

Shelter survey

Set-up and considerations

Shelter inventory: An understanding of your community’s shelter system is key to determining the best approach for your community. Determine how many facilities and shelter beds you have in your community. Include transitional shelter units.

Leadership: Each shelter is encouraged to assign a shelter lead who will be the key contact between the PiT count coordinator and the shelter, attend training activities and determine the best survey approach within the shelter. If the shelter is administering the survey, the shelter lead will take primary responsibility for ensuring that all PiT count processes are adhered to during the count. If volunteers are administering the survey, the shelter lead will work closely with their assigned team leader during the count to ensure that the process is respectful, accurate and safe.

Communication: The success of a shelter count relies on close collaboration with shelter staff through regular communication with the PiT count coordinator, the shelter lead and the volunteer team leader.

Training: Survey administrators, whether they are shelter staff or volunteers, *must* be trained to deliver the PiT count survey. Encourage shelter staff to attend your training sessions. Even if volunteers are administering the survey, encourage your shelter leads to attend the team leader training.

Promote the count: Provide enough promotional materials (posters, cards, etc.) to shelter staff – in advance of the count – to encourage participation during the count. Encourage shelters to distribute the materials in advance. *Promotional materials should not mention the honorarium.*

Specific populations: As with all other aspects of the count, consideration should be given to how best to administer the survey in a respectful and safe manner. Ensure that your volunteers understand the unique experiences of homelessness that some populations face (e.g. youth, women, Aboriginal people, families). Always emphasize that participation is voluntary.

approaches to conducting a shelter count

The shelter conducts the count

1

Smaller shelters may have sufficient resources to administer the PiT count survey using shelter staff. Survey packages (including signage, posters and consent forms if necessary) should be dropped off at shelters prior to the count. Ensure that the shelter is given a sufficient number of surveys and supplies (buttons, honoraria, etc.). The shelter should be given instructions on when to conduct the count. Provide shelter leads with an HQ contact to call if issues or questions arise.



When adopting this approach ensure that:

* Staff administering the survey are trained on how to deliver the PiT count survey;
* The shelter lead can answer any questions about the shelter count process or survey;
* Regular communication occurs prior to the count; and
* Reminders are sent the day before the survey packages are delivered to the shelter.

The day after the count, the survey packages should be picked up and returned to headquarters for data entry and data cleaning.

Volunteers conduct the count in the shelter

2

Depending on the size of the shelter, it may be necessary to send volunteers, including a team leader, to administer the surveys. In most cases, volunteers should meet at the PiT count headquarters (or a regional HQ) to meet with their team leader and collect survey materials. The shelter lead may also choose to meet their volunteer team at HQ.

When adopting this approach ensure that:

* The shelter lead and/or shelter staff invite shelter users to participate in the count and direct willing participants to volunteer surveyors;
* Volunteers survey near one another, but with adequate space to respect participants’ privacy;
* If surveys are conducted outside common areas (such as sleeping areas), they are administered by shelter staff; and
* After all willing participants have been surveyed, the team leader and volunteers travel back to headquarters (or regional HQ) to sign out, review the surveys and return their materials.

**See the Shelter Survey Set-up image for an example.**

General considerations

* Respect the privacy of shelter users; do not approach shelter users who have indicated they do not want to participate.
* The shelter lead may choose to "cross off" those who have participated in the survey from a master list of clients (usually available through the Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS) or other administrative data systems) in order to ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to participate.
* All participating shelters, regardless of the survey approach, must provide their total occupancy on the night of the count.

**Accessibility**

If the shelter is not accessible, ensure that you notify assigned volunteers ahead of time and reassign volunteers if necessary.

**Supply/Training Room**

Work with the shelter lead to identify a room where volunteers can store their belongings (purses, coats, etc.). Keep extra supplies (surveys, honoraria) in this room. If you are offering a training recap at the shelter, ensure there is space to do so. This can also occur at the headquarters (or regional HQ).

This tool was developed by Employment and Social Development Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. It can be found on the Homelessness Learning Hub (homelessnesslearninghub.ca/courses/point-time-counts) and the Point-in-Time Count Toolkit (homelesshub.ca/pitcounttoolkit) web pages.