still have permanent housing with their parents.
- ▶ People who are in permanent supportive housing or Housing First programs. The PiT Count, in part, is meant to measure success in reducing homelessness through these Housing First and supportive housing programs, so including them among the numbers would hide this progress. Nevertheless, you may want to use the PiT count as an opportunity to speak about the success you have had in housing people through these programs. This information can help to contextualize changes in the population over time.
- ▶ People that are experiencing overcrowding. This is an important contextual piece of information and highlights a need for housing within a community. Because it is not possible to assess this in the context of a PiT count, this population is considered outside of the scope of the count.

HPS Recommended Standard 2

If possible, the local PiT count report can include data from local public systems—including correctional facilities, juvenile detention centres, hospitals, detox centres—for people who have no fixed address and who are imminently going to be released, but have no discharge plan that includes housing. This number is not included in the Core Enumeration.

YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following to determine who to count:

Hidden homelessness

As the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness notes, youth may be more likely than adults to experience hidden homelessness. As a result, the experiences of youth may be underrepresented in counts that include only the Core Populations.

The different degrees of homelessness are important to consider, as not all homeless youth are absolutely homeless or sleeping rough (“Unsheltered”), nor do they always show up in homeless shelters (“Emergency sheltered”). Some communities have no youth-specific emergency shelters, and in the jurisdictions that do, access may be defined by a narrower age mandate (“under 18” or “16–21”), for instance.

One thing that defines youth homelessness is the greater likelihood that they are “Provisionally Accommodated.” In fact, there is some evidence that young people are twice as likely as adults to be part of the “hidden homeless” population, meaning they may stay temporarily with friends or other family members without any degree of permanence or security (this is often described as ‘couch-surfing’) (Gaetz, Gulliver, & Richter, 2014:42). This has significant implications for service planning and homelessness enumeration. – Excerpt from the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness

If youth homelessness is a local priority, we recommend including hidden homelessness within the scope of your count. Doing so will allow you to collect survey information, including demographics and service needs, from youth experiencing homelessness in your community. This information is important as you design and implement effective responses to youth homelessness.

Remember, though, due to the inherent challenges of enumerating hidden homelessness, the PiT Count will inevitably underestimate the extent of youth homelessness in your community. You must explain this underestimation to stakeholders, the media and the public, so they understand that the number of youth experiencing homelessness in your community is larger than it will appear in the count.

Defining youth homelessness

Youth organizations and communities define youth homelessness differently across the country. Some define youth age range up to age 24, whereas others define it up to 25 or even 30. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness strongly recommends that communities align to the Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness, which defines youth homelessness as:

... the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.

Using this definition allows for consistent data comparison and the ability to aggregate local data across communities. As increasing resources are being dedicated to efforts to end youth homelessness, our ability to measure youth homelessness consistently is important.

Note: Although the definition of youth homelessness includes those as young as 13, we discourage conducting PiT Count surveys with youth under 15. While youth aged 13 and 14 can be enumerated, there are legal and ethical concerns around surveying youth under 15 without parental consent. For more information, refer to [Ethics & Informed Consent](#).



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Canadian Definition of Homelessness](#)
- ▶ [Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Where to Count

One of the most important decisions during PiT Count planning is where to conduct the count. As noted in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#), participants in the Coordinated Count must seek to enumerate, at a minimum, people staying in emergency shelters, transitional housing units, violence against women shelters and in outdoor or public locations, such as the streets, parks, bus shelters, etc.

You may opt to expand the scope of the count to include other enumeration methods, such as service counts and magnet events, for some of the following reasons:

- ▶ You are broadening the scope of your count to include forms of homelessness beyond those identified in the Core Populations (e.g., hidden homelessness, systems homelessness).
- ▶ Populations such as Indigenous Peoples, youth or newcomers are likely to be missed through the unsheltered and sheltered counts, due to an unwillingness to participate or a greater likelihood of experiencing hidden homelessness.
- ▶ You and your Indigenous partners seek to create culturally safe, welcoming spaces for Indigenous people experiencing homelessness to complete the PiT Count survey and make connections with Indigenous-specific housing services and supports.
- ▶ Your community covers a large geographic area or is predominately rural, and therefore an unsheltered count is more difficult to conduct, and individuals are likely to be missed.

This section provides an overview of the mandatory and optional count components and guidance on implementing each.

IMPLEMENTATION

Count components

The count components you select will depend, in part, on the scope of your count. At a minimum, communities participating in the Coordinated Count are required to conduct unsheltered and sheltered counts. Adding other methods will allow you to survey populations beyond the Core Populations and/or improve the accuracy of your unsheltered count. If you include complementary components, you will require additional strategies to ensure you are not double-counting participants. See [Unique Identifiers](#) for more information.

		CORE POPULATION	CANADIAN DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS
Mandatory			
<u>Unsheltered Counts</u>	The unsheltered count takes place generally over a few hours, often in the evening, overnight or early in the morning. Volunteers either walk the entire community or to designated 'hot spots' to enumerate and survey individuals who are experiencing homelessness.	Unsheltered	1.1, 1.2
<u>Sheltered Counts</u>	The sheltered count takes place at night, when clients have arrived at the sheltered locations for the evening. The sheltered component includes emergency shelters, transitional housing, VAW shelters and hotel accommodation (only in lieu of a shelter bed). Volunteers and/or staff deliver the PiT Count survey to willing participants. In addition to the surveys, staff provide administrative data on the number of clients staying in the sheltered locations on the night of the count.	Sheltered	2.1, 2.2, 3.1
Recommended			
<u>Public Systems Counts</u>	Public systems counts are conducted in hospitals, detox centres and correctional facilities. Participating facilities provide organizers, on the night of the count, with the number of people in their facility who are without a fixed address. Some facilities may be willing to conduct surveys.	-	3.4
Optional			
<u>Service Counts</u>	A service count generally takes place in the daytime, or when services are open. Volunteers and/or service staff deliver PiT Count surveys to people experiencing homelessness, as defined within the context of the count. A service count is not limited to homeless-serving agencies. Service counts often take place in food banks, at bottle depots, in libraries and at drop-in centres.	Unsheltered	1.1, 1.2, 3.2
<u>Magnet Events</u>	A magnet event is designed to encourage participation in the PiT Count from people experiencing homelessness who may be missed through other methods, such as youth staying with friends or people living in remote unsheltered locations. Magnet events usually have some combination of food, resources, entertainment and/or service referrals. Attendees who meet the definition of homelessness, as defined by the count, are given the option to complete a PiT Count survey at the event.	Unsheltered	1.1, 1.2, 3.2

PLANNING AN UNSHELTERED COUNT

STEP 1: Determine coverage strategy

There are several options to determine the scope of the unsheltered count. Will you send volunteers to every part of the community? Just to the areas frequented by people experiencing homelessness? Consider the following options:

Known locations: The most common unsheltered count method is to identify and canvass locations people experiencing homelessness are known to frequent. These places are unique to each community, and may include parks, malls, overpasses, businesses, ATMs, libraries, alleys, parkades, transportation depots, transit shelters and bottle recycling depots, among others.

Full coverage: Some communities may wish to have volunteers systematically walk the entire community to find and survey individuals experiencing homelessness. Communities can obtain census tract maps, or divide the area to be canvassed into zones to which teams will be deployed. This is a very resource-intensive approach, as it requires many volunteers to implement. However, smaller communities with sufficient volunteer availability may choose this option.

Combination of known locations and full coverage: The two approaches may also be combined. For example, in Calgary, the entire downtown core is divided into zones and covered by teams of volunteers on the night of the count. But because of the city's size, survey locations beyond the downtown core are identified using the known locations method. When possible, it is helpful to deploy outreach teams or experienced volunteers to the more remote locations.

Some communities, including Toronto, develop sophisticated sampling strategies to estimate the size of the homeless population in areas that are not actually canvassed. However most communities will have neither the resources nor need for such an approach. For consistency and simplicity, we recommend that most communities use a combination of known locations and full coverage.

HPS Core Standard 7

Unsheltered counts are based on a street survey conducted within a 24-hour period. This survey can cover the entire community, known locations within a community, a sample of neighbourhoods, or it can use a mixed approach. The survey can include streets, alleys, parks and other public locations, transit stations, abandoned buildings, vehicles, ravines, and other outdoor locations where people experiencing homelessness are known to sleep.

STEP 2: Map the unsheltered count

Prepare for the unsheltered count by creating your map zones, areas that teams of volunteers will cover during the count. Seek input from your PiT Count committee, community partners, and people with lived experience when mapping your survey locations. You may need to update your maps closer to the date of your count, as the locations frequented by people experiencing unsheltered homelessness may change.

We recommend sorting your map zones into priority groups, based on the anticipated number of people experiencing homelessness in each zone. Should you find yourself short of volunteers on the day of the count, prioritize the higher-density zones.

To identify known locations:

- ▶ Engage outreach workers, police, EMS, bylaw and parks officers, businesses and others to help you identify 'hot spots' for the night of the count.
- ▶ Undertake walkabouts in advance of a count date to identify and confirm known locations.
- ▶ Consult people experiencing homelessness to get a sense of where to canvass and how to approach potential interviewees, especially in camps.

Note that different populations experiencing homelessness may stay in different locations. For example, youth may gravitate toward more secluded areas such as forests, while single adult men may be more likely to stay in plain view on the street. Consult a range of stakeholders to ensure your mapping accurately reflects the diversity of experiences among people experiencing homelessness in your community.

With input, you can develop a map of known locations that can be used to determine the number of teams you need for the unsheltered count. If you choose to undertake the full coverage approach, this step may still be useful as it can help you anticipate areas that may require larger teams of volunteers.

Through this exercise, you can also identify potential areas where volunteers should not be deployed. For instance, we recommend sending outreach staff or service workers to encampments, instead of volunteers. It is safer for both volunteers and participants, since outreach staff have the training and expertise needed to approach encampments respectfully. Similarly, you may have private security guards canvas parking garages and campus police cover university campuses. Note: Volunteers should not survey on private property or at businesses, unless arranged with business owners prior to the count.

In cases where you aim for full coverage of the downtown core and use the known locations approach for the rest of the community, develop a map that divides the downtown into areas that can be easily walked by a team of volunteers over a few hours.

PLANNING A SHELTERED COUNT

STEP 1: Take inventory

Your first step in planning the sheltered count is to develop an inventory of locations listed in Core Standard 5, found in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#). Once identified, you can engage senior leadership in these organizations to explain the purpose of the count and encourage their participation.

For each program, note the bed capacity. You will need this information to determine how many surveys to print and volunteers to recruit. If an agency has more than one program, for example emergency shelter beds and transitional housing, list each program separately.

HPS Core Standard 5

Sheltered counts are based on the number of individuals staying in emergency shelters, extreme weather shelters, Violence Against Women (VAW) shelters, and transitional shelters on one night of the year. Where applicable, it may also include families or individuals who received hotel/motel vouchers in lieu of shelter beds. Note that surveys done in shelters are not used to determine the enumeration, but rather to provide information on the sheltered population.

TABLE 2: SAMPLE INVENTORY LIST

AGENCY NAME	PROGRAM	TYPE OF PROGRAM	DEMOGRAPHIC	BED CAPACITY
Choices	Wyatt House	Emergency Shelter	Youth (16–24)	20
	Blue Supports	Transitional	Youth (16–24)	5
Front Street Services	Front Street Services	Emergency Shelter	Adult Men	60
St. Christopher's	Sunpatch	Transitional	Women	8
YWCA	Evergreen	VAW Shelter	Women	15

STEP 2: Choose a data collection method

There are two types of data collected through the sheltered count: administrative data and survey data. Administrative data, provided by the agencies listed in your inventory, will indicate the number of people who stayed in sheltered locations on the night of the count. You will use this information to calculate your sheltered enumeration. In addition to the number of people staying in the shelter, agencies should provide basic information about the demographics of their service users on the night of the count.

Survey data is collected by administering the PiT Count survey in sheltered locations. Agency staff should provide input into how best to survey their clients. The count must fit in with their operations, intake processes and busy service periods.

There are two ways to administer the survey:

Administration by volunteers: In some communities, agencies will want volunteer teams to conduct the survey at their facilities. Volunteers should administer the survey from dedicated rooms or stations. The staff at the shelters should inform their clients that the survey is happening and direct them to the volunteer survey administrators, if clients are interested. It is helpful to provide information sheets, flyers and/or posters to shelters ahead of the count. Refer to [PiT Count Shelter Survey Set-Up](#) and [Shelter Survey Set-Up and Considerations](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) for more information.

Survey participants should not feel obligated to participate in the survey in order to gain access to shelter or any other service. Shelter staff should make it clear to clients that participation is voluntary.

Administration by agency staff: In some cases, staff may take on administration of the survey internally. This is commonly seen in shelters for youth or women fleeing violence. You will need to work closely with the provider to ensure they understand how to administer the survey. Provide adequate supplies, including extra surveys and honoraria for participation.

