



The National Point-In-Time Count

**The United States Housing and Urban Development Count Background, Definition,
Requirements, Issues and Recommendations**

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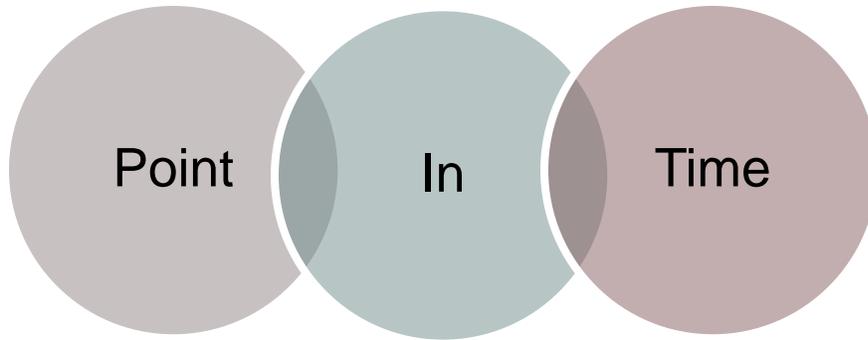
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April 19, 2012

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Homelessness has been a social issue for decades and is an epidemic in some parts of the United States. Starting in the 1980's, there have been measures put in place to start tracking and counting the homeless in an effort to acquire grants funded through the federal government – these grant funds are utilized to provide capital and operating assistance for programs that combat homelessness and poverty.

Homelessness can be described in many ways, however it is the definition put in place by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that matters as far as what

can be considered “homeless”. There are two distinct counts; one occurs within shelters and facilities and the other occurs on the street. Both counts directly correlate to the amount of funding the agencies receive. The manner in which each state, county or city conducts the counts is at their discretion, but there is a distinction between the street numbers and shelter numbers. This paper will explore the current methodologies, issues and provide recommendations for a more accurate Point-In-Time (PIT) homeless count.

BACKGROUND 1 | ONE

The definition of homelessness according to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, (HUD) is a person who only resides in a place “not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned building, or on the street” (United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2012). HUD’s definition is the guideline to follow in order to receive funds

for most of the many programs that HUD has and supports. The states must submit their count results according to the above definition.

In accordance with the 2009 HEARTH Act under the Obama administration’s Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing, HUD has published a twenty six page document of final regulations that have revised and further defined the definition of homeless.

Currently, HUD has two sub-categories of homelessness: sheltered and unsheltered. Each of these subcategories has various programs and assistance available. HUD has many other branches such as the Continuum of Care (Continuum of Care regional Committee on Homelessness, 2012), which manages competitive funding from HUD.

HUD REQUIREMENTS

The PIT Homeless Count is a HUD mandated census of the homeless population of an area. The census is used to determine the amount of federal funds allocated to a region for homeless assistance programs. Since the amount of funding given is in direct correlation to the census results, effective methodologies to ensure count accuracy is essential to a region receiving the maximum amount of federal

funds. To assist the homeless population in their area, each region is required to take a comprehensive census every January. In order to formulate a series of recommendations aimed at improving the methodologies employed by the various cities within Maricopa County, it is necessary to examine the techniques used by cities in other metropolitan areas of the country. The following is intended to be a brief overview of methods utilized both nationally and locally. Three national cities were chosen for research because their climates are similar to that of Maricopa County. In addition, all three areas cover a significant number of square miles. The three Maricopa county cities were researched due to their interesting variation of methods used. While HUD mandates when the census can be taken, the methodologies used to determine the count vary from city to city across the country.

NATIONAL POINT-IN-TIME COUNT METHODS: A COMPARISON 2|TWO

CLARK COUNTY, NEVADA

Located in southern Nevada, this area encompasses the Las Vegas Metropolitan region. In addition to having a comparable year round climate, throughout the past decade this area also experienced a similar period of economic growth followed by collapse as that experienced in Maricopa County. The Southern Nevada Regional Planning Coalition (SNRPC) is the agency charged with conducting the PIT Count for the region. In 2007, 2009 and in 2011 the SNRPC contracted with a nonprofit social research firm, Applied Survey Research (ASR) to conduct the homeless census taken in southern Nevada. In addition to utilizing volunteers to

take the census, ASR has also developed a unique program in which they train homeless persons to participate in the PIT count (Applied Survey Research, 2011). The regional survey was conducted on January 26-27 and followed the guidelines established by HUD. Once the street count was completed, ASR also conducted a follow up survey of five-hundred and forty-seven homeless persons living in the area. The intent of the survey was to provide SNRPC officials with a more comprehensive, detailed profile of the homeless population living in the area (Applied Survey Research, 2011).

