

2026 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness:

Volunteer Training for Unsheltered PIT Count

Eastern and Western PA Continuums of Care

by Framework Strategies
on behalf of the PA Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED)



WHAT IS THE PIT COUNT?

“Point-in-Time” (PIT) = a snapshot of the number of people experiencing homelessness on a given night

Includes people sleeping in:

SHELTERED locations. This can include emergency shelters, domestic violence shelters, sometimes motels, transitional housing

UNSHELTERED locations. You will count people experiencing homelessness in **UNSHELTERED** locations

Required by HUD nationally during last 10 days of January

HUD GUIDANCE FOR PIT COUNT

The CoC is using HUD's most recently published PIT/HIC Data Submission Guidance from 2023 to develop our community PIT surveys.

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/2023-11cpdn.pdf>

WHAT IS THE UNSHELTERED COUNT?

What does UNSHELTERED mean?

Individuals or families whose primary nighttime residence is a public place not meant for human habitation.

What does COUNT mean?

Obtaining basic demographic information on each person and household.

WHY DO WE DO A PIT COUNT?



To measure and monitor trends and changes in homelessness on local and national levels



To help our community understand what resources we need and strategize the best ways to use them to end homelessness



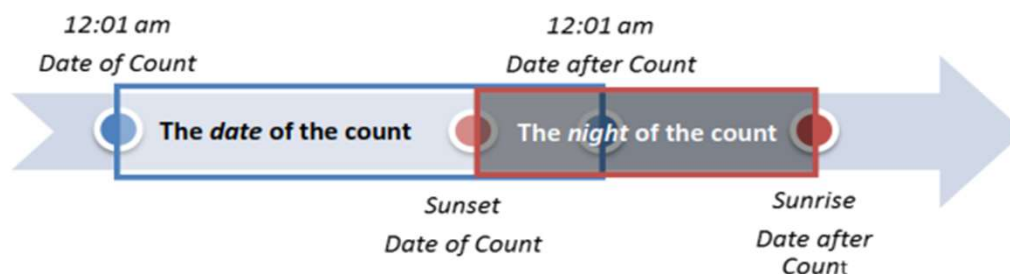
To comply with federal regulations and requirements

WHEN IS THE POINT-IN- TIME (PIT) CONDUCTED?

CoC program regulations require sheltered and unsheltered counts to be “conducted on one night in the last 10 calendar days of January.”

**2026 PIT Count Date:
Wednesday,
January 21, 2026**

This means the period from **Wednesday night Jan. 21st**
through Thursday morning Jan. 22nd.



UNSHELTERED PIT COUNT: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Safety

Anonymity

Each Person Counted

Each Person Counted Once

UNSHELTERED COUNT - LOCATIONS

Where will we find families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness?

You will be assigned to a particular area of the county where you will seek people staying in the following types of places:

- Streets
- Vehicles
- Parks
- Hunting cabins
- Tents
- Campgrounds
- Barns
- Truck Stops
- Abandoned buildings
- Transportation depots
- Chicken coops
- Railroad cars
- Storage units
- Lumberyards

UNSHELTERED COUNT - LOCATIONS

Where will we find families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness?

- Some counties utilize a service-based count, where volunteers go to locations such as soup kitchens, community centers, etc. to identify and survey persons experiencing homelessness.
- Some counties do a street count and canvas the entire county, or hot spots within the count.
- Some counties combine both strategies.

Your count coordinator will inform you of the local strategy for conducting the PIT count.

UNSHELTERED COUNT: LOCATIONS

1. People living in tents, cars, trucks and vans are considered unsheltered.
2. People living in RVs are considered housed if they are regularly connected to water, sewer and utilities or a septic system, well and generator, meet local codes, and the household owns or rents the RV and the land upon which it is located.
3. Residents of tiny homes and sheds are considered housed if the home meets local codes and contains a toilet, shower, kitchen, sleeping and living space, and is connected to water, sewer and utilities. The household must either own or rent the land and unit. The unit must also have climate control if located in very cold and very hot climates (regular seasonal patterns fall below 32 degrees or above 100 degrees Fahrenheit).