Whenever possible, shelter clients should have the option to complete a PiT Count survey. However, in some cases, shelters may be unwilling or unable to conduct surveys with clients or accommodate count volunteers. At a minimum, sheltered locations must provide you with the number of people that stayed with them on the night of the count. Without this information, your sheltered enumeration will be inaccurate. Download the [Sheltered Enumeration Form Guidance](#) for more information.

HPS Core Standard 5

Sheltered counts are based on data collected by shelter data systems, where available, such as the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS). Large communities may use a sampling approach for their shelter survey (e.g., a representative sample of the shelters or shelter residents) provided that they explain their sampling strategy.

PLANNING A PUBLIC SYSTEMS COUNT

STEP 1: Take inventory

First, create a list of public systems that you want to include in your count. Hospitals, treatment centres, juvenile correctional facilities and holding cells are good options. Next, identify key contacts in each of these systems. Note: Depending on the jurisdiction in which the facility is located, you may need to work with multiple contacts and levels of government. For example, the Correctional Service of Canada operates federal correctional facilities, whereas jails and detention centres are provincially operated. In many instances, it may take considerable time and planning to make the required connections. Where possible, build on any existing relationships that your PiT Count committee or other count partners may have.

STEP 2: Determine data requirements

Work with willing facilities and systems to determine the best data collection approach. At a minimum, they will need to provide you with the number of people without a fixed address on the night of the count. This information will allow you to calculate your systems enumeration, though this should be reported separately from your [Core Enumeration](#). In some cases, facilities may be willing to provide additional information, such as age and gender.

STEP 3: Modify your survey

Less commonly, facilities may allow you to administer the PiT Count survey during the count. To do so, you will need to modify the screening questions to ensure that people with no fixed address, who are staying in public systems during the count, are screened into the survey. Guidance on modifying the PiT Count survey for public systems is forthcoming.

PLANNING A SERVICE COUNT

STEP 1: Take inventory

In consultation with your stakeholders, create a list of services or programs that people experiencing homelessness frequent. Put particular emphasis on services that serve populations that may be underrepresented in your count, for example, Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ2 youth and newcomers. Unlike the sheltered count inventory, the service list does not need to be exhaustive. Instead, pick services where you will encounter a high density of people experiencing homelessness. Drop-in centres, bottle depots, food programs, malls and libraries can be popular locations.

STEP 2: Work with the service providers

Not all service providers will be willing to participate. We recommend that you convene an information session and invite target service providers to learn about the purpose of a PiT Count. Find out from service providers when they have the greatest number of clients. This will help you to determine when to schedule the service count (within your 24-hour PiT Count period). As for the sheltered count, service providers can administer the PiT Count surveys themselves, over a set time period, or you can provide volunteers. Only people who meet the definition of homelessness, according to your count parameters, should complete the survey. It is not necessary to collect administrative data from service providers that do not offer temporary or short-term accommodation to clients experiencing homelessness.

PLANNING A MAGNET EVENT

STEP 1: Set the scope

As a community, you may decide to hold a general magnet event to attract as many people experiencing homelessness as possible. This approach is helpful in rural communities, where an unsheltered count may be difficult to carry out, or in communities with few homeless-serving agencies, where people experiencing homelessness may be difficult to find. [Yellowknife](#) and [Brandon](#), for example, have successfully used this approach.

Other types of magnet events include population-specific events. For example, in 2016, End Homelessness St. John's (EHSJ), in partnership with Choices for Youth and the Youth Leadership Council, hosted a magnet event specifically for youth. The event attracted youth who were otherwise disconnected from homeless-serving agencies. Through this event, EHSJ was able to survey a number of youth couch-surfing with friends who would not have been encountered through the unsheltered and sheltered counts. Refer to [Youth Magnet Events](#) and [Everyone Counts: St. John's Homeless Point-in-Time Count 2016](#) for more information.

Similarly, the Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton (SPRCH) hosted a magnet event during its Indigenous PiT Count in 2015. They provided a welcoming space with Indigenous-focused cultural and spiritual activities, including music, food and dance. The event was well attended by people experiencing homelessness, including Indigenous people, and was described as a transformative community experience. Indigenous volunteers were on site to administer the PiT Count survey to those willing to participate. Through the magnet event, the SPRCH provided a culturally safe place for Indigenous people to participate in the count. Refer to [Fostering Indigenous Partnerships & Cultural Competency during your Point-in-Time Count](#) for more information.

STEP 2: Partnership & planning

Once you have identified the aim of your magnet event(s), select partners to help plan and deliver the event(s). If you are conducting a general magnet event, you will need a range of partners. Seek businesses and community organizations that may be willing to donate supplies, such as posters and food, or event space. If weather and licensing permit, consider holding your magnet event in the form of a BBQ in a public park.

To conduct an Indigenous magnet event, partner with Indigenous organizations in your community to plan, implement and promote the event. Similarly, youth magnet events should be implemented in partnership with youth and youth-serving organizations. In both cases, it is best to designate a single organization to lead the planning and delivery of the event. The lead organization should work closely with youth and the PiT Count committee to ensure the event meets the requirements of the count and stays within budget.

STEP 3: Promote

Dedicate time and resources to promoting your magnet event(s) to as many agencies as possible. One option is to create cards that contain details about the event and information about the PiT Count. Local services and agencies can distribute them to their clients. It should be clear in any promotional material that everyone is welcome, and that attendance at the event is not contingent on participating in the survey.

Enlist the help of people with lived experience to promote magnet events through word of mouth. Adequately compensate any individuals with lived experience for their contributions to planning and promoting magnet events.

YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you determine which components to include in your count:

Magnet events & service counts

As recommended above, communities with a priority on youth homelessness should expand the scope of their count to survey people experiencing hidden homelessness. To do so effectively, we recommend adding a youth magnet event and/or service count. For more information on youth magnet events, refer to [Youth Magnet Events](#). Refer to the [Youth Readiness Assessment](#) for guidance on expanding the scope of your count.

Public systems counts

If you are conducting a public systems count, consider including juvenile correctional facilities and youth treatment centres. Juvenile correctional facilities are provincially operated.

When to Count

Communities participating in the Coordinated Count are required to conduct their 24-hour count between March 1 and April 30, 2018. Within this time period, there are a number of factors that may influence when you schedule your count. These include:

- ▶ Your geographic location and historical weather patterns in March and April.
- ▶ When previous counts in your community were conducted.
- ▶ The timing of other counts in your province, territory or region.
- ▶ Income-assistance payment schedules.
- ▶ Other events happening in your community, such as festivals, protests, major sports events and other research efforts.
- ▶ The amount of planning required to effectively implement your count.

In addition to deciding on what date you will conduct the count, consider when to schedule the various components of your count within a 24-hour period. The following section provides guidance on both.

IMPLEMENTATION

Scheduling your count

While communities should schedule their PiT Counts according to local factors, the COH recommends that participating communities conduct their PiT Counts in April. Increasing coordination around the timing of the counts produces local, regional and national benefits.

Improved data comparability

A key benefit of a coordinated count is the ability to compare data across communities and over time. The Coordinated Count makes great strides toward building data alignment between communities; implementing counts within a 1-month timeframe increases the comparability of data, helping build an accurate picture of homelessness on a local, provincial, territorial and national basis. With comparable data, we can measure the strength of our responses and invest appropriately toward ending homelessness.

More time

Holding your count in April will give you more time to engage community partners, refine your methodology, gather resources and recruit volunteers. At the very least, communities in the same region should coordinate the timing of their counts.

Improved weather

In many Canadian communities, April is much warmer than March; this increase in temperature may help with the logistics of implementing the count and identifying individuals experiencing homelessness on the street. Outdoor magnet events are also more feasible in April.

Some communities have found that warmer weather reduces visible street homelessness, but in most Canadian communities, temperatures in April are still relatively cool. Consult with stakeholders in your community to determine the optimal time to conduct your count.

 **YOUTH COUNTS**

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you determine when to schedule the various components of your count.

Extended service counts

In some communities, youth-based service counts extend beyond the 24-hour PiT Count period. The intention is to survey youth who may have been homeless during the count, but did not use services on that day and were not found in any unsheltered locations. Communities should be cautious with this approach. Although extending the service count hours may result in a few additional surveys being completed, it may require more resources than are justified for the response, and it increases the likelihood of duplication.

If you choose to conduct a multi-day service count, you must ensure that surveys delivered in the days following the 24-hour count are completed only by youth who were homeless on the night of the count. For example, if your count is conducted on April 15, surveys administered from April 16 to 18 should ask youth where they stayed on the night of April 15. Only youth who were experiencing homelessness on April 15 should be included in your PiT Count results.

We recommend against most communities extending service counts beyond the 24-hour PiT Count period. However, if you choose to extend your count, track the number of surveys completed during the extended hours to determine whether this approach is necessary in future years. If only a small percentage of additional surveys are completed, your resources may be better spent elsewhere.

What to Ask

A PiT Count serves two complementary purposes: first, to determine the number of people experiencing homelessness in your community over a 24-hour period; and second, to better understand who is experiencing homelessness and the circumstances those people face. Through a well-designed PiT Count survey, you can collect the latter information, including demographic details of your homeless population, service needs and history of homelessness.

Communities participating in the Coordinated Count are required to use the [Core Screening Questions](#) and [Core Survey Questions](#). This consistency allows for greater comparability between communities and for successive counts. Consistent survey design also allows for the aggregation of PiT Count data regionally, provincially, territorially and nationally. Communities are encouraged to add questions to their PiT Count surveys based on local needs and priorities. This section provides an overview of the PiT Count survey components and guidance on adding questions.

HPS Core Standard 2

The methodology and survey used by the community includes the Core Screening and Survey Questions, and the Core Populations described in this guide.

IMPLEMENTATION

PiT Count survey components

PIT COUNT SURVEY

SCRIPT

SCREENING QUESTIONS

SURVEY QUESTIONS

A PiT Count survey has three distinct components:

- ▶ The opening script, used by volunteers to obtain consent from potential participants.
- ▶ The screening questions, used by volunteers to determine eligibility to participate in the survey.
- ▶ The survey questions, asked by volunteers to gather data about individuals who are experiencing homelessness.

THE SCRIPT

The script provides volunteers with consistent language to introduce themselves, explain the purpose of the count and ask for participation. On the street, volunteers should use the script to initiate contact with every person they encounter. Thus, the script must be clear, concise and easily repeated. The script is equally essential at shelters, services and magnet events. Below is a sample script. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy also provides a sample script on their [recommended survey forms](#). Communities are free to customize their scripts, but should follow the tips below.

SAMPLE SCRIPT

My name is [first name] and I am a volunteer for the [community name] Housing Needs Survey.

We are conducting a short housing survey in [community name]. We do not ask for your name. The data collected is confidential and will be used to determine how we can improve housing options for people in [community name]. The survey is voluntary.

May I ask you a few questions to determine if you're eligible to participate?

If respondent is eligible to participate:

You are eligible to participate in the survey. It will take approximately [X] minutes, though you can stop at any time. The results of the survey may be published, but you will not be named or identified in any way. When it's ready, you can read the report by going to this website [hand respondent information card].

If respondent is not eligible to participate:

Thank you for answering these questions. We do not need any further information. Have a good day.

Script considerations

- ▶ The script should be concisely worded and practical to repeat.
- ▶ The voluntary and confidential nature of the survey must be emphasized.
- ▶ Honoraria for survey participation should not be mentioned prior to obtaining consent. To do so is coercive and invalidates informed consent. This is explained further in [Ethics & Informed Consent](#).

THE SCREENING QUESTIONS

The screening questions ensure that only those who meet the definition of homelessness, as defined within the context of your count, complete your PiT Count survey. The screening questions also provide an important source of data to [calculate your enumeration](#).

Participants in the Coordinated Count are required to use the Core Screening Questions, as noted in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#). You may download the sheltered and unsheltered survey forms, including the screening questions, from the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). The following excerpt from the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) provides an overview of the Core Screening Questions.

Core screening questions

Screening question A

Have you answered this survey with a person with this [identification e.g., button]?

- Yes
 No

All search teams should have an identifying item or piece of clothing. Over the course of the count, the same individual may be approached by two survey teams. This question is intended to reduce double-counting.

Screening question B

Are you willing to participate in the survey?

- Yes
 No

This question follows a brief explanation of the purpose of the survey.

Screening question C

Where are you staying tonight?

- A** Decline to answer
- B** Own apartment/house
- C** Someone else's place
- D** Motel/hotel
- E** Hospital, jail, prison, remand centre
- F** Emergency shelter, domestic violence shelter
- G** Transitional housing
- H** Public space (e.g., sidewalks, squares, parks, forests, bus shelter)
- I** Vehicle (car, van, rv, truck)
- J** Makeshift shelter, tent or shack
- K** Abandoned/vacant building
- L** Other unsheltered location (specify) [insert location]
- M** Respondent doesn't know [likely homeless]

This question includes a list of sheltered and unsheltered locations. It will be the primary tool for determining whether a respondent is considered homeless. The screening procedure will depend on whether you are surveying only the Core Populations, or including hidden homelessness. For the Core Populations, responses “f” to “m” screen-in to the survey. In the case of a daytime unsheltered count, the question would be, “Where did you stay last night?”