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

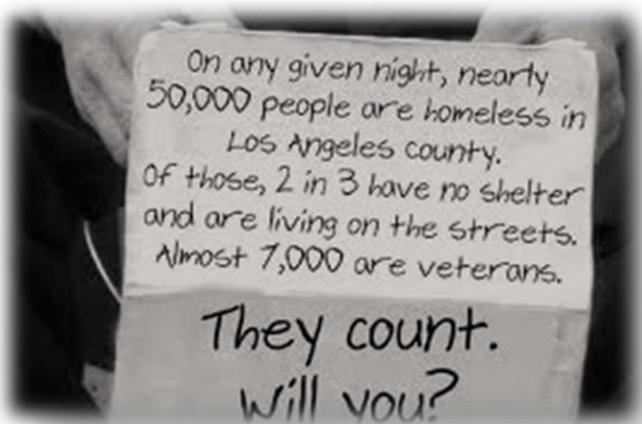
Located in north-central Georgia, the City of Atlanta and its surrounding suburbs lie primarily within the boundaries of Fulton and DeKalb Counties. The PIT Count for the region was coordinated by The Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative on Homelessness (Tri-J), in conjunction with the Pathways Community Network. Tri-J is a partnership of representatives from local governments and homeless service providers from the Atlanta, Fulton County and DeKalb County areas (Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative, 2011). The Pathways Community Network is an organization comprised of various nonprofit and governmental agencies from the metropolitan Atlanta area (Pathways Community Network). To facilitate the Atlanta count, the eight hundred square mile region was divided based on United States Census blocks into one hundred and thirty four enumerated areas. Each enumeration group was assigned a captain who was given a

LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

The 2011 Los Angeles County PIT Count was the largest homeless census ever conducted in the United States. The count encompassed all of Los Angeles County with the exception of the cities of Pasadena, Long Beach and Glendale, which conducted their own individual counts. The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is the lead agency for the Los Angeles Continuum of Care. The Authority was created by and is managed by the County and the City of Los Angeles. LAHSA collaborated on the census with the Survey Research Unit from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The census was

detailed map of his/her count area. The areas were rated as high, low and zero based on the anticipated number of homeless expected to be found in the area. The rating system also allowed count coordinators to determine the number of counting groups to be assigned to each zone. The regional count, taken on January 25, 2011, was conducted by a volunteer force of four hundred people who drove or walked the assigned area (The Metro Atlanta Tri-Jurisdictional Collaborative, 2011).

The 2011 Los Angeles County PIT Count was the largest homeless census ever conducted.



conducted by a team of four thousand volunteers over a three-night period and covered over four thousand square miles. Prior to the start of the count census volunteers were trained on how to identify a homeless person and worked in two and three person teams in order to complete the homeless census. The region was divided based on United States Census tracts. A total of six hundred and fourteen random tracts or approximately 50% of all census tracts within the Los Angeles Continuum of Care were sampled

during the count. The use of random selection to determine which tracts to count prevented biasing the census data due to only counting areas where large groups of homeless were known to gather. In addition to the street count a phone survey was conducted by UNC in order to discover hidden areas being utilized by homeless persons. The survey utilized a random dialing technique of landline phone numbers listed in areas thought to contain an inordinate number of hidden homeless persons (Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, 2011).



REGIONAL COUNTING METHODS: MARICOPA COUNTY 3|THREE

2011 marked the first year in which the Continuum of Care, the Regional Committee on Homelessness for Maricopa County, used a different count method for the City of Phoenix, and reportedly for the county's twenty-five cities and towns. For this year, "complete coverage" and "known location" (Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness, 2012) methods were used in an experiment to get a more accurate count. Areas with a higher density used the complete coverage method, spanning every street with volunteers and the police force. Lower density areas used a sampling method that is statistically valid (Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness, 2012). For the areas using the sampling method, the volunteers were randomly assigned to count specific areas, and then a valid extrapolation process was used for the areas not included in the count (Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness, 2012).