When in doubt about whether someone is considered unsheltered, conduct the interview or observation and document as much information as possible about the situation.

UNSHELTERED
COUNT DOES
NOT INCLUDE
INDIVIDUALS
LIVING IN
THESE
LOCATIONS:

Hotels/Motels

Shelters,
Transitional, Or
Permanent
Homeless Programs

Jails/Prison

Emergency Rooms/
Hospitals

Halfway Houses

Recovery Houses

Residential/Medical
Facilities

Youth In Custody Of
State In Foster Care
Or Other Out-of-
home Placement

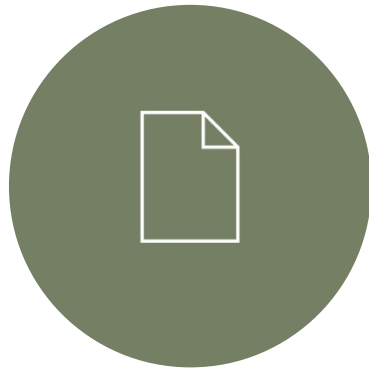
Doubled Up In The
Homes Of
Family/Friends

UNSHELTERED COUNT – WHO?

All household types are included:

- Households with children
- Households without children
 - Couples- married and unmarried
 - Single individuals
 - Other makeups where the persons define themselves as a household (intergenerational households of adults, siblings, etc.) and there are no children
- Youth
 - unaccompanied children < age 18
 - unaccompanied youth, 18-24
 - parenting youth

UNSHELTERED COUNT – HOW SURVEYS ARE CONDUCTED



BRIEF INTERVIEWS

or



OBSERVATION ONLY

(use only when necessary)

UNSHELTERED COUNT – HOW?

1. **Brief interviews – preferred**

- Complete one Interview Form for each household
- If a household has more than five members please record additional data on a second form, clearly indicating that they are part of same household
- If a household includes more than one person, please ensure that data is recorded on the form consistently recording the data based on the assigned “person #”.
 - e.g. If LH is person # 1 and BH is person # 2 on page 2, please ensure that BH is also person # 2 on the subsequent pages.

UNSHELTERED COUNT – HOW?

2. **Observation** - If someone will not or cannot provide the information requested on the Interview Form, complete the observation only section at the bottom of page 1 of the survey.
 - It is very important that you **fill out the entire section**.
 - **This section is where we tend to see the most errors or issues.** *More info on this in a few slides.*



CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

SURVEY FORMS: BEFORE BEGINNING

- Write your county name at the top left.
- Please write your name or team name/number on the top right of the form, along with the date/time of count.
This is very important in case we have questions about your survey.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Step 1: Approach & Introduction

- Approach the person and introduce yourself
- Ask if the person has a few minutes to answer some questions
- Keep in mind:
 - Individuals sleeping outside may be dealing with active addiction, mental health concerns, and significant trauma histories. Do not sneak up on or startle people. Never shine flashlights in people's faces.
 - Maintain eye contact (if possible) and an open stance with your hands visible. Use a tone of voice that's approachable. Speak slowly, be polite, and don't shout.



Hi, my name is [name]. I am with [org.] we're out here trying to talk to folks who might not have a safe place to sleep tonight. Can I ask you a few questions?

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Step 2: Explain what you're doing & get consent

- Explain why you're there (sample script on next slide)
- If you are providing supplies/ survival packs/ etc, your county coordinator will provide info on how to make these available (please do not make it contingent on participation)
- If they consent to answering your questions, continue with the interview. If they don't, thank them for their time, and use the observation form (if you believe them to be experiencing homelessness).