Modifying the screening questions

The screening questions should be applied consistently across communities. It is important that communities do not change, regroup or remove any categories in Question C. However, if your community chooses to include other forms of homelessness, beyond the minimum requirements, you will need to amend the screening questions accordingly.

For example, if you choose to capture hidden homelessness, you will need to modify the screening questions so those who are staying temporarily with friends or family and are without a house or apartment

to which they can return, are screened in to the survey. HPS, in consultation with a working group of community representatives and researchers, has developed a set of [recommended screening questions to capture hidden homelessness](#).

Whether or not you expand your screening questions to include hidden homelessness, your volunteer training should focus on implementing and interpreting the screening questions. This aspect of the count can be confusing and significant errors will make data analysis difficult and reduce the accuracy of your count.

SURVEY QUESTIONS

There are four types of survey questions: [Core Questions](#), [COH Questions](#), Indigenous Homelessness Questions and local questions. Communities participating in the Coordinated Count are required to ask all 14 Core Questions, as written. These questions were developed in consultation with experts, community members and people with lived experience, and cover topics such as age, gender, Indigenous identity, veteran status, and reason for housing loss. The Core Questions can be downloaded from the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#).

In addition to the Core Questions, the COH has created an additional 14 questions for communities to use, based on their local needs and priorities. These questions are not required by HPS; however, more communities adopting the COH-worded questions will increase data consistency and comparability we will see across communities. The [COH Questions](#) can be downloaded from the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#).

To complement the COH Questions, we are developing a set of optional questions based on the forthcoming [Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada](#). The Canadian Definition of Homelessness, a definition based on physical structure and habitation, does not adequately represent Indigenous conceptions of 'home.' As a result, the PiT Count methodology, which is rooted in place-based typology (similar to that of the Canadian Definition of Homelessness) measures only a limited experience of homelessness – one that does not reflect ongoing colonization and the root causes of Indigenous homelessness.

Further research, discussion and deliberation is required to determine how best to measure homelessness based on the typology in the forthcoming Definition of Indigenous Homelessness. For now, the PiT Count methodology must continue to draw from a place-based definition; ultimately, there are limits to what the methodology can achieve.

However, the PiT Count does offer a timely opportunity to collect data on Indigenous experiences of homelessness. The Indigenous Homelessness Questions will help communities to better understand the social, spiritual, emotional and physical causes of Indigenous homelessness, and how these intersect with place-based definitions of homelessness.

The forthcoming definition and the Indigenous Homelessness Questions will be available on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). We encourage you to review the optional questions with local Indigenous leaders, service providers and people with lived experience, to determine whether including these questions can improve local understanding of and responses to Indigenous homelessness.

To put it plainly: colonialism has eroded, undermined and supplanted Indigenous cultural practices and their inclusive concept of 'home,' replacing these with the Western ideals of patriarchy and a self-possessed, independent, 'home.' Thus, Indigenous 'homelessness' has been incorrectly understood by settlers as 'being without a structure of habitation' or 'being roofless,' when Indigenous homelessness is also about being without 'All My Relations.' Being without a physical structure is only a symptom of the root cause of Indigenous homelessness—being without social, spiritual, emotional, and physical relationships.

– Excerpt from the Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada (forthcoming)

In addition to the Core Questions, COH Questions, and Indigenous Homelessness Questions, communities are free to add local questions based on community needs and other requirements (e.g., the Government of Ontario requires all participating communities in Ontario to ask [a set of common questions](#).) Before adding local questions, we encourage you to look through the COH question, which have been tested in other communities. If you choose to develop your own additional question(s) consider the following.

PiT Count surveys should be minimally invasive. Detailed questions about substance use, mental health, trading sex for shelter, history of abuse and/or criminal activity, for example, may make participants uncomfortable or feel unsafe.

Survey questions can be difficult to construct. The most effective questions have been revised and tested, often many times. Seek feedback from people with lived experience on the construction of your local questions. Does your question make sense? Could it offend or upset a participant? We encourage you to share your survey on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). There, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and local experts can provide feedback and advice.

A PiT Count survey is short. A PiT Count is not intended as a fulsome research study or a community-wide needs assessment. Instead, the PiT Count provides a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness, and basic demographic and service needs information. Whenever possible, we recommend keeping the survey to fewer than 24 questions (including the optional Indigenous Homelessness Questions developed by the COH). This means the 14 [Core Questions](#) allow for a maximum of 10 additional questions developed locally and/or by the COH.

Only collect data you will use. More data is not always better. It is best to collect only data that will be useful in assessing the scope of homelessness in your community, measuring progress toward ending homelessness, and developing effective solutions to do so. Such an approach also makes data entry easier and faster.

UNIQUE IDENTIFIERS

If your methodology includes complementary count components such as magnet events and service counts, there is a greater likelihood that participants will complete the survey more than once. This duplication will create inaccurate results.

One solution is to assign a unique identifier to survey participants. There are a number of ways to do this, but the approach you choose should be easy for volunteers to follow and protect the confidentiality of participants.

We recommend asking participants to provide their first name initial, last name initial and date of birth (do not ask participants for their names). For example, Jackie Smith, born on December 20, would provide the following: **J – S – 20**. Asking for additional information, such as birth month or year, may compromise participant confidentiality.

Depending on the size of your community, more than one individual may have the same unique identifier. Compare survey responses such as age, gender and history of homelessness, to determine whether it is likely that the same participant was surveyed twice.

Include a section near the top of the survey for volunteers to record the unique identifier. Make sure it is easily visible so volunteers remember to complete this section. Volunteers should reassure participants that this information is confidential and will not be published or shared.

In addition to unique identifiers, you can further reduce the likelihood of duplication by scheduling the components of your count strategically. For instance, conduct the sheltered count once your shelters are closed for the evening, and schedule magnet events, where possible, during the unsheltered count.

Other data collection forms

ADDITIONAL DATA COLLECTION FORMS

SHELTERED ENUMERATION FORM

TALLY SHEETS

SHELTERED ENUMERATION FORM

The number of surveys collected in your unsheltered count will determine your unsheltered enumeration. For example, if 25 people complete the unsheltered survey and indicate they are staying in locations h through j (as listed in Screening Question C) then your unsheltered count will be 25.

However, the sheltered enumeration—the number of people staying in emergency shelters, VAW shelters and in transitional housing—is calculated, not by the number of completed surveys, but through administrative data provided by shelter facilities. This is because, in some communities, as few as 40% of shelter users are willing to participate in the PiT Count survey. If you were to calculate the number of people experiencing sheltered homelessness based on the number of completed surveys, your sheltered enumeration would inevitably be too low.

Instead, sheltered facilities must provide you with the number of clients who stayed with them on the night of the count. You can also request basic demographic information such as age, gender and Indigenous identity. This allows you to compare your survey and administrative data to determine whether the surveys represent the broader sheltered population on the night of the count, including those not surveyed.

To assist in collecting data from sheltered facilities, we have created a [sheltered enumeration form](#) that can be adapted based on local needs. For more information on calculating your Core Enumeration, refer to the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#).

TALLY SHEETS

Some communities include people who are observed to be homeless in their unsheltered enumeration. Although volunteers are encouraged to ask the screening questions of everyone they encounter, volunteers should not wake people up or enter cars, buildings, tents, or encampments. As a result, some communities ask volunteers to record people who appear to be homeless, but cannot complete the screening questions, on a tally sheet.

This method is not without issues. It can be difficult to determine whether someone is homeless based solely on appearance. However, if you choose to collect information on observed homelessness, provide volunteers with a tally sheet. HPS has provided [a sample tally sheet](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#).

We advise reviewing the tally sheets carefully after the count to determine whether the data are reliable enough to include in your unsheltered enumeration. A conservative approach would be to exclude the observed total from your enumeration, but include an explanatory note that includes the observed number. For example, you might say: “A minimum of 25 people were found to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness on the night of the count. An additional 3 people were thought to be homeless by volunteers, but did not complete the screening questions or survey.”

The criteria for including someone as observed homeless should be clearly identified. For example, individuals may be considered homeless if they bedded down in an unsheltered location and they have many belongings with them (e.g., backpacks, garbage bags, shopping cart, sleeping bag, bedrolls, etc.).

Observations should only be used as a last resort, since the data they provide are less reliable than those based on self-report. In addition, asking the screening questions provides the opportunity to the respondent to be screened into the survey, receive the honorarium/token, and receive information about services. If observations are used, the proportion of your count that is based on observations homelessness should be clearly indicated in your reporting.

– Excerpt from the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#)



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you design your PiT Count survey:

COH Questions

Communities focusing on youth homelessness should include the following [COH Questions](#): 12b [reason for no shelter use], 08c [reason came to community] C02 [foster care] and C06 [barriers].

Separate youth surveys

All PiT Count participants, regardless of age, must be asked the Core Questions. However, communities with a particular focus on youth homelessness may wish to ask additional youth-focused questions. These can be included in the PiT Count survey or in a separate complementary survey. Whenever possible, we encourage communities to use the former approach. It can be difficult for volunteers to navigate more than one survey, and youth may be resistant to completing a second survey. Furthermore, many youth-focused questions, such as experiences with child protection services, are also applicable to the adult population.

Consulting youth

If you are creating local questions, consult with youth who have lived experience to determine whether the questions are clear and consistent with their experiences. Ask youth what information would be useful to capture through the PiT Count survey.

Note: The wording of Core Questions and COH Questions should not be changed. If you have feedback on the core questions, based on consultation, contact the Homelessness Partnering Strategy or post your comments on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Refer to [Youth Leadership](#) for more information about engaging youth in your count.

Indigenous youth homelessness

Indigenous youth are disproportionately represented among people experiencing homelessness. Indigenous Peoples are the youngest and fastest-growing segment of the population, prompting some to argue that homelessness among Indigenous youth is set to rise dramatically. A PiT Count provides an opportunity to determine the number of Indigenous youth currently homeless in your community, and to collect important data on their experiences. If youth homelessness is a priority, we encourage you to consider using the Indigenous Homelessness Questions we developed with our partners. Consult with Indigenous youth, service providers and other community representatives to determine whether these questions will accurately capture the experiences of Indigenous youth in your community.

Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey

As noted in the previous section, a PiT Count survey is intended to be short. Even with additional time, planning and resources, the PiT Count cannot provide comprehensive data on youth homelessness in your community. Instead, the PiT Count should be leveraged as an opportunity to collect some data on the experiences of youth, to complement other sources of data, such as agency data, shelter studies, prevalence counts, school studies, and other research studies. One such complementary study is the Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey, delivered in partnership between the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, A Way Home Canada, and the National Learning Community. First delivered in 2016, with over 1100 responses, the survey is the largest study of youth homelessness in Canada. In April 2018, we intend to replicate the study with youth-serving organizations across the country.

Some communities may wish to participate concurrently in the 2018 National Youth Homelessness Survey and the 2018 Coordinated Count, thus reducing the burden of a long, youth-focused PiT Count survey. For more information on concurrent participation, contact the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [HPS PiT Count Recommended Survey Forms](#)
- ▶ [HPS survey forms with optional COH questions](#)
- ▶ [Sample tally sheet](#)
- ▶ [Sheltered enumeration form guidance](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Implementation

A PiT Count is a complex logistical exercise with many moving parts. Adequate planning and foresight help achieve successful count implementation. While some unforeseen circumstances out of your control may occur, potential risks can be mitigated through volunteer training and management. Always make the safety of participants and volunteers your main priority.

This section covers the following:

- ▶ How do you prepare in the weeks and days leading up to the count?
- ▶ What happens on the day of the count?
- ▶ What role do volunteers play in a count?
- ▶ How many volunteers does a count require?
- ▶ What is the best strategy to recruit volunteers?
- ▶ How should the volunteer recruitment and training process be managed?
- ▶ What training do volunteers require?
- ▶ How should training be conducted?

Count Logistics

As you develop your count methodology, also begin planning for implementation. If you have additional count components, such as magnet events and service counts, more planning will be required. No matter how small the community, implementing a count requires many human resources, and even the most effective PiT Count coordinator will require help from assistant coordinators, PiT Count committee members and/or Community Entity staff. Adequate planning and delegation before the count will reduce potential issues during the count.

IMPLEMENTATION

Before the count

Before the count, take steps to ensure that count day is organized, safe and effective. In addition to the information in this document, the Guide to PiT Counts in Canada contains a helpful [PiT Count Implementation Timeline](#) that covers an overview of planning, preparation and implementation.