The count took place on January 25, 2011, during the month chosen by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development for the nation to conduct their counts.

The result of the count from 2011 was 1,749 for all homeless individuals and families, a significant decrease of 36% from the previous year of 2010, of which was 2,729 (Maricopa Association of Governments, 2011). Both these years of count data conflict with the report from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, which showed no significant change from 2009 (DeWitt, 2011). Something else to consider from the number differences is the fact that the Department of Economic Security reported to having counted 4,304 persons or families in transitional or emergency shelters on the particular night of the street count in 2011 (DeWitt, 2011).

Methodology for the PIT Homeless Count has been found to mostly be the same for a number of cities within Maricopa County, with slight differences. Information from the city count coordinators of Phoenix, Scottsdale and Glendale can be found below,

as well as 2011/2010 count data from the Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness.

City	2011 total	2010 total	Percent Change
Phoenix	1159	1750	-34%
Glendale	42	28	50%
Scottsdale	119	126	-6%

Chart Source: Maricopa Association of Governments. (2011). *Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness*. Retrieved from <http://www.azmag.gov/Committees/Committee.asp?CMSID=1046&MID=HumanServices>

PHOENIX

Tim Cole, from the City of Phoenix Human Services Department, is the coordinator for the Phoenix homeless count. He has stated the “combined method” was used for the 2011 PIT (T. Cole, personal communication, March 27, 2012). Street maps from previous years are used and updated as needed, and street count surveys and data sheets are passed out to each counter participating in the process. Duplication is avoided by clearly describing boundaries to be counted to volunteers in meetings prior to the count. Homeless persons are not approached, as this could be a safety concern for the counters,

and could make the homeless shy away or not be seen or counted. Law enforcement and homeless outreach teams provide information as far as “hidden areas” each year, and this is incorporated into the yearly counts (T. Cole, personal communication, March 27, 2012).

Due to the perceived inaccuracies of the 2011 PIT, Phoenix decided to forego the 2012 Count. Committee members meet monthly to work on this new method. A count for 2012 is being planned for the third quarter in fiscal year 2012 (Continuum of Care Regional Committee on Homelessness, 2012).

SCOTTSDALE

The Human Resources Planner and Budget Specialist for the City of Scottsdale, Cindy Ensign, has coordinated the homeless street count for the past several years, and states the city uses information for the count each year from their Five Year Consolidated Plan, Strategic Plan, and Annual Plans (C. Ensign, personal communication, March 26 2012). Her group sends out a detailed location description list from the prior year to the counting group. The police focus on the main commercial traffic areas on

their routes, solid waste services focus on the residential areas and in the commercial alleys, and the city staff focus on the grounds outside of their facilities.

Mrs. Ensign suggests the decrease in count numbers in the past year was from a difference in questions required from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, but not necessarily a reduction in homeless persons on the street (C. Ensign, personal communication, March 26, 2012).

GLENDALE

The Neighborhood Partnership Administrator, Matt Cohrs is the current coordinator of the City of Glendale's PIT homeless street count. For their count each year, they recruit volunteers as the date of the count draws close (M. Cohrs, personal communication, March 23, 2012). This consists of employees

from other departments and people they work with or in the community, such as faith based organizations. The count is based off appearance, and previously known areas where homeless tend to populate regularly. Areas on maps are drawn out and assigned in "kick-off" meetings prior to the count for the volunteers.

THE ISSUE 4 | FOUR

INCONSISTENT METHODOLOGY

In recent years the methodology for the PIT count has become a concern. The homeless count from 2010 to 2011 produced numbers that represented a decrease of 36% within the region. Even though this is the desired effect of the efforts from the region, it brought into question the accuracy of the numbers. Currently each jurisdiction is responsible for conducting the count within their region. Each agency determines the methodology that will be utilized for their jurisdiction. One example

used by the City of Phoenix is a statistically valid sampling of the homeless population of the city. Phoenix is divided into a grid system of five hundred sixty three square miles. High homeless populated areas that were identified in previous years are canvassed to gain an accurate count of the current inhabitants. The remaining areas are sampled at a rate to produce an 85% or greater confidence that the weighted sample was within 10% of identifying actual homeless persons in those areas. Areas such as the Town of Buckeye employ the services of their police force to

perform the homeless count. The officers are asked to use their historical knowledge of the region to locate the homeless population and perform the count. The jurisdiction is not broken into a grid system rather the area is divided into patrol routes. It is evident from the examples shown that the methodology across the region is inconsistent at best. The data collected from these counts cannot currently be viewed as being accurate. A regional methodology for performing the PIT homeless count does not exist at this time and would require support from all participating cities to be established.