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

SCRIPT: *Hello, I am (introduce yourself by your first name). We are conducting a survey to count people experiencing homelessness in order to learn more about people experiencing homelessness, what kinds of problems they face, and to better understand what services are needed to address homelessness. Your participation is voluntary and your response to each question is voluntary.*

I will ask for your initials and your age, but I will not need your name, date of birth, social security number, or any other information that could be traced back to you. The responses to these questions will not be shared with anyone outside of our team. I will need to read each question all the way through.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Step 3: Conduct the interview using the survey form

- Go through each question in the survey form.
 - Remember: people have the right to not answer some or all questions!
- Add any notes that may be helpful
 - Example: If a person says that they have their own apartment, but they're sitting on a bench outside of a 24-hour grocery store at 2:00 am with what appear to be all of their belongings, write down that you think there may be a discrepancy in what they are saying vs. where they will sleep that night.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Step 4: Closing the interview

- Thank the person for their time
- Refer them to any services or resources they may have asked about or may need.
 - If you have the ability to provide transportation to shelter, please offer that to anyone you encounter. (Make a note indicating that shelter was provided, if applicable.)

Step 5: Recording what you heard and observed

- Walk away from the person interviewed to a safe place
- Take a few minutes after your conversation to double check that you've completed the whole survey form
- Include any additional notes or details
- Make sure everything you have written is readable



BRIEF SURVEYS

BRIEF SURVEYS: WHAT INFORMATION ARE WE COLLECTING?

- Number of persons in household
- For each person in household:
 - Age
 - Race/Ethnicity (select all that apply)
 - Gender (select all that apply)
- Additional data collected for adults or youth under 18 who are head of household:
 - Number of homeless episodes and length of time homeless
 - Domestic violence status (not asked in front of two adults who have identified that they are part of the same household)
 - Veteran status
 - Disability information

BRIEF SURVEY: WHERE DID YOU SLEEP?

Where are you sleeping/did you sleep the night of Jan. 21st

Where are you sleeping/did you sleep the night of Jan. 21st (insert: tonight or last night)?

UNSHELTERED LOCATIONS:	SHELTERED LOCATIONS:
<input type="checkbox"/> Street / sidewalk <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle (car, van RV, truck) <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Bus / train station / airport <input type="checkbox"/> Under bridge / over pass <input type="checkbox"/> Woods or outdoor encampment <input type="checkbox"/> Behind stores or shopping center <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned building <input type="checkbox"/> Other. → Specify: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Emergency Shelter. Name: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> In a hotel/motel/rent-a-room. If yes, <u>paid</u> by whom? <input type="checkbox"/> Self/friend/family (STOP. DISCONTINUE SURVEY*) <input type="checkbox"/> Church (Name: _____) <input type="checkbox"/> Charitable/service org. (Name: _____) <input type="checkbox"/> Government program (Name: _____) <input type="checkbox"/> Don't know <input type="checkbox"/> Other. → Specify: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> In the home of a family member or friend → Ⓢ PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE SURVEY* <input type="checkbox"/> In a home that I own/rent → Ⓢ PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY*
Description of unsheltered location & details to help ensure household is only counted once (REQUIRED):	

Households in the locations above will be included in the unsheltered PIT count.

BRIEF SURVEY: WHERE DID YOU SLEEP?

- In addition to checking off the appropriate unsheltered location, please write down any details about location.
 - **This is very important.** This information is used to ensure a household is not double counted. If you do not have time to fill this out in the moment, please make sure you complete it before turning in your surveys.
 - Please provide as much identifying information as possible.
 - e.g. Blue tent behind Walmart in Pennsylvaniatown; sleeping in brown van in Flying J Truck Stop in Centralville

BRIEF SURVEY: WHERE DID YOU SLEEP?

Emergency Shelter. Households in emergency shelters will be counted in the sheltered PIT count. If you transport a household to shelter, please coordinate how the information on this Interview Form will be collected, on the Unsheltered Interview Form or by the Shelter.

In a hotel/motel/rent-a-room: If yes, who paid for the room? If a household is sleeping in a hotel room on 1/21/26 that is paid for by government/non-profit, they should be included in the sheltered PIT count. Programs that provide hotel vouchers are included in the sheltered PIT count. If you encounter someone sleeping in a hotel on the PIT night and they have not yet completed an interview form, please complete the interview. If you provide transportation to a hotel and/or hotel vouchers during your unsheltered PIT count, please complete this Interview Form.