BEFORE THE COUNT

DEVELOP A SAFETY PROTOCOL

PLAN FOR ADVERSE WEATHER

SELECT A HEADQUARTERS LOCATION

STAFF THE COUNT

WORK WITH SHELTER LEADS

FORM OUTREACH TEAMS

RECRUIT & ASSIGN VOLUNTEERS

PREPARE SURVEY KITS

TRAIN VOLUNTEERS

DEVELOP A SAFETY PROTOCOL

In the weeks leading up to the count, work with your local police force to develop a safety protocol for the day of the count. Provide police with details about your methodology, including where and when volunteers will be surveying. Ask police to provide you with any information that may affect your count (e.g., special events, increased police patrols).

In some communities, police and emergency medical services (EMS) personnel participate in volunteer training and provide a safety debriefing at headquarters during the count. Work with your emergency services to determine what role, if any, they will play in the count. At a minimum, you should request a dedicated phone number to contact police about relevant non-emergencies during your count, though volunteers should still call 911 in the case of emergencies.

Volunteers canvassing on the street or surveying in a shelter should never be alone. Emphasize that members of a team should be within sight of one another at all times. It is the [team leader's responsibility](#) to ensure the team remains together. At the end of the count, all members of the team should return to headquarters or their designated training centre to sign out.

Each team should have a cell phone, along with contact information for police and the headquarters team. Training should prepare team leaders and volunteers to recognize potentially unsafe situations, and teams should be encouraged to call headquarters as needed during the count. In the case of emergencies, as previously mentioned, teams should call 911.

Teams should also be easily identifiable. At night, glow sticks and reflective tape are easy to use and inexpensive. These tools help people on the street identify and approach the survey team when it is dark. These visible tools also help police easily identify count volunteers. Volunteers participating in indoor locations can be given a shirt or visible badge so they are easily identified as count volunteers.

PLAN FOR ADVERSE WEATHER

Monitor the weather conditions expected during the count. In the event of extreme weather, you may need to postpone. In most cases, however, the count should go forward, so plan for adverse weather conditions or be prepared to adapt your approach (e.g., shorter volunteer shifts). Provide your volunteers with updates, assuring them that in the event of poor weather the count will take place as scheduled. Provide suggestions on what to wear, reiterate the importance of attending, and remind volunteers to contact you if they are unable to participate.

FIND A HEADQUARTERS LOCATION

Select a gathering place where volunteers can register, receive training, and meet their teams before being deployed to their assigned unsheltered zones, shelters or service locations. This can be a central community centre, church, gym, or any other space where all volunteers can gather at the same time. If parking at headquarters is limited, encourage volunteers to walk, carpool or use public transit.

In large geographic areas, additional meeting locations or 'satellite locations' may be needed. For safety reasons, it is important that all volunteers start and finish their shifts at headquarters, or at their assigned satellite locations. Headquarters staff should also check in regularly with teams that are out, to monitor their whereabouts.

For more information about selecting and setting up headquarters and satellite locations refer to [PiT Count Headquarters Set-Up](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#).

STAFF THE COUNT

In addition to volunteers, you will require a team (paid or unpaid) to support the operations from headquarters. Provide your headquarters volunteers with training well in advance of the count. Develop a clear organizational chart. Who will manage the headquarters team? How will important information be communicated to and from the PiT Count coordinator?

If you have satellite locations, assign dedicated and experienced individuals to oversee the satellite operations. Refer to [Types of Volunteers](#) for more information about the role of headquarters and satellite volunteers.

WORK WITH SHELTER LEADS

Ask participating shelters to designate shelter leads to work with the PiT Count coordinator to ensure the shelter count is delivered effectively. Remain in frequent contact with the shelter leads in the weeks leading up to the count. Work with the leads to determine when the blank survey forms and supplies will be dropped off and when the completed forms and other supplies will be picked up.

FORM OUTREACH TEAMS

Ideally, have at least one outreach team on staff during the count, to provide support to individuals on the street who require assistance. Communities without dedicated outreach services should work with local service providers to form a temporary response team that can be deployed as needed during the count. Instances where an outreach team may be required include:

- ▶ A person is requesting housing or services.
- ▶ A participant is in distress.
- ▶ A team of volunteers comes across an encampment.

RECRUIT & ASSIGN VOLUNTEERS

Begin volunteer recruitment several weeks before the count. Once registration is closed, review the registration information and assign volunteers to teams based on their experience and skill sets. We do not recommend waiting until the day of the count to assign volunteers to teams. However, be prepared to reorganize teams on the fly as volunteers drop out or fail to show up.

Maintain contact with volunteers through reminders and updates. Encourage them to contact you as soon as possible if they are unable to participate in the count. The night before the count, review your volunteer assignments to ensure you have enough teams to survey your priority map zones and service locations. Let volunteers know ahead of time whether they will be stationed at an indoor or outdoor location and where and when to begin their shift. It is not necessary to tell them their exact assignment, except for magnet event volunteers, who should usually begin their shift at the event location.

For more information on volunteer coordination prior to the count, refer to [Volunteer Coordination](#) and [Volunteer Training](#) and refer to the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) for a [helpful infographic](#).

PREPARE SURVEY KITS

Prepare your survey kits well in advance. Consider recruiting volunteers to help collate the surveys and organize supplies. Develop supply packages for the volunteer survey teams and participating shelters. Overestimate the number of surveys, tally sheets and honoraria required.

Let volunteers know what will be provided to them and what they should bring. If you are conducting training in advance of the day of the count, keep survey kits on hand so volunteers can become familiar with the contents.

Basic supplies include:

- ▶ Survey forms and tally sheets
- ▶ Survey area map or address of indoor survey locations
- ▶ Clipboards
- ▶ Pens, pencils or felt-tip pens (ballpoint pens can freeze in cold weather)
- ▶ Flashlights
- ▶ Identification markers (yellow buttons, red tags, glowsticks, etc.)
- ▶ Honoraria
- ▶ Resource cards
- ▶ Transit tokens/tickets
- ▶ Emergency contact numbers

During the count

One of the best ways to prepare for the day of the count is to consider the volunteer experience from start to finish. We have prepared a [flowchart](#) that illustrates the volunteer process before, during and after the count. The following section of the toolkit provides further guidance on three important aspects of count logistics: headquarters, team monitoring and debriefing.

STARTING AT HEADQUARTERS

Volunteers assigned to unsheltered, sheltered or service locations should meet at headquarters or a satellite location before the count, signing in upon arrival. Magnet event volunteers should meet at the event location. Meeting at a single location allows volunteers to register, connect with their teams and review safety and training protocols before starting their shifts.

Ask volunteers to meet at least 1 hour before their scheduled deployment. If you are conducting training on the same day as the count, ask volunteers to arrive early enough to cover all aspects of training without rushing. Note, however, that it is unreasonable to ask volunteers to arrive more than 2 hours before their shift. If your training requires more than 90 minutes, we recommend holding it prior to the day of the count.

Remember, a PiT Count is also an opportunity to engage members of the public around the issue of homelessness, and count volunteers can be valuable ambassadors. The welcoming at headquarters should be engaging, informative and organized.

TEAM MONITORING

Once the volunteer teams are deployed, a member of the headquarters team should check in with team leaders approximately every hour. We suggest setting up a command station, which is a place for staff or volunteers to monitor the teams. The command station staff should ensure teams are making progress and have enough supplies and survey forms on hand.

Command station volunteers should regularly update their designated supervisor and communicate any issues surrounding volunteer and participant safety. If someone experiencing homelessness requests an outreach team or accommodation, team leaders should call the command station. The command station staff should notify the PiT Count coordinator, who should follow up as soon as possible.

DEBRIEFING

All teams should return to headquarters during a specific window of time to sign out, so that all volunteers are accounted for. The debriefing is an important opportunity to solicit volunteer feedback. The PiT Count coordinator should be available to address comments and any major areas of concern identified.

Ask volunteers to return all supplies and survey forms, even if they are blank or incomplete. The debriefing period is a good opportunity to review the submitted surveys for completeness and readability. As surveys and tally sheets are being handed in, an assistant coordinator, a member of the PiT Count committee or, where possible, the PiT Count coordinator, should review them. **Address issues on the spot, while the volunteers are still there to explain. This can greatly improve your data quality and reduce errors during the analysis stage.**

Finally, don't forget to thank your volunteers. Once the debriefing is completed, thank them for their time and effort. A small token of appreciation, such as a thank-you letter, is usually appreciated.



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your implementation plan.

Leadership & Accountability

Youth counts, or youth count components, should be treated as a broader part of the PiT Count; they are not a separate exercise. While the planning and implementation of youth-focused elements, such as magnet events, may be delegated to youth-serving organizations, the CE and PiT Count coordinator are ultimately responsible for ensuring all components of the count are delivered effectively and safely.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [PiT Count headquarters set-up](#)
- ▶ [PiT Count sheltered survey set-up](#)
- ▶ [Sheltered survey: set-up and considerations](#)
- ▶ [PiT Count volunteer experience](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Volunteer Coordination

The successful implementation of a PiT count typically relies on effective volunteer recruitment, management and training. Volunteers bring critical skills to the activity and, for many, the opportunity to participate in a count is a positive and rewarding experience.

Ideally, you will recruit a number of volunteers who have experience working with individuals experiencing homelessness. This could include service providers, social workers, health care staff and outreach workers. The count is a key opportunity to engage a range of stakeholders, including the public, in a collective effort to address homelessness. Consider the count as an opportunity to raise awareness and gain allies in the broader movement to end homelessness.

Volunteers will also provide you with important feedback to improve your process for the next count, and they can become a resource to tap on a regular basis, resulting in a win-win outcome as they increase their skills and you reduce your long-term recruitment costs.

Do not underestimate the time and resources required to manage the recruitment, training and monitoring of volunteers. Some communities may opt to hire an assistant coordinator to oversee the volunteer process.

HPS Core Standard 8

The Community Entity (CE) is responsible for the quality of data collected. Efforts should be made to ensure that each person is counted only once (i.e., to limit double counting) through the survey itself and through de-duplication of the data. The CE is also responsible for ensuring that staff and volunteers receive the proper training, including the count standards, survey procedures, data management and privacy, and personal safety.

IMPLEMENTATION

Types of volunteers

There are many roles volunteers can play leading up to, during and after the count. Your chosen methodology will determine the number of volunteers you require and the skills and experiences they should have.

TIMING	TYPE OF VOLUNTEER	ROLES
Before count	Planning volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Printing, stapling and collating survey and volunteer forms ▶ Preparing volunteer clipboards with scripts, surveys, tally sheets ▶ Assembling volunteer packages including pens/pencils, honoraria, information cards, clipboards, etc.
During count	Headquarters volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Supporting the PiT Count coordinator with administrative tasks ▶ Setting up headquarters ▶ Welcoming and directing volunteers ▶ Managing volunteer sign-in and sign-out ▶ Picking up beverages and snacks ▶ Answering volunteer questions ▶ Handing out volunteer packages ▶ Reviewing completed surveys for accuracy ▶ Collecting supplies at the end of the count
	Team leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Encouraging volunteers to adhere to training ▶ Checking survey forms ▶ Maintaining volunteer and participant safety ▶ Responding to issues as they arise ▶ Updating headquarters ▶ Keeping track of supplies
	Unsheltered count volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Walking designated map zones with a team ▶ Asking screening questions to people they encounter ▶ Surveying people who are eligible to participate ▶ Distributing honoraria and information cards to respondents ▶ Alerting headquarters staff if issues arise ▶ Completing the tally sheet for observed homelessness (if using)
	Sheltered count volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Asking screening questions ▶ Surveying people who are eligible to participate ▶ Distributing honoraria and information cards to respondents ▶ Adhering to guidance and rules set by shelter staff ▶ Alerting shelter and/or headquarters staff if issues arise
	Service count volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Asking screening questions ▶ Surveying people who are eligible to participate ▶ Distributing honoraria and information cards to respondents ▶ Adhering to guidance and rules set by service staff ▶ Alerting service and/or headquarters staff if issues arise

TIMING	TYPE OF VOLUNTEER	ROLES
During count	Magnet event volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Supporting the magnet event organizers with administrative tasks ▶ Setting up the magnet event ▶ Picking up beverages and snacks ▶ Welcoming and directing participants ▶ Answering participant questions ▶ Asking screening questions to those who wish to participate ▶ Surveying people who are eligible to participate ▶ Distributing honoraria and information cards to respondents ▶ Alerting magnet event staff if issues arise
After count	Data input volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Reviewing surveys for accuracy and completion ▶ Inputting surveys into HIFIS ▶ Contacting volunteers for clarification, if required ▶ Bringing discrepancies, errors and ambiguous data to the attention of the PiT Count coordinator
	Appreciation event for volunteers (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Supporting organizers with administrative tasks ▶ Setting up the event ▶ Picking up beverages and snacks ▶ Welcoming and directing attendees ▶ Answering attendees' questions

Volunteer structure

Many communities group their volunteers into teams, with team leaders providing oversight and guidance during the count. Team leaders often work in the homelessness sector and receive additional PiT Count training.