MANPOWER

One of the main issues involved in a cities PIT count for homeless people is the lack of manpower to conduct a proper search and count. In a number of cities, the local police are used as a source during the count time. Unfortunately, other police duties interfere with the count as officers can be pulled away to handle law enforcement issues, thereby abandoning their jurisdictional area for the count. Another issue with the police handling a portion of a city for the count is that in most cases homeless people are leery of the police and will do their best to hide from them. Manpower to cover the city and perform counts is usually limited and security is a concern.

Volunteers to help with the count are another source that city officials turn to in gathering numbers of homeless. These volunteers come from community leaders, church congregations, schools, etc. Unfortunately as volunteers, the accuracy of a count can be skewed because of inexperience or inattentiveness to the project.

In addition, starting in 2013 HUD has placed additional requirements on identifying homeless and chronically homeless veterans. These new stipulations will require that volunteers actually speak to all individuals being counted to determine their status. This communication could have an adverse affect on the count due to the fact that many homeless persons do not want to be or consider themselves to be homeless. Only individuals that identify themselves to be homeless could participate.

HIDDEN AREAS AND BOUNDARIES

Hidden and out of sight areas are a problem when conducting homeless counts. Many homeless make their shelters in areas out of sight so that they are unbothered by the public and police. Examples of hidden areas would be large open areas, bushes, dry water canals, and alleys. When conducting counts, this is a problem for volunteers and PIT counters because these areas tend to be dark and in remote areas which could possibly pose a dangerous situation if explored at night. Although potentially dangerous, hidden areas may contain large numbers of homeless individuals that need to be included in the counts.

City borders and outlining areas can be controversial spots as streets or natural boundaries that are easily crossable will commonly pose as territory lines. Whether to count a homeless person who is near or on a border poses the issue. For example, if the homeless person is on the Phoenix side of a street while a City of Tempe PIT counter is in the area, but shortly after crosses over to Tempe territory after the Tempe counter is gone, it is possible

that this person could go uncounted. The debate is if a homeless person should be counted if they are on or near a boundary, or within sight of a PIT counter. Another issue, especially in rural and outlying cities, is how far outside of the city center should the PIT counters explore, and whether Indian Reservations should be included

in these counts. Indian Reservation homeless numbers are currently found through Census counts, but not PIT counts. Non Native American homeless persons could venture onto reservations to make purchases and visit, which could potentially result in them being missed in the PIT count.

RECOMMENDATIONS 5| FIVE

UNIVERSAL METHODOLOGY

Due to the lack of standard operating procedures of how each town or city is expected to conduct their PIT count the region and Continuum of Care receive what we believe to be inconsistent counts. We recommend that Arizona adopt a universal methodology for the PIT count. Part of that universal methodology would be to follow the model that Phoenix currently uses. They are well prepared and divide the city into group by density to determine how many volunteers to send. By sectioning the cities off into grids you are making sure all areas have been counted and checked. Every city should follow the same statistical guideline with an 85% confidence interval to ensure that the count will be more consistent.

Cities should be required to follow the guidelines and requirements from HUD so we can receive optimum funding. This also relays back to every city following a set of universal methodology to insure accuracy. A

SPONSORSHIPS

One of the biggest challenges facing the homeless PIT count each year is the recruitment of volunteers to conduct the count. While some

representative from the city of Scottsdale stated in an interview with one of the researchers that they do not feel that getting information from homeless people to identify them as chronically homeless veterans is beneficial to the count because it “puts off” the homeless being counted. It is a HUD requirement that these chronic homeless veterans are identified.