Other → Specify: Depending on the location, this household may or may not count in the unsheltered or sheltered PIT count.

In the home of a family member or friend → PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY

In a home that I own/rent → PLEASE CHECK OFF, SAY THANK YOU & DISCONTINUE THE SURVEY

BRIEF SURVEY QUESTIONS

- If you identify that the household is unsheltered, please complete the remaining questions.
- Information is self-report: please do not assume any information.

BRIEF SURVEY QUESTIONS

Initials only, no name. If person refuses to give initials, assign initials and complete rest of interview.

Age – If a person does not wish to share, please estimate age range.

Gender, ethnicity, and race –
Read the lists out loud and have the person self-identify their response. Please do not assume a response.

UNSHELTERED INTERVIEWS – BRIEF SURVEY COUNT

- Ask all questions as written on the Interview Form or within the Mobile App.
- Individuals may refuse to answer some or all questions.
- Refusal to participate will not result in a denial of shelter, service, or other assistance.
- If a household/individual does not want to provide any information but you believe them to be experiencing unsheltered homelessness, please complete an observation only count.
- If person refuses to give initials, assign initials and complete rest of interview.

UNSHELTERED COUNT - OBSERVATION ONLY

Observation Only Section

OBSERVATION ONLY. Interviewer: If you are unable to survey an **individual/household that you believe to be experiencing homelessness**, because individual/household is asleep or is unable or unwilling to be interviewed or to complete the full interview, please provide the following information to the best of your ability based on what you can observe for each person within the household. (Each household should be submitted as a separate survey.)

- **# adults in Household:** _____
 - **Estimated age of adults (leave blank if unable to estimate age):** # age 18-24 = _____
age 25-34 = _____ # age 35-44 = _____ # age 45-54 = _____ # age 55-64 _____
65 and older = _____
- **# children (under age 18) in Household:** _____
- **Details as to how you know/why you believe this household is unsheltered (REQUIRED):** _____

- **Description of location, clothing and any other details that would help to ensure this household is only counted once (please be as specific as possible) (REQUIRED):** _____

MUST fill out details and description sections. Without enough information sometimes we have to exclude the survey and not count the individual.

UNSHELTERED COUNT: OBSERVATION ONLY

When to conduct count by observation only

- Observation only count must be conducted the late-night hours of January 21 or early morning of January 22.
- Individual/household is asleep/bedded down (*need to write this on the form*)
- Individual/household is unwilling to be interviewed/ complete the full interview, but you believe them to be experiencing homelessness (*need to write the details on the form*).
 - E.g., on a park bench outside in winter with all of their belongings
 - E.g., the individual is known to you and your team

UNSHELTERED COUNT: OBSERVATION ONLY

Write down as much detail as possible that helps to make the person identifiable and to provide clues on their housing status.

- What is the person wearing? (e.g., “black beanie, navy sweatshirt, jeans, and tan utility boots.” or “bundled in a grey, puffy sleeping bag that covered their face.”)
- What does the person look like? (e.g., “shoulder-length grey hair, white, female, 50-60 years old”)
- Why were you unable to complete a survey with them? (e.g., “They said they did not want to complete a survey, but they were awake.”)
- Where did you see them? (e.g., “In front of the TD bank at the corner of 6th and Cedar St.”)
- What makes you think that they are or may be experiencing homelessness? (e.g., “They were sleeping on a park bench with a large bag of their belongings next to them.”)

UNSHELTERED COUNT: OBSERVATION ONLY

When is an observational survey NOT appropriate?

- “Standing on side of road, Ford Blvd., dark clothing”
- “Person has been in the same spot for a while outside 7/11. Appears disoriented.” (no time filled out on survey)
- “Male is in his car. It appears there are pillows in the back seat.” (no time filled out on survey)
- Flying J said there is a man who hangs out sometimes who is homeless.