Unsheltered teams generally have between two and four members, depending on the size and density of the map zones. The size of sheltered and service teams varies depending on the number of potential survey participants at a particular location.

Selecting team leaders

The accuracy of your count will largely depend on the leadership provided by your team leaders. While appropriate training ensures that volunteers are familiar with the process, team leaders ensure that implementation is consistent, respectful and safe.

Select team leaders who have experience working with people experiencing homelessness, or with other vulnerable populations. Health care professionals and post-secondary students who understand homelessness and/or research methods can also make effective team leaders. Seek university students from courses in homelessness, housing, research methodology, social work, community nursing and/or counselling. College students in social services, community development and counselling programs are also assets.

Circulate your call for volunteers to Indigenous-serving organizations. People who have experience working with Indigenous populations, particularly those experiencing homelessness, may offer valuable leadership to teams, and ensure that the count is implemented in a culturally competent way. Some communities encourage unsheltered team leaders, as they walk through their map zones, to discuss the causes and consequences of homelessness. Team leaders with knowledge of the historical and contemporary causes of Indigenous homelessness, including Canada's history of colonization, and the impacts of intergenerational trauma and systemic discrimination and racism, may wish to use the downtime during the unsheltered count to engage their team members in such discussion, as appropriate.

Team leaders should have leadership experience. They may also have a basic understanding of research methods and surveys, although you will provide training for this. Most importantly, as already noted, they should be experienced in working with people experiencing homelessness, particularly those who spend some or all of their time on the street.

If you are unable to find enough team leaders with this experience, select team leaders who have related experience. For example, case managers at a government-sponsored financial assistance program, volunteers from a community food bank, staff who work with women fleeing violence, and other personnel who have experience dealing with vulnerable populations.

Look for volunteers who have previously participated in your community's count. Members of your PiT Count committee or other key stakeholders may also be willing to assume team leader roles.

Team leaders should be prepared to deal with conflict (however unlikely), make decisions quickly, understand safety considerations and make everyone—team members and participants alike—feel comfortable.

Estimating volunteer requirements

UNSHeltered Count

To determine the number of volunteers you need to recruit, consider the scope of your approach.

- ▶ Will you use a full coverage or known locations approach (or a combination)?
- ▶ How many zones are you expecting to cover?
- ▶ How many individuals are you expecting to interview?
- ▶ How long does each survey take to administer?

Typically, you will need two or three volunteers and one team leader per zone. If outreach workers, police, security, or other agencies are covering particular zones or known location, you will need fewer teams of volunteers.

If your survey is especially long, or if you anticipate a large number of eligible participants in a particular zone, you should increase the number of volunteers assigned to an area. This will be especially true for known locations.

SHELTERED COUNT, SERVICE COUNT & MAGNET EVENTS

If you are deploying volunteers to sheltered and service locations—as opposed to staff providing you with administrative data or conducting the surveys themselves—you will need additional teams of volunteers. Consider:

- ▶ How many shelters and services in the community have agreed to participate?
- ▶ How many clients are you expecting to survey? What percentage of clients participated in the count in previous years?
- ▶ How many survey administration stations will you have at each location? (This will depend on what each location can accommodate in terms of space, operations and safety.)

You will need one volunteer for each survey administration station. For safety, you should deploy at least two people to each participating facility, ideally one volunteer and one team leader. Be sure to send a team leader who thoroughly understands the PiT Count process. You may decide to deploy a member of the PiT Count committee or an individual who has been very involved in the planning process.

THE HEADQUARTERS TEAM

During the count, you will need a central location at which volunteers will register and receive training, and to which they will return at the end of the count. This location is your PiT Count headquarters. You will require a team of volunteers to ensure your headquarters is well organized and prepared to respond to unanticipated circumstances.

The PiT Count coordinator, along with the members of the PiT Count committee, should manage the operations of the count from headquarters. The headquarters team should be prepared to check volunteers in and out, direct volunteers to training, reorganize teams, monitor the progress and safety of the teams, check in with team leaders, deploy additional supplies (surveys, honoraria), dispatch extra teams of volunteers, and collect surveys at the end of the count.

In larger communities, you may need more than one location to welcome, train and deploy volunteers. You will need additional well-trained volunteers to cover these locations. Satellite training centres should maintain close contact with headquarters throughout the count.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

It is impossible to know how many volunteers will show up on the day of the count. Before the count, emphasize that volunteers who are unable to meet their commitment should notify you via email. Nonetheless, you should be prepared that up to 20% of volunteers may not show up.

You should have volunteers on stand-by, including team leaders, whom you can allocate to teams that are short of personnel. If you find yourself with too few volunteers to cover your map zones, prioritize the areas of the city where you anticipate finding the largest number of people experiencing homelessness. These areas should be identified ahead of time.

You will also encounter unregistered volunteers. If you have delivered training prior to the day of the count, unregistered volunteers will have inevitably missed the training. You must decide whether to assign these volunteers to an experienced team or turn them away. Be clear about your policy from the beginning. If you are delivering training on the day or night of the count, unregistered volunteers are less of a concern.

SAMPLE VOLUNTEER CALCULATION

The following is a sample volunteer calculation based on the guidance above. If you have questions about your community's volunteer requirements, based on your methodology, we encourage you to post on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). There, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and community experts can help you to calculate your volunteer recruitment goals.

The following is a sample volunteer calculation based on the above guidelines. If you have questions about your community's volunteer requirements, based on your methodology, we encourage you to post on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). The Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and community experts can help you to calculate your volunteer recruitment goals.

Unsheltered Count

Cityville has 10 map zones; therefore, they require 10 team leaders and 20 volunteers. Factoring in a 20% attrition rate, they will need to recruit and train approximately 37 unsheltered count volunteers.

Sheltered Count

Cityville has four sheltered facilities with the following bed capacities:

- ▶ A: 15
- ▶ B: 30
- ▶ C: 50
- ▶ D: 60

Cityville's survey takes less than 10 minutes to complete. Therefore, approximately two volunteers are required for every 20 beds, including one team leader. There should be a minimum of two volunteers in every facility. Therefore, Cityville requires four team leaders and 12 volunteers. Factoring in a 20% attrition rate, they will need to recruit and train approximately 20 sheltered count volunteers.

- ▶ A: One team leader, one volunteer
- ▶ B: One team leader, two volunteers
- ▶ C: One team leader, four volunteers
- ▶ D: One team leader, five volunteers

Service Count

Cityville is conducting surveys at five service locations. Teams of two, including a team leader, are sent to less busy service locations, and teams of three are sent to larger service locations.

- ▶ A: Small service (one team leader, one volunteer)
- ▶ B: Small service (one team leader, one volunteer)
- ▶ C: Small service (one team leader, one volunteer)
- ▶ D: Large service (one team leader, two volunteers)
- ▶ E: Large service (one team leader, two volunteers)

Therefore, Cityville requires five team leaders and seven volunteers. Factoring in a 20% attrition rate, they will need to recruit and train approximately 15 service count volunteers.

Magnet Event

Cityville is conducting 2 magnet events. Approximately 3 survey volunteers, including one team leader, are required for every 30 attendees.

- ▶ Youth event: 60 attendees (one leader, five volunteers)
- ▶ Indigenous event: 90 attendees (one leader, eight volunteers)

Therefore, Cityville requires 2 team leaders and 13 survey volunteers. Factoring in a 20% attrition rate, they will need to recruit and train approximately 18 magnet event volunteers.

Headquarters

Cityville requires at least 6 headquarters volunteers to support set-up, volunteer registration, refreshment table management, volunteer coordination, etc.

Summary

COMPONENT	TEAM LEADERS	VOLUNTEERS	TOTAL
Unsheltered	12	25	37
Sheltered	5	15	20
Service	6	9	15
Magnet Events	3	16	19
Headquarters	-	7	7
Total	26	72	Target Recruitment: 98 Volunteers

Assigning teams

Once you determine the number of volunteers you need, develop a process to assign them to teams. For example, assign the team leader role to volunteers who have experience working with homeless populations. And regardless of their relevant experience, assign the team leader role only to volunteers who are interested in a leadership position.

Assign inexperienced volunteers to work with team leaders, as the leaders' experience working with homeless populations can help reduce other volunteers' anxiety, particularly for the unsheltered count. Having an experienced team leader also helps ensure people are approached respectfully and safely.

Some survey participants, such as Indigenous Peoples, women, youth and others, may experience additional vulnerabilities, such as a history of trauma or abuse. As a result, some participants may feel safer completing the survey with volunteers of a similar demographic. Whenever possible, consider the demographic profile of your teams as you assign them.

Volunteer recruitment

When issuing your call for volunteers, build on the network of homelessness service providers or broader social services in your community. You can request that the members of your PiT Count committee distribute notice of the count through their own networks.

However, PiT Counts should involve more than the ‘usual suspects.’ A count is a unique opportunity to involve the public in addressing homelessness, even for those who have no experience with the issue.

You can recruit volunteers through community newspapers or bulletin boards, social media, online groups and/or Craigslist. Community volunteer centres can also spread the word about the opportunity. Building good relationships with key media outlets early in the planning process will help facilitate volunteer recruitment. For more information refer to [Media Engagement](#).

Previous counts have shown that some Indigenous people experiencing homelessness prefer to complete PiT count surveys with Indigenous volunteers. Partner with Indigenous community leaders to develop a recruitment strategy. Some communities, such as Winnipeg, make a concerted effort to have at least one Indigenous volunteer on each team. If you are holding an Indigenous-focused magnet event, we recommend recruiting as many Indigenous volunteers as possible to staff the event.

Volunteer management

Develop a coordinated volunteer management process to keep track of volunteers’ contact information, registration forms, waivers and feedback on their experience. This database will be valuable for future counts to reach out to previous volunteers, potentially making volunteer recruitment easier. Also, as volunteers build their experience by participating in multiple counts, some will be comfortable and qualified to act as team leaders in the future.

Managing volunteers demands attention to many aspects, starting with recruitment and ending with evaluation and thanks. Make sure volunteers are given an opportunity to contribute, and to feel their skills have been used well, while ensuring they follow all protocols and stay safe. It is important that both volunteers and the people they meet or survey feel positive about the experience.

Volunteer management software saves time and money, improves efficiency and creates a volunteer database for future counts. There are several free or low-cost programs available online (e.g., *Volunteer Spot* or *Survey Monkey*). Choose software that allows volunteers to register easily for the count and receive updates regarding training and other important information. Since you will collect personal information, including email addresses and phone numbers, be sure your selected software has sufficient privacy protections.

Volunteer management software has the added benefit of allowing you to communicate with your volunteers on an ongoing basis throughout registration, training and the day of the count. Volunteer retention—the percentage of registered volunteers who complete training and participate in the count—is improved when volunteers regularly receive information, updates and reminders prior to the count. If volunteers feel integral to the success of the count, they are more likely to attend for their shifts. Still, we recommend recruiting 20% more volunteers than you anticipate needing. See [Sample Volunteer Calculation](#) for more information on calculating your volunteer requirements.

Volunteer forms

All volunteers participating in your count should complete [a registration form](#), [an oath of confidentiality](#) and [a waiver](#). You can download templates on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). It is the responsibility of the lead organization to ensure all forms meet legal requirements.

Volunteer recognition

There are many ways to recognize the efforts of volunteers. Some communities pay a small stipend to team leaders; some have t-shirts for volunteers that serve as both a token of appreciation and act as identification during the count.

The simplest but most important recognition is to email a letter of thanks to all volunteers immediately after the count. This can be easily done through volunteer management software.

Share the results of the count with your volunteers by providing a link to the online report. Invite volunteers to any events at which you plan to release your results. These gestures will help volunteers feel involved, appreciated and informed, and they will also be more likely to participate in future counts.

Some communities throw a volunteer appreciate event, which coincides with the launch of the results. These events are a good way to thank your volunteers and demonstrate the importance of their contributions.



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your volunteer recruitment plan

Youth volunteers

As previously mentioned, youth with lived experience can provide expertise to the planning and implementation of your count. Consider recruiting youth volunteers for all aspects of your count, but especially youth-based magnet events and service counts.

There is [some disagreement](#) as to whether youth are more or less likely to complete the PiT count survey if a peer administers it. It is worth noting that End Homelessness St. John's, Choices for Youth and the Youth Leadership Council used peer volunteers during their 2016 Point-in-Time Count and participation from youth was enthusiastic and high. Ultimately, whenever possible, youth participants should be offered the choice to complete the survey with a peer or an onsite staff member.

Consult with your youth advisors to determine the best approach in your community. Note: All volunteers, including peer volunteers, must sign and adhere to [an oath of confidentiality](#).

Minimum age of participation

Many communities do not allow participants under 18 to volunteer for the sheltered or unsheltered count. We do not recommend recruiting youth under 18 as survey volunteers. Instead, consult with your partnering youth organizations to find appropriate and safe volunteer roles for youth with lived experience who wish to participate, but are under 18.