To make this universal methodology clearly available to all city representatives there should be a requirement or guideline sheet created and disbursed to all necessary city offices and representatives who deal with the PIT count. Further, it should be made available online so it can be easily accessed. Phoenix also conducts a training/assignment meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page with procedure and safety. There should be a representative from each city in Maricopa County present in that meeting so they can take the information back to their offices.

municipalities, such as Peoria, utilize paid staff to conduct the count, most cities do not have the manpower or financial resources necessary to conduct a thorough count. One solution to this

problem is to incentivize the count to recruit more volunteers. By partnering with local businesses to offer incentives to individuals who participate in the count, Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) could greatly increase the number of volunteers participating in the count without increasing costs related to the recruitment of volunteers. For example, MAG

could partner with local businesses, such as property management companies who identify homelessness as a factor that drives down the value of their business. The incentive for the

CAREER FIELD EXPLORATION CREDITS

A large part of the PIT count is the dependence on volunteers and manpower. In order to ensure that the count can be as accurate as possible MAG, the cities, and state as a whole need to find new innovative ways to ensure that enough people are in attendance to take an accurate count. One recommendation our group has is to reach out to Arizona State University (ASU) to obtain volunteers.

ASU has certain degrees in which students must obtain a certain amount of Career Field Exploration (CFE) hours and participating in a point in time count could be a great opportunity to fill the needs of volunteers and the need of MAG. According to ASU's website, four different bachelor's degrees require CFE hours. The degrees are Nonprofit Leadership and Management, Parks and Recreation Management, Tourism Development and Management and Parks and Recreation

HOMELESS TASK FORCE

Like it was stated previously there has been a decline in the PIT count in the Phoenix

small businesses is to count and identify the homeless so there can be funding put into place to keep homeless people off private property. Incentives for volunteers could range from dinner before the count to discounts or gift cards upon completing a shift. While these incentives may seem insignificant, they have the potential to greatly increase the number of volunteers participating each year. The incentives benefit both the volunteers and businesses donating the goods or prizes.

Management with an emphasis on Therapeutic Recreation and one certificate in American Humanics Nonprofit Leadership and Management (ASU, College of Public Programs).

Each of these degrees and certificate require at minimum two hundred hours of CFE (ASU, College of Public Programs). In addition, students must obtain these hours from various different organizations and nonprofits, not from one single entity. Thus, students are continually on the lookout for new possible partnerships to obtain their hours. Our group believes that a possible partnership between ASU and MAG could lead to not only a more accurate count, but also to a more consistent volunteer force.

If MAG is interested in using ASU and its resources, MAG needs to contact the School of Community Resources and Development in the College of Public Programs located at 411 N Central Ave. Ste. 550.

Metro area regarding the homeless population. Many people working to fight homelessness

believe this decline not to be accurate. They believe there are hidden or unknown locations of homeless people that are not being counted. This is an issue because if the numbers are not accurate of the current population Arizona will not receive enough funding to accommodate the shelters set into place for homeless prevention. There are a number of recommendations we suggest to make the PIT count more accurate.

Our recommendation would be to create a volunteer task force one year prior to the PIT count. This task force would be comprised of five to ten volunteers who preferably work or specialize in homeless prevention. This team a year prior to the count would research the hidden places where homeless people may be cohabitating that the public is unaware of. For the safety of the task force, they would be researching these areas from a distance. They would not be required to set out on foot or put themselves in dangerous situations to find this information. The task force could use a number of resources to find out these hidden spots.

The first would be to contact the local law enforcement agency. The police are patrolling the streets everyday and may know of a number of places they would suggest visiting for the count. They can also give you a recommendation on whether the area is safe to visit on the day of the count, or possibly give you a police escort during the count. Law

enforcement will have the greatest knowledge of locations above anyone else on the street. They may even have a few homeless people they use as confidential informants who can give you information on hidden places.

The second would be to check abandoned neighborhoods for squatters. Since it is impossible to check every abandoned or foreclosed home in a city or town, it would make more sense to contact the community directors. A flyer or letter could be released to different communities to keep an eye out on abandoned properties and to contact a specific number or person if there is anything suspicious seen. This way, if there is a known abandoned house containing squatters, it can be included in the count, and rely on law enforcement to investigate the abandoned homes.

Lastly, there are unknown places like storm drains or underground areas homeless people may be living. Instead of checking every drain, a person can contact the city directly and speak to the city employees that work on jobs that deal directly with city maintenance. These city employees may have valuable information for the task force. The task force is not designed to look in every dark alley and turn over every stone rather they are there to utilize their resources and research the possible places homeless people may be living without the public knowledge.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our group hopes that MAG finds this information useful when considering the methodology for the 2013 PIT homeless count.

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