Why not appropriate?

- Not enough detail (age, appearance, location, TIME OF DAY, details of why you believe they are experiencing homelessness)
- If we have more information, the unsheltered coordinator can work to make sure they were not counted by another team or an emergency shelter
- Third party reports are not appropriate to include in the PIT count. The person must be counted/observed by your team.

UNSHELTERED COUNT: OBSERVATION ONLY

We need your help to ensure that the observation only section is filled out properly. If we do not have details about the sleeping location and details to help ensure the household is only counted once, we often must exclude the survey.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Please turn all forms in to your county unsheltered PIT coordinator at the conclusion of the count. If your county is using the PIT mobile app, surveys will be submitted automatically as they are completed.

WALK THROUGH SURVEY FORM



UNSHELTERED PIT TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

BEST PRACTICES

Remember that you are speaking to highly vulnerable people and asking some very sensitive questions. Always lead with respect for the person you're speaking with and respect for their dignity.

Everyone has the right to refuse to answer any or all of your questions.

Ask all questions, unless the person has already given the answer to the question over the course of your conversation.

Always ask questions as they are written; do not ask questions in a way that shows you think you already know the answer.

PIT COUNT DOS AND DON'TS

DO

- ✓ DO get consent before asking PIT count survey questions
- ✓ DO remember that you may be entering into someone's personal or private space
- ✓ DO have a conversation with the people you interview
- ✓ DO respect people's time

DON'T

- DON'T take personal photos of or with the people you survey
- DON'T ask questions in a way that assumes you know the answer
- DON'T insert yourself into the person's story
- DON'T force people to answer questions they don't want to answer
- DON'T make promises you can't deliver

BEST PRACTICES

If this is your first PIT count or you would like more guidance on how to approach an individual who is unsheltered, we recommend this brief 4-minute video from the Homeless Hub out of Canada:

How to approach an individual on the street training video:

<https://www.homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/how-approach-individual-street-video>

BEST PRACTICES

Resource: Who and How to Approach Someone During PIT Count, and How to Ensure Personal Security

<https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Who-and-How-to-Approach.-1.pdf>

CONSIDERATIONS FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS

- As indicated on the survey form, you are interviewing two adults together you will SKIP the safety section of the interview.
- If you identify someone who is fleeing DV or identifies as a domestic violence survivor during the PIT Count:
 - If the survivor is interested, refer to local DV program for safety planning assistance
 - PIT volunteers are not expected to safety plan, but if engaged, listen to the survivor and ask what they need.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

The safety of all PIT count volunteers is of highest priority. Please do not enter a situation that is unsafe. This may include:

- Building that is not structurally sound.
- Traveling down unpaved/ snow covered roads unless you are in a car that can handle those conditions.
- Approaching an individual or group of people if it does not feel safe.

Volunteers should always go out in teams (should never conduct interviews or observations alone).



NEXT STEPS

ITEMS TO REVIEW WITH YOUR COUNTY UNSHELTERED PIT COORDINATOR:



SCHEDULE



KEY CONTACTS



SAFETY PROTOCOLS



WHAT TO BRING



METHOD FOR
SUBMITTING
SURVEYS



ANY OTHER
QUESTIONS YOU
HAVE

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Additional resources on the Point in Time Count:

How to approach an individual on the street training video:

<https://www.homelessnesslearninghub.ca/library/resources/how-approach-individual-street-video>

Who and How to Approach Someone During PIT Count, and How to Ensure Personal Security:

<https://homelessnesslearninghub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Who-and-How-to-Approach.-1.pdf>

CONTACT INFORMATION

Pease contact your county unsheltered PIT coordinator with questions.

- If you still need help you can email: pahomelesscount@framework-strategies.com.

CoC PIT Count Website:

- <https://pennsylvaniacoc.org/2026-point-time-pit-count-and-housing-inventory-count-hic>
- PIT materials will be posted here

**THANK YOU FOR
BEING PART OF
THE 2026
UNSHELTERED PIT
COUNT!**