Supporting youth leadership

Seek opportunities during the count for youth to provide expertise, but also gain skills and learn from new experiences. Recruit youth with lived experience for key roles, such as running the command station, handling volunteer registration and serving as team leaders. You may even consider hiring a youth with lived experience as an assistant coordinator. Remember: any major contributions from youth, beyond the traditional volunteer roles, should be adequately compensated.

Protecting youth

If you are sending volunteers to youth services, either to a magnet event or a service count, consult with the service providers to understand their standard volunteer protocols. Some services may require volunteers to complete a criminal background check, which may be prohibitive for some volunteers. As with any participant, but especially youth, volunteers should not be left alone with respondents, under any circumstances. Surveys should be completed one-on-one, out of earshot of other volunteers and participants, but within eyesight of others.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Volunteer role description](#)
- ▶ [PiT Count volunteer experience](#)
- ▶ [Oath of confidentiality](#)
- ▶ [Waiver form](#)
- ▶ [Registration form](#)
- ▶ [Evaluation form](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Volunteer Training

An effective PiT Count includes clear and thorough volunteer training. Training prepares volunteers for their role as survey administrators, and increases their understanding of homelessness, a tremendous way to gain allies in efforts to end homelessness.

Volunteer training can occur before the day of the count or on the evening of the count. There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. Advance training should be no longer than 2 hours, with the primary goal of giving volunteers an overview of the count process and what to expect. Training sessions that are held the evening of the count, as previously noted, should be no longer than 90 minutes, meaning they may need to be mainly specific to assigned roles (unsheltered count, sheltered count, service count).

IMPLEMENTATION

Training timing

It is easiest to conduct training with volunteers on the day of the count—and this is what many communities do. However, if you are conducting a large or complex count, or have limited space during the count, you may choose to do your training in advance.

Advance training allows you to cover more information and gives volunteers time to think about what they have learned before the count. To make sure information is fresh in volunteers' minds, you can require them to complete additional online training or read additional materials before the night of the count. Be mindful of volunteers' time, schedules and commitments. The more demands you place on volunteers, the less participation you are likely to have.

General training

To reduce the time commitment needed from volunteers who will not serve as team leaders, we recommend providing training on the day of the count before teams are sent out to their assigned areas. This ensures the information is fresh in volunteers' minds. We strongly recommend that this training be mandatory for all volunteers, to ensure they understand ethics and safety issues.

All volunteers should be trained as a large group in one location, but if space permits, it is helpful to break volunteers out into smaller groups with their team leader, for part of the time, to encourage interaction and questions. If possible, at a minimum, have teams sit together to practice the survey and get to know one another.

The [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) recommends covering the following in your training, though it is up to you and your community partners exactly what you will cover.

- ▶ **The purpose of the count:** Why it is happening and the expected benefits for the community and for the respondents.
- ▶ **The population:** Who experiences homelessness and why. There is an opportunity to educate volunteers on the population and the causes of homelessness. This could include specific information on homelessness experienced by Indigenous people and youth.
- ▶ **The approach:** How to approach someone to participate in the survey. An explanation of the honoraria/incentives. How to ask the survey questions in a respectful manner.
- ▶ **The survey:** How to screen for homelessness. What each question is asking for. The importance of collecting reliable data.
- ▶ **Logistics and safety:** What materials will be provided to survey teams. What to wear and bring on the day of the count. Who to contact in the case of a problem or emergency.

Recruit experts in your community to make the training more effective. For example, bring in a police officer or bylaw officer to talk about logistics and safety, an outreach worker to give insights into how to appropriately approach people experiencing homelessness, and a researcher to speak about ethics and informed consent.

Develop your training in consultation with your Indigenous partners. Volunteer training does not allow for enough time to comprehensively cover the historic and contemporary causes of Indigenous homelessness, nor the legacy of harm caused by exploitative research practices. However, volunteers must receive sufficient training to conduct their duties with respect for the well-being and interests of Indigenous Peoples.

Communities that opt to use the Indigenous Homelessness Questions, in development by the Canadian Observatory and our partners, will want to place particular emphasis on Indigenous homelessness during volunteer training. Again, partner with Indigenous leaders, organizations and people with lived experience to contribute to or deliver this aspect of training.

As you develop your training materials, you may want to seek input on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Communities participating in the Coordinated Count can share ideas, exchange volunteer training resources and provide feedback to one another. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness can also provide advice on developing your training materials.

Team leader training

Unlike general volunteer training, team leader training is more intensive and should occur in advance of the count. Team leaders need a more thorough understanding of the survey questions, ethics, safety and overall logistics.

Team leader training should deal with the survey in detail, especially the administration of the screening questions. Consider incorporating role-playing to familiarize participants with the process. Ethics and informed consent should be emphasized, along with safety and cultural competency. For further information, refer to [Ethics & Informed Consent](#).

Headquarters training

A brief orientation for your headquarters team is helpful, providing an opportunity for them to learn about their specific responsibilities (e.g., signing volunteers in and out, handing out supplies, etc.). This should take place on a date before the count.



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your volunteer training.

Youth leadership

The PiT Count is an opportunity to inform volunteers about youth homelessness and how it differs from adult homelessness. While there is a lot to cover in training, consider providing an opportunity for your youth advisors to speak briefly during the training about the causes and consequences of homelessness. This may help to reduce stereotypes in your community and will provide your youth advisors with valuable public-speaking experience.

LGBTQ2S

Due to the overrepresentation of LGBTQ2S youth among populations of youth experiencing homelessness, we strongly recommend training volunteers on the importance of asking all survey questions, including those about gender and sexuality, neutrally and without bias.

Hidden homelessness

If you are adding hidden homelessness to the scope of your count, review the screening questions carefully with volunteers. The additional screening questions required to capture hidden homelessness increase the likelihood of errors.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Interviewing guide](#)
- ▶ [Media tip sheet](#)
- ▶ [Training activity: working through the survey](#)
- ▶ [Training activity: approaching people in an unsheltered environment](#)
- ▶ [Training video: how to approach](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Ethics & Informed Consent

PiT Counts are a form of research and should be conducted using ethical research standards. Although PiT Counts are generally confidential, non-invasive and conducted outside the purview of academic institutions, they should adhere to basic guidelines for conducting ethical research with vulnerable populations.

The York University's [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#) notes: "Respect the safety, welfare, and dignity of human participants in their research and treat them equally, fairly, and not as a means to an end." In support of this, the guidelines recommend the following:

- ▶ Research should be conducted with respect to the rights, welfare and human dignity of the participants.
- ▶ Research should be conducted in a non-judgemental way.
- ▶ Researchers should be considerate of an individual's privacy and the right to be left alone.
- ▶ Researchers should consider that many people who are homeless have experienced difficult lives characterized by violence, abuse, and trauma, and therefore ensure that research activities be conducted with sensitivity.
- ▶ Researchers should be aware of issues of diversity and how these affect people's experiences of homelessness. There is stigma attached to experiencing homelessness and this is often compounded by other factors, such as racism, sexism and homophobia, for example.

IMPLEMENTATION

Informed Consent

PiT Count surveys are typically short, minimally evasive and usually anonymous, so communities generally find that verbal consent is sufficient. In the toolkit, we've included a [sample script](#) to obtain consent from participants. If you are creating your own script, include the following:

- ▶ The reason for collecting information.
- ▶ What information is being collected.
- ▶ What will be done with the information collected
- ▶ Who will have access to information collected.
- ▶ Who to contact if a participant has questions or wishes to withdraw consent.

Confidentiality

Maintain the confidentiality of all survey participants. This is especially important if you are collecting names and/or phone numbers for the purposes of rehousing or collecting unique IDs. All volunteers should be required to sign an oath of confidentiality.

The duty to maintain confidentiality extends into the data analysis and reporting phases. In smaller communities, where people know each other well, the identity of participants may be harder to conceal. With small sample sizes, you may be unable to perform detailed analysis of populations or compare groups in different living situations (e.g., unsheltered, sheltered, provisionally accommodated).

Honoraria

In PiT Counts and other research, it is common to recognize the time and effort given by research participants. Most communities offer honoraria to survey participants after their participation in the survey. Other communities offer engagement gifts at the outset of interactions, whether or not the individuals participate in the survey. Providing an engagement gift, rather than an honorarium, reduces the incentive for people to participate in the survey more than once.

For more information on selecting honoraria, refer to the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness discussion paper: [Use of Honoraria in Point-in-Time Counts](#).



YOUTH COUNTS

There are additional ethical guidelines when conducting research with youth. As you develop your methodology, consider the following:

Youth count protocol

Due to the ethical, safety and legal concerns, we recommend that all communities develop local guidelines for enumerating and surveying youth. The guidelines should include information about the minimum age of consent to participate, protocol for interviewing youth, assessing risk of harm, and the duty to report to child protection services. Refer to the [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#) for a detailed discussion on conducting research with vulnerable and at-risk youth.

Age of consent

Generally, youth under age 18 require parental consent to participate in research. In some instances, youth as young as 16 can participate in research without parental consent. For most homeless youth of any age, obtaining parental consent is neither possible nor desirable. However, screening out youth who do not have parental consent may result in important data being lost. According to [Without a Home: The National Youth Homelessness Survey](#), approximately 40% of youth reported having their first experience of homelessness before the age of 16. As such, we recommend that youth aged 15 and older participate in the PiT Count survey, provided the questions are minimally invasive. Youth under 15 should be counted on a tally sheet or through administrative data, but should not be surveyed.

Duty to report

According to [Ontario law](#), the public must report any youth under the age of 16 who is in need of protection. This includes children who are facing “physical, sexual and emotional abuse, neglect, and risk of harm.” Challengingly, reporting youth who are experiencing homelessness to child protection services may have adverse consequences that are not in the best interests of the youth. For further discussion of this issue refer to the [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#).

Based on your provincial laws and regulations, and in consultation with your PiT Count committee, we recommend that you develop a protocol for team leaders, volunteers and service staff in the event they encounter youth under the age of 16 and/or youth at risk of harm.

Unless there is an immediate risk of harm, we suggest that volunteers notify their team leaders should they have concerns about the safety of any participant, including youth. The team leaders should contact headquarters, so the PiT Count coordinator can dispatch trained outreach workers or emergency service personnel to assess the situation and risk of harm.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Guidelines for Conducting Research with People who are Homeless](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Post Count

It's tempting to think, once the count is over, that the end of the project is near. In fact, while completing the count is a major milestone, post-count activities require just as much time, resources and planning as earlier phases. When you begin planning, consider how to execute such key post-count activities as data input, management and analysis. Developing a post-count strategy early in the planning process helps avoid delays once the count is over.

This section covers the following:

- ▶ What data management protocols should be in place before the count?
- ▶ How should data be managed once the count has been completed?
- ▶ What is data cleaning? How will it improve the quality of the data?
- ▶ How long does it take to publish the results of a count?
- ▶ What are the basic elements of a PiT Count report?
- ▶ How should the results of a count be used to improve responses to homelessness?

Data Management, Input & Analysis

Your data management strategy should ensure data is kept secure and confidential. In some cases, communities partner with academic institutions, local and provincial statistics agencies, or consultants to support data input and analysis. Whatever your strategy, the PiT Count coordinator and lead agency (e.g., Community Entities, Service Managers) have ultimate accountability for the data collected; the coordinator should develop a clear data management protocol that is referred to often throughout count planning and implementation. For example, you may want to refer to the data management protocol when you are training headquarters volunteers on survey management during the count, or if you partner with outside agencies to assist with data input and analysis.

IMPLEMENTATION

Developing a data management protocol

Developing the data management protocol should occur early in the planning process. If stakeholders or count participants have concerns about data security, the data management protocol will provide reassurance.

As you develop the protocol, consider the following:

Security of survey forms

Survey forms, including photocopies, scanned images and incomplete forms, must be kept secure. How will you secure the completed forms during and immediately after the count? Where will survey forms be kept in the days and weeks following the count? Who will have access to them? When will they be destroyed? How will they be destroyed?

Security of electronic data

Communities participating in the 2018 Coordinated Count will input their data through HIFIS, after which the data can be exported for analysis. Again, the raw data must be secure. Where will the data be stored? Who will have access to it? Will it be password protected? How long will it be kept?

Data analysis

Analyzing PiT Count data requires knowledge of basic statistical concepts; some PiT Count coordinators or assistant coordinators may have the necessary skills to complete data analysis without outside support. However, third parties with expertise in statistical analysis bring additional skills to the process, allowing for more detailed analysis. Academic institutions or consultants with whom you are partnering should sign confidentiality agreements, as noted in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#). The agreement should include information about data ownership, and guidelines for storing the data once the analysis is complete. It is important that the lead agency retain all data, so comparisons and analyses can be done in future years.

HIFIS

Once you have developed your survey, and before your count takes place, consult with representatives from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and [HIFIS](#) to find out how to customize the HIFIS PiT Count module to meet your local needs. This will give you ample time to review and test the software and, if possible, train data input volunteers before the count. More information and guidance about using the HIFIS PiT Count module will be made available by HPS on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#).

HPS Core Standard 4

The results of the Core Count are reported to the HPS via the software provided. This information will contribute to the understanding of homelessness across Canada, and will not be used to publicly report on findings from individual communities.

Data input and cleaning

Once the count is complete, we recommend reviewing the surveys as soon as possible, both on the night of the count (by team leaders or headquarters staff) and by the coordinator the next day. Do a quick overview for missing entries, ambiguous answers, unclear handwriting and anomalies. Contact the appropriate survey volunteers to clarify any questions or concerns.

Once the coordinator has quickly reviewed the surveys, begin data input. In smaller communities, the coordinator can complete all or most of the data input. Larger communities may require volunteers or additional staff to carry out this component.

As you input the data, keep a record of decisions. For example, if a respondent selects more than one sleeping location or gender identity, record what was done to resolve the issue. This is especially important if more than one person inputs the data; keeping a record of decisions will encourage consistency across surveys for the current count and in future years. It will also highlight questions that were problematic or confusing.

When you have inputted the data, you can review the dataset for ineligible participants (e.g., respondents with permanent residences), duplicate responses (e.g., surveys with the same [Unique Identifiers](#)) and responses that seem unlikely (e.g., a person who is born in 1905). It is better to remove responses that do not make sense than to risk compromising the quality of your dataset.

For more information on data input and cleaning, refer to the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#) or to this [presentation](#) delivered by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg.

Data analysis

PiT Count data analysis does not need to be complicated. In fact, you can generate reports on the Core Questions through HIFIS. While these reports do not replace the need to do analysis, they do provide you with an approximate picture of your results (prior to cleaning your dataset).

In most communities, analysis can be done effectively in Excel. Refer to this [presentation](#) by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy for tips on conducting basic PiT Count data analysis. Communities that want to do more sophisticated analysis, including comparisons from previous counts, may require additional resources such as statistical software (e.g., SPSS, R) or support from outside consultants or volunteers with statistical expertise.

As you conduct your analysis, consider the confidentiality of survey participants. In communities with few responses, participants may be identifiable through overly detailed analysis. For example, you may compromise the confidentiality of a respondent if you indicate that only one Indigenous youth identifies as Two-Spirit. It is also difficult to draw meaningful conclusions from such small sample sizes.

Refer to the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#) to access PiT Count reports from other communities. Reviewing these will give you an indication of the types of analysis used in previous counts. You may also find it useful to compare your results to the data collected from the [2016 Coordinated Count](#).

CALCULATING THE CORE ENUMERATION

A key objective of your analysis is to calculate your enumeration: the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in your community. Only those population groups that can be enumerated, per the guidelines in [Adding to the scope of the count](#), should be included in your calculations. We recommend using the guidance in the [Guide to PiT Counts in Canada](#):

The Core Enumeration is the total number of people who stayed in sheltered and unsheltered locations on the night of the count. Because this number is based only on the Core Populations, it is a number that can be compared across years and can be rolled-up across communities. It is not a perfect number—some people who are homeless in unsheltered locations may decline to be surveyed—but it represents the minimum number of people who were homeless on the night of the count.

It is calculated as $A + B + C$, where:

- 1 The number of people in shelters (including extreme weather shelters and VAW shelters)
- 2 The number of people in transitional shelters
- 3 The number of people identified as experiencing homelessness in unsheltered locations (i.e., who gave an unsheltered location when surveyed + those who were observed to be experiencing homelessness, where applicable)

This does not prevent you from reporting the total number of people experiencing other forms of homelessness, such as hidden homelessness, but only the Core Populations should be included in your enumeration. For example, you can report that at least 120 people were found to be experiencing unsheltered and sheltered homelessness during the count, while another 25 people experiencing hidden homelessness were surveyed. If you are conducting public systems counts, we recommend reporting those results using a similar format. By making these distinctions, you are making it clear that a PiT Count is not intended to measure the scope of certain forms of homelessness, including hidden homelessness.

If you choose to calculate your enumeration more broadly, clarify in your analysis that a PiT Count cannot accurately enumerate hidden homelessness. One approach would be to refer to the total number of people surveyed, rather than the number of people enumerated.

For another approach, refer to the results in the [St. John's Homeless Point-in-Time 2016 report](#). They reported both the Core Enumeration and the total number of people experiencing homelessness across all forms of homelessness included in their count. This will allow the city to use the Core Enumeration to measure their progress toward ending homelessness year over year.

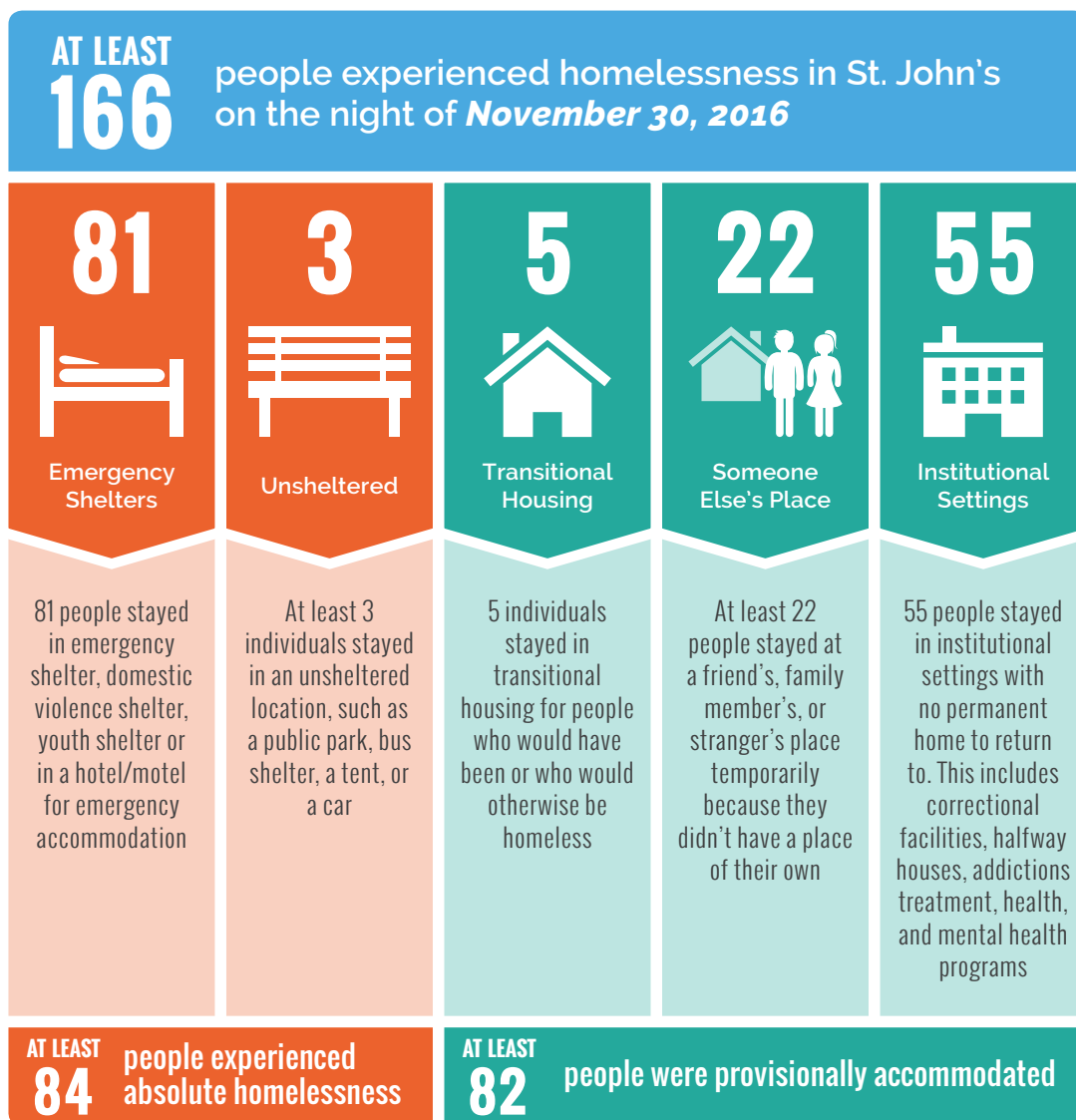
EVERYONE COUNTS: ST. JOHN'S HOMELESSNESS PIT COUNT 2016

RESULTS OF 'EVERYONE COUNTS'

3.1 ESTIMATE OF ST. JOHN'S HOMELESS POPULATION ON NOVEMBER 30, 2016

On the night of November 30, 2016 there were at least 166 people experiencing homelessness in St. John's, including 38 youth aged 16 to 24 years. An in-depth analysis of youth homelessness is covered in Section 4. Five individuals were turned away from shelters on the night of the count. These individuals were not included in the count number as we are unable to determine if they were counted at another site.

The HPS Guide to PiT Counts suggests calculating the 'Core Enumeration' by adding those counted in emergency shelters, transitional houses and unsheltered locations. According to this, the Core Enumeration for the Count is 89 people. Calculating the Core Enumeration allows for comparability to other communities, who only count the core populations and not those who are provisionally accommodated in institutions or at another's home.



If you are comparing your results to previous counts, keep in mind that only the Core Enumeration should be used to measure reductions in homelessness. Changes in the unsheltered and sheltered populations can be measured through a count, whereas increases or decreases in hidden homelessness may be related more to methodology than real change.

Although methodological changes from year to year can affect the results of an unsheltered count (e.g., weather, volunteer training, mapping, etc.), hidden homelessness numbers are much more dependent on youth count methodology. For example, you would expect to have more surveys completed by people experiencing hidden homelessness if you add a youth-focused magnet event, but a decrease in the number of respondents experiencing hidden homelessness if your magnet event is less well-attended than in previous years. Using only the Core Populations to measure progress will improve the accuracy of your analysis.

YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you conduct your data analysis.

Youth data

We recommend doing a complementary analysis with the data collected from youth, provided you have enough responses for a meaningful analysis. There may be significant differences between the youth and the adult population when it comes to demographics, sexual orientation, reasons for leaving home and experiences in foster care. Refer to [Everyone Counts: St. John's Homeless PiT Count 2016](#) to see an example of a separate youth analysis. Communities with enough survey responses to protect confidentiality and extract meaningful conclusions may decide to do similar analyses with other populations, such as Indigenous Peoples or women.

Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey

It is helpful to view your local PiT Count data in context with other data on homelessness. We recommend using the data found in the [Without a Home: National Youth Homelessness Survey](#) to determine whether the experiences of youth in your community align with those of youth in other communities.

KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Presentation: Working with PiT Data](#)
- ▶ [Presentation: Data Entry and Cleaning](#)
- ▶ [Sample data-sharing agreement](#)
- ▶ [Community PiT Count reports & presentations](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Communicating Results

A PiT Count is more than a research exercise. One of its key benefits is the opportunity to engage stakeholders, the media and the public in conversations about ending homelessness. To facilitate a community-wide dialogue, develop a post-count communications strategy that builds on the positive discussions and relationships you established throughout your count.

IMPLEMENTATION

Post-count press release [1–2 days after the count]

Timely communication is important. Once the count is completed, you should publicly acknowledge the efforts of the community, and thank all those who were involved. However, do not feel pressure to release results, even preliminary ones, immediately after the count. Take time to properly sort, clean and analyze your data, develop key findings and draft your final report. Depending on the size of your count, it may take up to 3 months to produce a final report. We recommend that you issue a post-count press release within 24 to 48 hours after the count. As you draft your press release, consider the key messages below. For more information, download a [Sample Post-Count Press Release](#).

TABLE 3: POST-COUNT PRESS RELEASE KEY MESSAGES

QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION
What is a PiT Count?	Briefly describe what a PiT Count is and why it is important. For helpful language to use in your press release, refer to the Guide for PiT Counts in Canada .
How do you define homelessness?	Explain which types of homelessness your PiT Count aimed to enumerate. Explain that the PiT Count is not an exact count, but instead a 'snapshot' of homelessness, one that determines the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in your community. Direct readers to the Canadian Definition of Homelessness .
How many volunteers participated?	State the number of volunteers who participated. Thank volunteers for their time, efforts and enthusiasm. If possible, obtain quotes from volunteers and/or team leaders about their experiences. Remember, information shared by survey participants should remain confidential.
Who else participated in the count?	Thank all participating agencies and stakeholders that contributed time and resources to the count.
When will the preliminary and/or final results be made available?	Provide a timeline for the release of the preliminary and final results. We recommend holding a launch event to share results with volunteers, survey participants, media and key stakeholders. For more information on sharing results with those experiencing homelessness, refer to the PiT Count Town Hall Summary .
How will the results be used?	Provide a brief overview of how the results will be used following the count. It is important that the public, media and stakeholders know that a PiT Count is more than a data collection exercise: it is an integral part of our efforts to end homelessness.
Who should the media contact for more information?	Provide contact details for the PiT Count coordinator or the designated media liaison.
Is there more information available about PiT Counts?	Refer media partners to additional resources, such as your local PiT Count website, previous news releases, Guide to PiT Counts in Canada or this toolkit.

A CAUTIONARY NOTE

In the days following the count, avoid sharing the number of surveys completed during the count, or even rough estimates of the number. It is likely that some surveys are duplicates or do not fit the screening criteria, and the number of completed surveys is only one component of the total enumeration. In most communities, administrative data from shelters, transitional housing units and public systems will capture most of the individuals enumerated. This means initial estimates are likely to be incorrect and potentially misleading. Instead, focus on facts that are already confirmed, such as the number of volunteers who participated or the number of partnering agencies.

Preliminary results [3–5 weeks after the count]

As previously noted, it best to allow plenty of time to review surveys, analyze data and draft the final PiT Count report. However, it is likely the PiT Count will have generated community-wide enthusiasm and an increased commitment to collaboration. As a result, it is important to maintain the momentum around the issue of homelessness. To keep the conversation going, we recommend releasing preliminary results 3 to 5 weeks after your count, depending on the count's size and complexity.

The preliminary results need not be long or detailed. An infographic or visually appealing one-pager may be more effective and easily understood by a wider range of audiences. Issue a press release and circulate the preliminary results to your partners and through your social media channels.

Consider including the following information.

Count details

Provide basic details about your count including:

- ▶ The date it took place
- ▶ The number of volunteers who participated
- ▶ The number of partnering agencies
- ▶ Contact details of the PiT Count coordinator or designated media liaison

Enumeration

State how many people identified during your count were experiencing homelessness. Remember to emphasize that number represents the minimum number of individuals experiencing homelessness in your community, and only those who fall within the definition used in your count (e.g., sheltered and unsheltered populations). If you surveyed individuals who are couch-surfing or precariously housed, provide those numbers separately from your Core Enumeration.

Basic demographics

Choose two to four demographic indicators to report. It is not necessary to share comprehensive results at this stage. Data on age, Indigenous identity, gender, family status and sexual orientation are easy to organize to represent visually.

LEARNING FROM OTHER COMMUNITIES

For more ideas on how to communicate your preliminary results, refer to the following examples:

- ▶ Fredericton Homeless Count 2016 Initial Findings [[Infographic](#)]
- ▶ Winnipeg Street Census 2015 [[Summary of Findings](#)]
- ▶ Regina 2015 Homeless Point-in-Time Count Preliminary Findings [[News Release](#)]
- ▶ Edmonton 2016 Alberta Count [[Preliminary Findings](#)]

Final report [2–3 months after the count]

The final report is a key component of any PiT Count. There are many ways count data can be communicated, but most PiT Count reports share common elements. The most effective PiT Count reports are concise, descriptive and easily understood by a wide range of audiences.

A PiT Count report has several objectives:

- ▶ To communicate the results of the PiT Count in a meaningful, accurate and respectful manner.
- ▶ To increase knowledge about homelessness in a community.
- ▶ To provide useful information to governments, funders, service providers and local advocates.
- ▶ To provide a record of methodological decisions, local adaptations, and recommendations for future counts.
- ▶ To increase our collective knowledge about PiT Counts in Canada.
- ▶ With successive counts, to track trends and progress over time.

TABLE 4: COMPONENTS OF A PIT COUNT REPORT

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Enumeration	Based on the results of your analysis, state the number of individuals found to be experiencing homelessness during the count. Explain that the count represents the minimum number of people experiencing homelessness in your community. Refer to Calculating the Core Enumeration or the Guide to PiT Counts in Canada for more information.
Key demographics	Provide a summary of key demographics (e.g., gender breakdown, average age, percentage of individuals who identify as Indigenous) and significant findings.
Acknowledgments	Acknowledge the contributions of your PiT Count partners, including participating agencies, emergency services and your PiT Count committee.
Definition of homelessness	Include a definition of homelessness to help readers understand that the experience of homelessness covers a vast range of living situations. Indicate which types of homelessness the count included—for example, sheltered and unsheltered—and which living situations are beyond the scope of the count. For more information, refer to the Canadian Definition of Homelessness .

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
Methodology	Briefly explain your methodology, including any limitations or unusual circumstances that could have affected data collection. For instance, adverse weather conditions, unusual police presence or community events could affect a count. Provide information on the number of volunteers who attended training and participated in the count. If you see merit in providing a detailed description of your methods, include this information in an appendix.
Community information	Information about your community, including average housing prices and rents, vacancy rates, annual shelter use, rates of unemployment and other housing and homelessness indicators can provide helpful context for your results.
Results	Your analysis results should be the largest part of your report. Use graphs and visual representations to make the data easy to understand. Where appropriate, put the data in context by identifying how your results compare to other research and data on homelessness.
Comparison to previous years	A key benefit of a PiT Count is the opportunity for year over year comparisons. Compare the current enumeration to results from previous counts. Identify changes in the number of people experiencing homelessness, both increases and decreases, and any notable demographic changes, such as increases in youth homelessness or reductions in chronic homelessness. Note any methodological changes that may have affected apparent trends.
Quotations	Some communities have elected to include quotations from volunteers and individuals with lived experience. Used sparingly, quotations can provide useful context and make the report more engaging. Quotations from volunteers should be about their own experiences only. Volunteers should not share information or anecdotes provided by survey participants. Seek permission from individuals you choose to quote.
Photos	If you decide to include photos in your final report, seek written permission from anyone who appears in the photos, including staff, partners, volunteers and survey participants. Though it is not legally required, it is respectful to do so. Avoid pictures of encampments and individuals sleeping or those that contribute to negative stereotypes about people experiencing homelessness.
Glossary of terms	In addition to a definition of homelessness, provide definitions for technical terms that are used in your report. Terms like <i>administrative data</i> , <i>public systems</i> , <i>magnet events</i> , <i>chronic homelessness</i> , <i>absolute homelessness</i> , <i>lived experience</i> and <i>couch-surfing</i> may not be widely understood.
Recommendations for future counts	For the benefit of other communities and future count organizers in your community, include a section with key learning and recommendations for future counts. Solicit input from the PiT Count Committee on what worked and areas for improvement. Refer to Everyone Counts: St. John's Homeless PiT Count 2016 for an example.
Appendices	We recommend including your PiT Count survey in an appendix. It is helpful for other communities as they design their own surveys. Refer to the Winnipeg Street Census 2015 Final Report or the Regina 2015 Homeless Count Final Report for additional information that you may wish to include as report appendices.

TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

Seek input

Though it can be challenging to draft a report by committee, a final PiT Count Report must contain input from key stakeholders. Before drafting the report, solicit feedback from the PiT Count committee on what to include. What are the expectations for the report? What are the key objectives? Use the PiT Count as an opportunity to inform the media and public about the historical and contemporary causes of Indigenous homelessness. Partner with Indigenous leaders and Indigenous-led organizations to help put findings in context or draft sections of the report. Ensure that all stakeholders who have provided input are properly credited in the report.

Use plain and accessible language

While a PiT Count is a complex research methodology, its results must be easily understood, clearly communicated and widely shared. The Homeless Hub contains a number of helpful resources to improve the accessibility and readability of research and data, often described as [knowledge mobilization](#).

Give context

If there are obvious limitations to your methodology, such as sub-populations being potentially overrepresented or under-counted, circumstances that may have affected the count, or even surprising results, be sure to provide those observations.

Include visual elements

Reports that are visually appealing tend to be circulated more widely and receive greater attention. Report design need not be expensive. One of your partner agencies may have graphic design resources to spare, or you can approach graphic design programs at a nearby college or university.

SHARING THE REPORT

As you develop a plan to publish and disseminate your PiT Count report, consider the following:

- ▶ How will the report be shared and with whom?
- ▶ What is your media strategy? What is your social media strategy?
- ▶ How can your partners contribute?
- ▶ How will you share the results with volunteers?
- ▶ How will you share results with survey participants and partner agencies?
- ▶ How will you share with Indigenous partners and communities?
- ▶ Will you hold a launch event?
- ▶ How will you share the information with key decision makers in your community?
- ▶ What is your media strategy? What is your social media strategy?
- ▶ How can your partners contribute?



YOUTH COUNTS

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you develop your report.

Youth Count reports

As noted throughout the toolkit, a youth count should be integrated into a PiT Count; it is not a separate exercise. The same goes for communicating your results. We recommend conducting a complementary analysis on your youth data, and including this analysis in a dedicated section of your broader community report. Separate reports can cause confusion, and require additional time and resources to prepare.

In this dedicated section, include the number of youth enumerated and surveyed across the forms of homelessness included in your count. This information is helpful as we seek to measure the scope of youth homelessness across Canada.

Youth advisors

Ask your youth advisors to provide input during the development of the report. They can help to put data into context, provide feedback on language, and draft sections of the report. Be sure that youth and the youth-serving organizations supporting them are properly credited in the report. Ask contributing youth how they wish to be acknowledged.



KEY RESOURCES

- ▶ [Sample post-count press release](#)
- ▶ [Community PiT Count reports & presentations](#)

Additional resources created by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and communities, are available in the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Section](#) on the [Community Workspace on Homelessness](#). Or refer to the [Point-in-Time Count Resource Directory](#), which is updated as new resources are developed and shared.

Mobilizing Results

Communities across Canada have effectively used PiT Count data to measure progress toward ending homelessness, as a tool for system planning, and as a mechanism to rehouse individuals experiencing homelessness. It is more than a data-collection exercise; the process holds communities accountable for their efforts to end homelessness. It provides funders, system planners and service providers with the information they need to make adjustments and continuously improve community-wide responses to homelessness.

IMPLEMENTATION

Taking action

It is the responsibility of the PiT Count committee, lead agency and other community stakeholders to ensure the data collected through the PiT Count is effectively shared and built upon to improve planning at the program, system and community levels.

AREAS OF INQUIRY	KEY QUESTIONS
Populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What populations are overrepresented in your count? ▶ Are these overrepresentations consistent with results from other communities regionally? Nationally? ▶ Are there demographic differences between people staying in shelters, living on the street or staying temporarily with friends and family? ▶ In what ways can your service system better meet the needs of those who are overrepresented?
Systems planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What does the occupancy rate of emergency shelters on the night of the count tell you about the demand for emergency services? ▶ What service gaps were identified by participants? ▶ Are these services available in your community? ▶ If not, how can the homeless-serving sector partner to respond to these needs?
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What is the relationship between the number of people enumerated and the core housing need and vacancy rate in your community? ▶ What would it take to house every person surveyed? Can your existing housing stock meet the demand?
Community planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do your existing plans to prevent and end homelessness reflect the trends you are seeing in your PiT Count data? ▶ If not, what may be the reasons for the discrepancies? Do the existing plans need to be revised? Do you need more information?
Structural causes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What broader structural, political and economic trends may be affecting homelessness in your community? ▶ What long-term effects might these trends have?
Complementary data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Together, what do the various sources of available data tell you about homelessness in your community? ▶ What are the similarities and differences between the PiT Count data and other sources of data in your community (e.g., Registry Weeks, service level data, discrete research projects, etc.)?
Measuring progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Are you seeing reductions in sheltered and unsheltered homelessness year over year? ▶ Can these reductions be attributed to specific interventions or policy changes (e.g., Housing First, decriminalization of homelessness, family reconnect, eviction prevention, etc.)? ▶ How does your progress compare to the indicators within the Canadian Definition of Ending Homelessness: Measuring Functional and Absolute Zero?

 **YOUTH COUNTS**

If you are conducting a dedicated youth count, consider the following as you prepare to mobilize your results:

Youth homelessness community planning

A growing number of communities, including Kingston, Kamloops, Calgary and Winnipeg, have created [plans to prevent and end youth homelessness](#). Other communities, including St. John's, Yellowknife and Brandon, are developing plans. A key requirement is accurate and timely data on the scope and nature of youth homelessness in a community; a PiT Count can provide initial data on which communities can build as they develop their plans. For more information about using PiT Count data to develop a community plan, refer to [A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#).

Youth Data Dashboard

[A Way Home](#), in partnership with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH), is developing a resource for community stakeholders and all levels of government to better measure youth homelessness, using a multifaceted data collection approach. The data dashboard integrates various sources of data on youth homelessness, to paint a clear and detailed picture of youth homelessness in Canada. The dashboard is not a platform, but a shared language and a set of common measurement methods, used in tandem to better understand and articulate the scope of the issue.

In the coming months, A Way Home and the COH will share their vision for the Youth Data Dashboard, including guidance on integrating data from youth counts into a broader shared measurement approach.

 **KEY RESOURCES**

- ▶ [A Way Home: Youth Homelessness Community Planning Toolkit](#)
- ▶ [Exploring Effective Systems Responses to Homelessness](#)
- ▶ [Canadian Definition of Ending Homelessness: Measuring Functional and Absolute Zero](#)

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